

2013
REPORT



The Australian
Literacy & Numeracy
Foundation

EARLY LANGUAGE & LITERACY PROGRAM

KEMPSEY/MACLEAY VALLEY REGION, NSW





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KEMPSEY/MACLEAY VALLEY REGION, NSW

2013 REPORT



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The CAGES Foundation funds the Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation's,
Early Language & Literacy Program in the Kempsey/Macleay Valley region of NSW.



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OUR BELIEFS

We believe all Australians have the right to literacy, because being able to read and write is the key to accessing education and employment, and fully participating in society.

That's why the Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) is dedicated to raising language, literacy and numeracy standards in Australia.

ALNF teaches marginalised Australians – including those in refugee and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – how to read and write.

We also help to develop the skills of teachers, carers, healthcare workers, community workers and volunteers to pass on good literacy practices to their families and communities.

ALNF's programs (See Appendix A) are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, groups and communities and are demonstrably effective in delivering tangible outcomes and making a real impact.

www.alnf.org







SECTION ONE

Program Description

EARLY LANGUAGE & LITERACY (EL&L) PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The EL&L Program (See Appendix B) provides pre-literacy resources, instruction and support to children who are predisposed to reading failure even before they begin formal school at the age of 5 years. These at-risk children are over-represented in low socio-economic areas, particularly children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. The Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) changes these children's literacy learning profiles by supporting the adults involved in their lives with knowledge, skills and resources. These adults include families and community members, community volunteers, teachers' aides, preschool teachers, early years' teachers, special needs teachers and high school students (peer support).

The EL&L Program focuses on the combination of developmental Speech and Language Pathology pre-literacy and language concepts and practices, and aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Curriculum.

"When being assessed for Accreditation, the assessors said that they were blown away by the preschool's literacy program. Two staff members from the centre attended last year's Early Language & Literacy course and were using the program and resources. The assessors were very impressed."

- Preschool Director

The program consists of workshops and ongoing mentoring of Phonemic Awareness (See Appendix C) activities, pre-literacy and early alphabet stage and early oral language development, utilising a multi-sensory teaching/learning style. These games, activities and strategies are designed to improve the cognitive and perceptual development of children under eight years of age, to compensate for circumstances arising from socio-economic and health disadvantages, in particular, hearing loss resulting from chronic middle ear infection.

The EL&L Program is implemented across a number of age groups, from prior to school into the formal school years.

- In the prior to school years, children are prepared to be literacy ready in the developmentally appropriate time.
- A strong transition into formal school is ensured through the sharing of the EL&L Program between preschool teachers and the first year of school teachers.
- In the formal school years, extra development support and/or practice for children requiring "the extra lessons" in order to develop the essential pre-literacy skills required for reading success, are provided as a supplementary method to the selected school literacy program.

"This program is amazing for all children, (especially the way it) links back to Aboriginal Cultural Literacy Pathway."

- Preschool Teacher

INFORMATION ABOUT THE KEMPSEY/ MACLEAY VALLEY PROJECT (THE PROJECT)

Adults involved in the Kempsey project enthusiastically comment on the developmental improvements of the children, and speak about the joy that the children's learning growth brings to not only themselves but also the children and their families. That growth is measured in a number of ways. One that is easily viewed and understood, is the feedback through the Children's Assessment tool, the Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – School Entry (SPAT-SE) results. This year, 100% of the children involved in the project markedly increased their pre-literacy learning skills! The enthusiasm is palpable in the emails of thanks and commendation that have been sent through to ALNF, with the request to go "on the record" in this report.

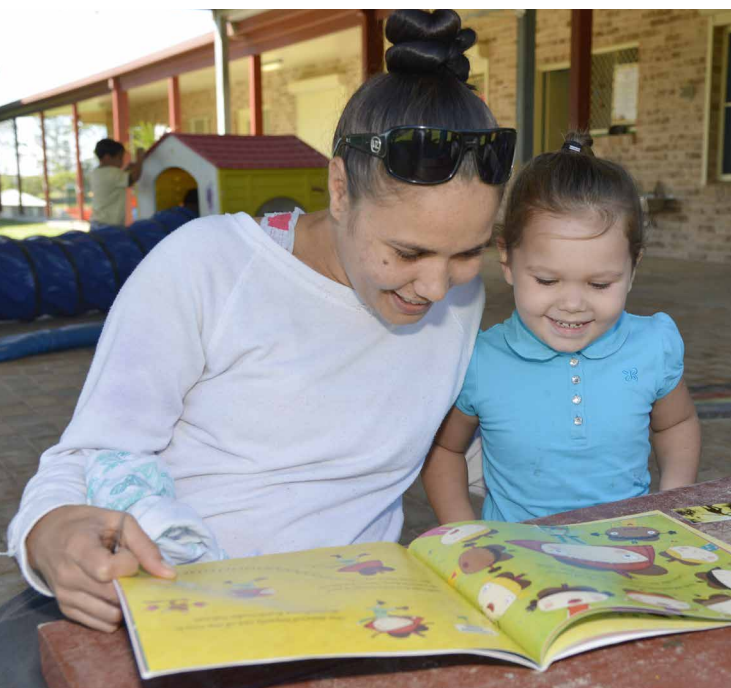
Whilst this is the official report for 2012 and, as such, meant to be unemotional, it is relevant to comment here that an emotional element very much exists around this project. At the core is the sheer relief that there is now a successful



method, resources and strategies that effectively change the predicted literacy failure of at-risk children, particularly those suffering from chronic ear disease (Otitis Media) and concomitant hearing loss.

Well documented, throughout international and Australian research, is clear academic acknowledgement of the need for effective pre-literacy and Phonemic Awareness learning experiences in prior to school learning sites and during the first years of formal school. The National Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework identify Phonemic Awareness as an essential item for teaching/learning attention. The EL&L Program offers welcomed practical assistance for families of preschoolers and formal preschool / school teachers to successfully address this essential area of development. The results of the SPAT-SE this year indicate that the Kempsey and Macleay Valley families, teachers and teacher assistants now have valuable aptitude in this area. Furthermore, they now have a skill set in the full compliment of EL&L strategies including visual and auditory perception, tactile

**Breaking down the silos
between education and health
can be achieved in a practical
manner through the provision
of the specialised EL&L
Program which specifically
addresses the Chronic Otitis
Media mediated language and
literacy deficit needs of the
Indigenous and non-Indigenous
Macleay Valley children.**



kinaesthetic perception, oral motor perception and planning, in addition to vocabulary and sentence type development. It is a skill set to encompass a wide range of children including those with learning challenges. The adults in this project responsible for this measurable improvement are to be commended.

A Flexible Approach

The EL&L Program is adaptable in its application and as such suits the span of ages requiring the EL&L Program in The Project. With very young children, EL&L strategies are integrated into play activities and routines in the prior-to-school years. For both the prior-to-school and school-aged children, the EL&L Program provides opportunities for direct, explicit instruction that can be used as a remedial program for underachieving children or as a general stimulation program. Examples of strategies include:

- Focussed play with the Seven Steps to Phonemic Awareness Games and Activities;
- Specific book reading activities with embedded Phonemic Awareness practice, vocabulary building and text awareness, and;
- Regular testing to adjust activity planning and monitoring of each child's progress.

The sequence of these activities are developmentally organised which creates high engagement, much needed practice, and effective learning and teaching exchanges culminating in successful improvements in results. This EL&L report documents some of the participants' reactions and the developmental improvement of the children.

The EL&L Program is designed for use as a parallel program providing the foundational pre-literacy skills to facilitate the school's selected literacy program. It can be used for whole class instruction and/or small group withdrawal for those children needing extra literacy learning support. The range of participating sites in The Project demonstrates the flexible application of the EL&L Program. Preschool and school teachers' comments can be viewed in **Section 2: Project Outcomes.**

Evaluation and Monitoring

The scope of the EL&L Program caters to a wide range of learning needs within the cohorts of children across the various learning sites. Central to the EL&L Program is the provision of evaluation and monitoring resources plus the skill set for teachers, family members and volunteers, to select appropriate games and activities to

"I think I could use these ideas (from the workshop) with my children at home. Thank you, it was fun."

- Parent



meet the indicated developmental needs of each child. This component facilitates the ability of teachers, family members and volunteers to provide extra support to those children requiring additional practice, and to also progress those children ready for new levels of developmental stimulation. The aim is to advance children who

are developmentally progressive but, by the same token, not to leave children behind who require additional experience and practice.

The EL&L evaluation protocols along with SPAT-SE test results allow teachers, family members and volunteers to make appropriate judgments and to plan learning experiences for different learning needs accordingly. Since these pre-literacy stages are not developmentally optional, it is essential that “struggling” children are not overlooked. Research shows that these children are highly likely to continue to struggle with the acquisition of fluent reading skills and as a result, will become educationally challenged. Early identification of these children with accompanying relevant EL&L pre-literacy learning support, provides families and educators with the resources and skills to change this outcome.

Section 2: Project Outcomes indicates that the participating learning sites in this project are creating positive Phonemic Awareness growth, catering for a wide range of developmental abilities.

**The EL&L Program
is comprised of:**

- Pre-Phonics
(Phonemic Awareness is contained in this section)
- Pre-Reading
- Pre-Writing
- Vocabulary and Oral Language

“The EL&L resources – Love them! Takes a lot of planning out of the equation. Great how everything is there in the one place. (The course) trains you to incorporate lessons, games etc, in all aspects of your day.”

– Preschool Teacher

Addressing Health and Developmental Issues

The combination of speech pathology and early education practices in the EL&L Program is highly relevant to the needs of the Kempsey and Macleay Valley children who are over represented with the two following issues:

1. Middle Ear Disease and concomitant hearing loss (See Appendix D)

The EL&L Program is specifically designed to compensate for the hearing loss incurred by children who suffer from middle ear infection, called Otitis Media. The Indigenous children of Kempsey and Macleay Valley are overrepresented with this chronic ear disease.

Amplification devices such as amplified surround sound systems are only available in some of the classrooms involved in this project. However, even the children with this type of classroom device also require stimulation across learning environments e.g. during outside play, where the amplification system is not available. The end result is that the children need the benefit of their teachers’ multi-sensory teaching skills provided

by the EL&L Program plus the EL&L Program’s range of resources, to compensate for the significant pre-literacy learning difficulties brought on by the intermittent hearing loss.

2. Developmental issues as a result of general disadvantage

The EL&L Program specifically addresses the following six barriers:

1. Challenged developmental growth in the cognitive and sensory perceptual skills required for reading development.
2. Poor pre-literacy development which requires compensatory strategies for hearing loss and other language learning difficulties.
3. English as a Second Language resulting in impaired oral language development.
4. Limited access to reading and writing resources.
5. Limited community and family reading knowledge and practices.
6. Limited home to school interaction/ participation around children’s language and literacy learning.

“I have already started to implement the skills building Pre-Phonics, Pre-Reading and Pre-Writing using Tommy Turtle and Arthur Puppet in my daily Literacy Program and I can see the difference. The children are engaged and progress is being made. My children are writing sentences, reading etc. all thanks to the strategies and resources from ALNF.”

– Preschool Teacher



As the EL&L Program is a comprehensive pre-literacy learning program, it benefits Kempsey and Macleay Valley children's literacy learning needs. It is a sensory perceptual integration program that combines auditory perception, visual perception, small muscle group motor planning for oral (articulation) and hand control (writing) with cognitive and language development. Broadly speaking, it is an oral language program that drills down into the elements essential for pre-literacy/language learning, and then uses a multi-sensory teaching style to expressly expose children to stimulation in these key areas. The EL&L resources are used as daily learning experiences with characters becoming "familiar friends", such as Tommy Turtle and Arthur Puppet, delivering concrete multi-sensory learning experiences. These types of activities, delivered with multi-sensory instruction, are precisely the developmental stimulation required by the children in this project,

to compensate for the health and socio-economic disadvantages characteristic of the area.

The Project sites are demonstrating that the practical integration of Speech Pathology and Early Education practices into the EL&L Program is both user-friendly and effective. The Macleay Valley region is an area where there is a heavy demand on Speech Pathology services. The insufficient availability of services, along with a variety of community issues, makes it highly

"I would really love to see all Indigenous and non-Indigenous services put their staff through this training. I can't recommend it enough."

– Preschool Educator

unlikely that children will receive the necessary pre-literacy stimulation that the Speech Pathology perspective brings to language and literacy development in the young child. The EL&L Program in the Macleay Valley region (2012) provided for more than 275 children to receive stimulation and ongoing support in the acquisition of these vitally important areas of development in preparation for formal literacy instruction.

Family Engagement

A continuing key goal of The Project is family engagement with the EL&L Program. The major issue is that many of the parents have their own literacy challenges, bringing about feelings of inadequacy and low confidence, which in turn impairs their ability to stimulate their children's literacy development. By "joining in" with their child's teachers, assistants and volunteers at the child's learning site, the EL&L Program offers a way to break through this block.

The Project will continue to strive to create positive home based pre-literacy exchanges in tandem with informed and targeted preschool/school activities. The objective is to generate a collegiate relationship between home and the child's learning environment that is positive and child centred.

The EL&L Program makes this possible by:

- Creating positive, proactive conversations about a child's responses to the EL&L Program resources during their preschool/school day.
- Providing accompanying games, activities and resources that are easy to engage with, explain and share with family members, even if the parents are experiencing literacy challenges.
- Improving conversations between learning site staff and family members, which tend to generate a "can do" reaction as parents feel empowered to participate in their child's literacy program.
- Supplying children with appropriate games and activities that correspond with their learning levels. Thus, they are not over challenged, resulting in responses with which they feel confident, and responses that they have often been rehearsing at their preschool. The children themselves become increasingly capable which in turn attracts positive parental comment and interaction.

These positive exchanges create a circle of positive interactions around literacy and language learning that is, often, missing in families where limited literacy knowledge or practises occur.

"I work with children who have difficulties in learning – it may be speech or that they have missed school or they don't get much help at home to learn. The course was fantastic. It teaches you to break the process of learning down into layers and then (how to teach these skills) one layer at a time."

- Preschool teacher

“The ALNF’s Early Language & Literacy program has introduced staff to a new way of working with literacy with our preschool children. Our children are naturally articulate in non-verbal methods of communication, those that rely on body language etc. What staff needed were ideas, tools and knowledge about language acquisition to help us expand and enhance our programming to get our children school-ready. Staff have now learnt to ‘slow down’ their instruction, story telling and singing when communicating with their students. We can really hear and see the difference this makes. Now when children are introduced to a new song, for example, staff are hearing correct pronunciation back from children. The Baby Phonogram Cards are also great. We introduced them to our children and after three sessions we had a child run her own session with other children! We were impressed. Thank you.”

- Preschool Director





SECTION TWO

Project Outcomes

PARTICIPANTS

The project began in October 2011 with 10 sites participating in the initial workshops and mentoring. During 2012, six further sites were added, including students from Macleay Vocational College.

In 2011/2012, 65 participants progressed through the modules of the Early Language & Literacy (EL&L) Certificate IV Course, accredited by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and received ongoing mentoring from the EL&L team.

- The September 2011 course involved 33 participants
- The September 2012 course involved 32 participants

In addition, 10 Early Stage 1 teachers attended EL&L One Day Training but did not complete the full Certificate IV course.

Participants included teachers, teachers' aides, community members – volunteers as literacy support in schools/preschool, five Macleay Vocational College students who used the course as a contribution to their pathway to employment, and four Distant Education students.

MENTORING VISITS DURING 2012

Seven mentoring visits were provided to the EL&L participants to offer support, give demonstration lessons and generally assist with their understanding of the children's learning needs. These consisted of:

- Three one-week visits
- One four-day visit
- Three three-day visits

The aim of training practitioners in the Macleay Valley area in the Certificate IV in Early Language and Literacy course was achieved.

65 Early Years teachers, teacher's assistants, volunteers and Macleay Vocational College students completed the course work for the Certificate IV in Early Language and Literacy (EL&L). To comply with the requirements for the completion of the Certificate IV in EL&L, participants need to complete; the five day course, 100 hours of supervised practice and an assignment that demonstrates the candidates' ability to implement the EL&L strategies and resources to address children's pre-literacy learning needs.

To date, of the 65 participants, eight candidates have completed all requirements for the award of Certificate IV in EL&L.

It is anticipated that the majority of the remaining course participants will complete the requirements for the Certificate IV EL&L qualification in 2013.

CHILDREN'S ASSESSMENT – SPAT-SE (SUTHERLAND PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS TEST – SCHOOL ENTRY)

Pre testing of 80 children for the baseline measure began at the beginning of 2012 to inform the direction of The Project.

Post testing occurred at the end of 2012 and involved 45 children who were tested by ALNF staff, and 150 children who were tested by the project participants with, and sometimes without, ALNF staff support.

Whilst not representing the full number of children involved in this project initiative, (three year olds, playgroup children and the children in Early Years classes at two public schools were not tested) a total of 275 children have participated in this active evaluative approach.

"I'm now working at the preschool and being paid. I didn't think I could ever do something like this."

- Student, Macleay Vocational College

The aim for young children in the Macleay Valley area, to develop essential pre-literacy skills necessary to form strong foundations for learning to read and write, was achieved.

The children's pre-literacy skills were measured using the SPAT-SE (Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test – School Entry).

Resources Supplied

The following resources were distributed for Families and Playgroup/Schools/Preschool sites:

- 20 Book Kits – 31 books in each set with accompanying EL&L Lesson Sequences.
- 2 Modified Book Kits – 12 books in each set with modified EL&L Lesson Sequences.
- 18 Sets of Phonemic Awareness Games, Levels 1-7 – 50 games in each set with instructions and equipment to play the games.
- 63 sets of Course Materials for EL&L Certificate IV – each set includes: 1 pack of English Discovery Phonogram Cards, 1 Training Manual, 1 Arthur Puppet, 1 Sound Stick, 1 Tommy Turtle pack, 1 copy of Phonemic Awareness in Young Children by Marilyn Jaeger-Adams, 1 A3 Sentence Cycle Poster and 1 Discovery Phonogram Chart.
- 60 Sounds to Sentences Booklets.
- 14 sets of the revised Discovery Phonogram Cards.
- 6 Sentence Cycle Posters, Discovery Phonogram Charts and A3 Discovery Phonogram Charts.

"Excellent resources – time saving and great to have at hand – makes implementing the program easy. The resources cater for a wide range of students' needs and interests. Love the Indigenous focus of the picture books."

- Preschool teacher

SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

- 100% of children demonstrating measurable pre-literacy maturation.
- 100% of EL&L practitioners incorporating the program into existing literacy programs.
- 100% engagement with EL&L resources.
- Strong implementation of evidence-based pre-literacy learning profiles.
- Strong uptake by parents (often literacy-challenged themselves).

CHILDREN

- Over 550 children received the benefits of the EL&L Program.
- 100% of children improved their Phonemic Awareness and pre-literacy skills.
- The EL&L practitioners reported a high level of engagement and interaction with all strategies and resources among their cohorts.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- 65 participants completed the EL&L Course and are now EL&L practitioners.
- 9 students from Macleay Vocational College completed the EL&L Course.
- 2 Distance Education students completed the course (Year 11/12).
- 11 community EL&L volunteers are now working at learning sites.

LEARNING SITES

- Increase in program reach from 10 to 17 sites (playgroup – Year 3).
- Sites now have capacity to teach the children through their learning challenges.
- Positive literacy learning relationships are being built between learning sites and home.

HOME & FAMILY

Increased confidence and skills among parents and carers to:

- Participate in positive discussions and activities at learning sites.
- Generate fun and effective literacy activities at home.
- Engage in conversations about their own children's learning needs.

DESCRIPTION OF SPAT-SE



The SPAT-SE is an Australian test of phonological awareness and early alphabet knowledge.

The purpose is to establish a set of pre-literacy skills.

The skills involved in the testing are all critical components of emergent pre-literacy and fundamental to successful learning responses to formal literacy instruction. Ideally, these skills should be fully in place by the time children are exposed to formal literacy instruction.

Gaps in the SPAT-SE testing results found in children who are well past the point of school entry, indicate learning challenges that require urgent explicit support.

“It immediately had an impact on our children. We all feel that now we are preparing kids for reading – properly.”

– Preschool Director

The SPAT-SE results are divided into three levels:

- Skills not yet emerging
- Emerging skills, requiring consolidation
- Competent performance

Exposure to the EL&L Program’s focused play/ specific activities in the prior to school and early years of school ensures that all children progress from the emergent stage to the competency stage.

The ALNF’s EL&L Program utilises the feedback from the SPAT-SE results to developmentally stimulate children’s critical pre-literacy learning so that they are well prepared to successfully engage with formal literacy instruction.

SPAT-SE TEST RESULTS

The SPAT-SE test results for the cohort of children who had not completed the EL&L Program are compared to the performance of the 2012 cohort of children involved in the EL&L Program.

Results are available for the 2011 and 2012 cohorts completing the SPAT-SE test at seven sites. Comparison between the two yearly cohorts indicates a significant improvement in the level of competency in Phonemic Awareness achieved by the 2012 cohort of children after participating in learning programs that used the EL&L Program, and its strategies and resources.

From the SPAT-SE test, three levels of competency are identified: Beginning (scores between 0-19), Developing (scores between 20-38) and Competent (scores between 39-44). It is ideal

for children entering preschool to be competent in the skills that the SPAT-SE tests. For those children who have started school, a Mastery (scores 45-50) of these skills is necessary for success once formal literacy instruction begins.

There are five preschools and two schools represented by the graphs below. The children come from a wide variety of socio-economic and cultural groups. In five of the seven sites, a minimum of 75% of the student population is Aboriginal. Children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, with specific learning needs and/or those with hearing problems brought about by Chronic Otitis Media, are over represented in these cohorts of children.

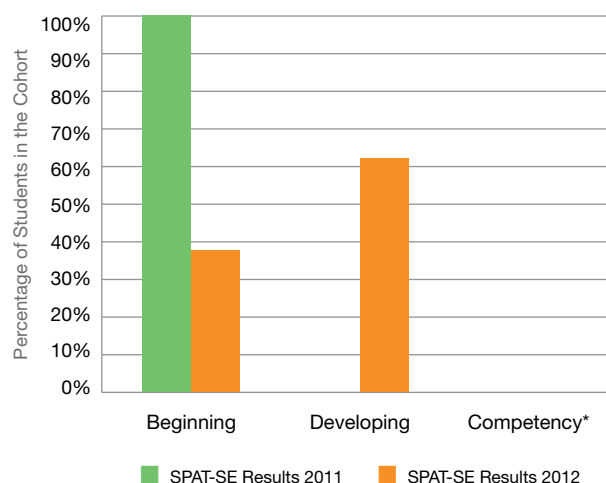
SPAT-SE TEST RESULTS: GRAPHS

The following seven graphs provide a developmental comparison of the levels of competency in Phonemic Awareness between 2011 and 2012 cohorts of preschool and kindergarten children.

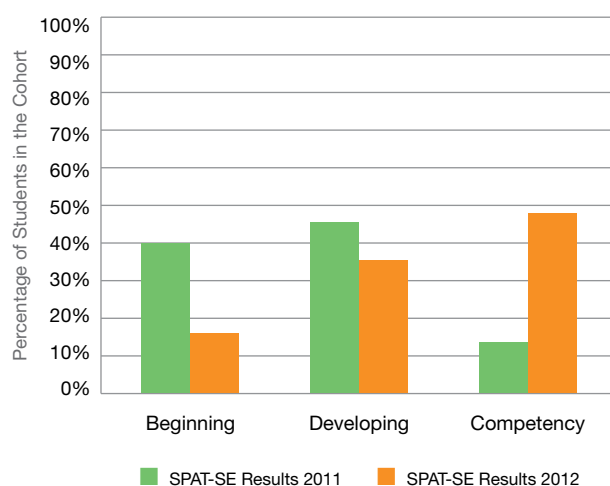
The data shows the successful achievement of significant gains in children's Phonemic Awareness skills where preschool and kindergarten teachers are incorporating the EL&L Program into their normal literacy program.

Preschool Cohorts

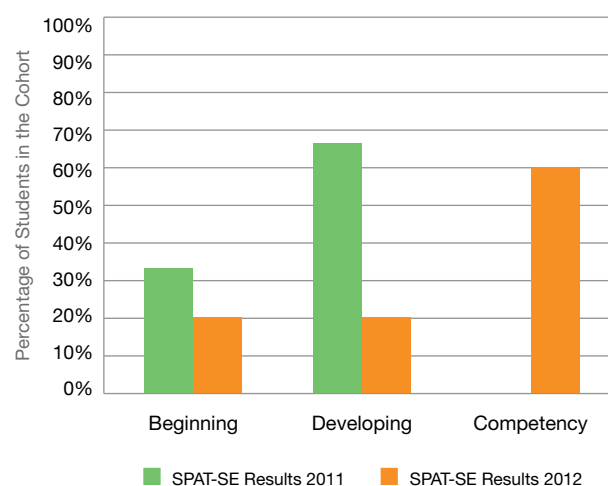
Graph 1: Preschool SPAT-SE Level of Competency Comparison



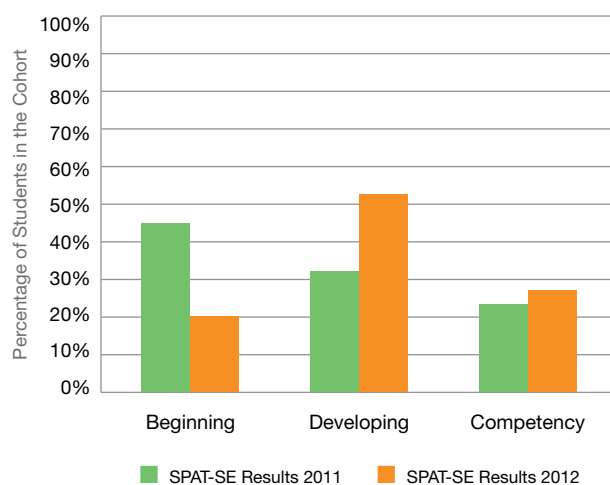
**Graph 2: Preschool SPAT-SE
Level of Competency Comparison**



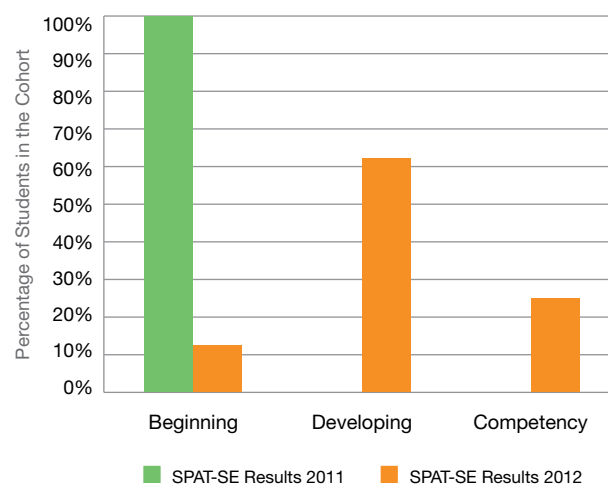
**Graph 3: Preschool SPAT-SE
Level of Competency Comparison**



**Graph 4: Preschool SPAT-SE
Level of Competency Comparison**

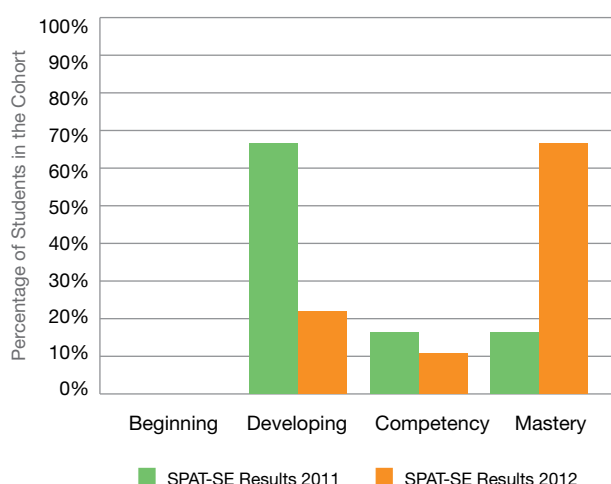


**Graph 5: Preschool SPAT-SE
Level of Competency Comparison**

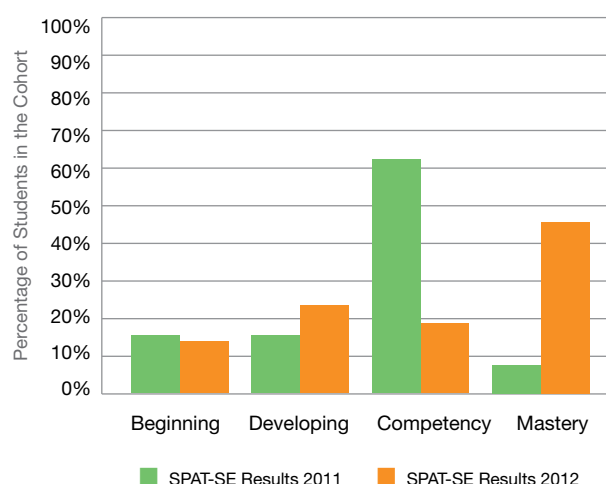


Kindergarten Cohorts

Graph 6: Kindergarten SPAT-SE Level of Competency Comparison



Graph 7: Kindergarten SPAT-SE Level of Competency Comparison

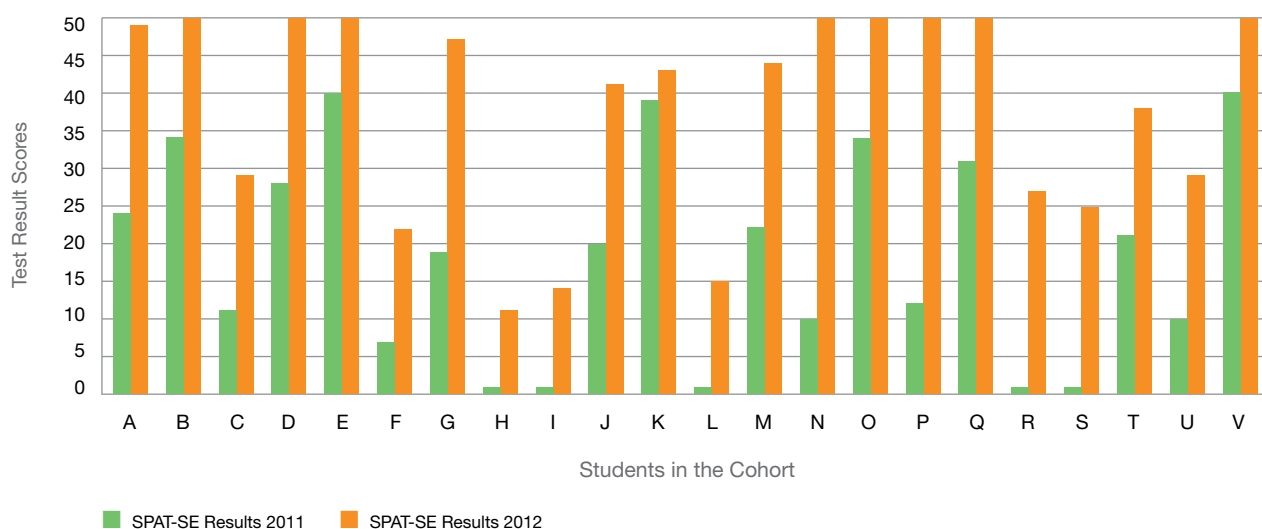


SPAT-SE Phonemic Awareness scores for the 2012 cohorts of preschool and kindergarten children across three sites, where the EL&L Program had been implemented for the majority of the school year, are displayed graphically below. The preschool graphs show results for children who are old enough to start school in 2013.

As per the graphs below, the vast majority of children gained significant improvement in their performance.

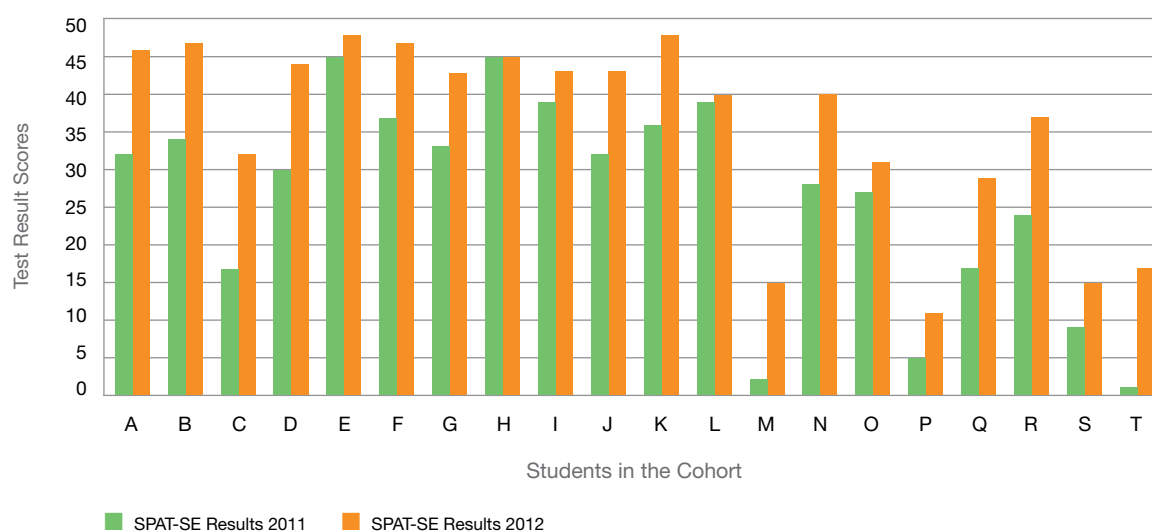
Kindergarten Cohort

Graph 8: Kindergarten SPAT-SE Pre and Post Test Scores

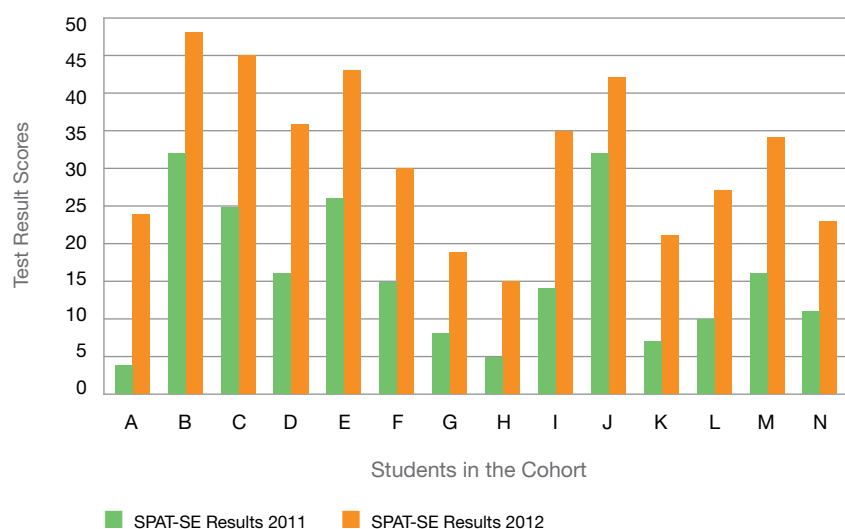


Preschool Cohort

**Graph 9: Preschool SPAT-SE
Pre and Post Test Scores**



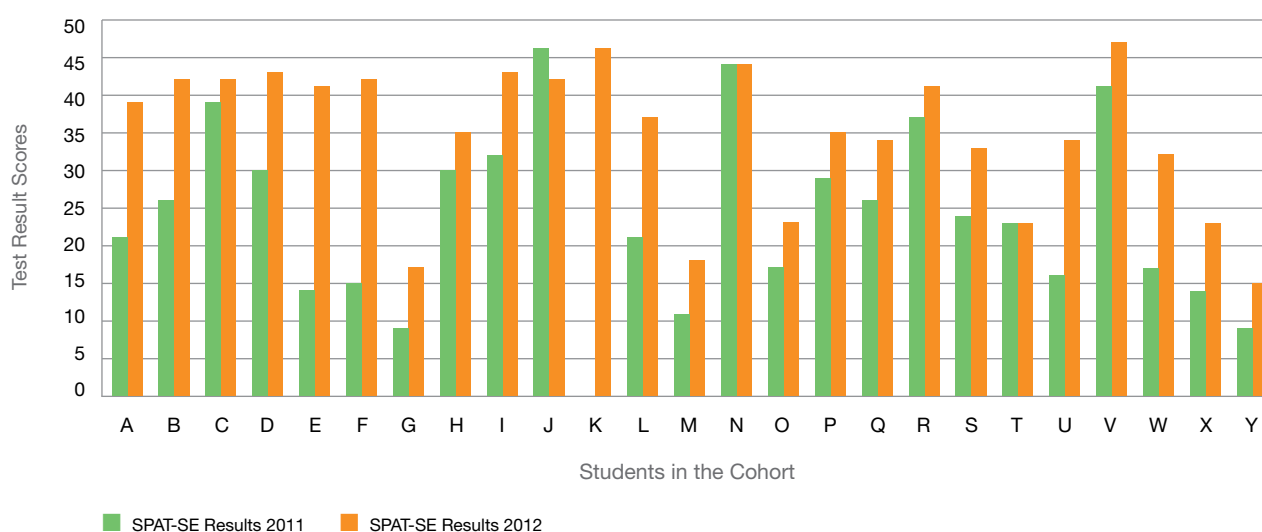
**Graph 10: Preschool SPAT-SE
Pre and Post Test Scores**



SPAT-SE results are available for the 2012 cohorts of children in preschool and kindergarten classes in five sites where the EL&L Program had been implemented in a more intensive way for periods of between six weeks and three months. The following graphs show the growth in individual children's Phonemic Awareness. The vast majority of children show significant improvement in their SPAT-SE scores.

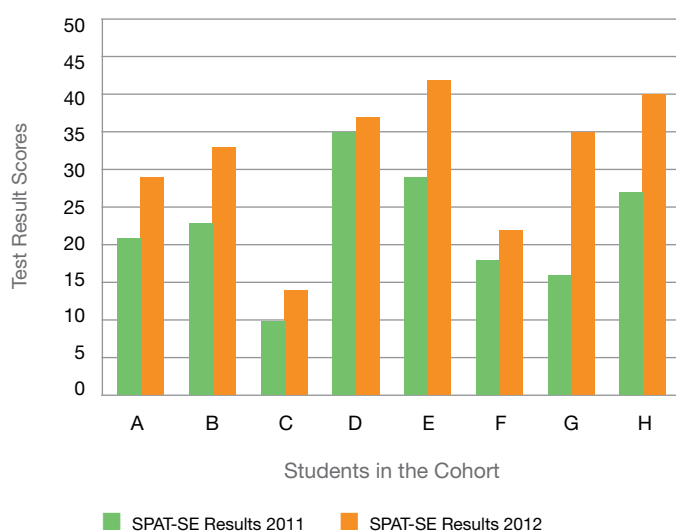
Preschool Cohort

Graph 11: Preschool SPAT-SE Pre and Post Test Scores
6 Week Pre-Post Testing



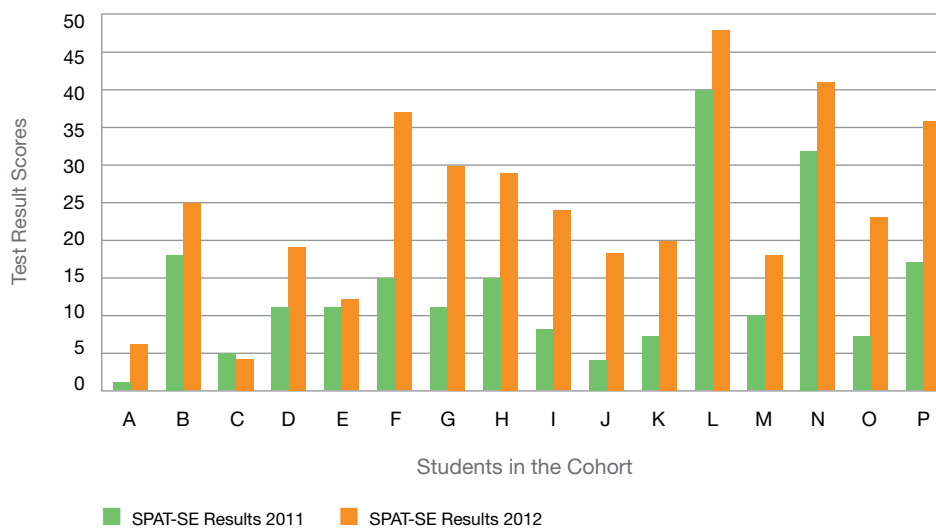
All the children in this sample are old enough to begin school in 2013.

Graph 12: Preschool SPAT-SE Pre and Post Test Scores
3 Month Pre-Post Testing



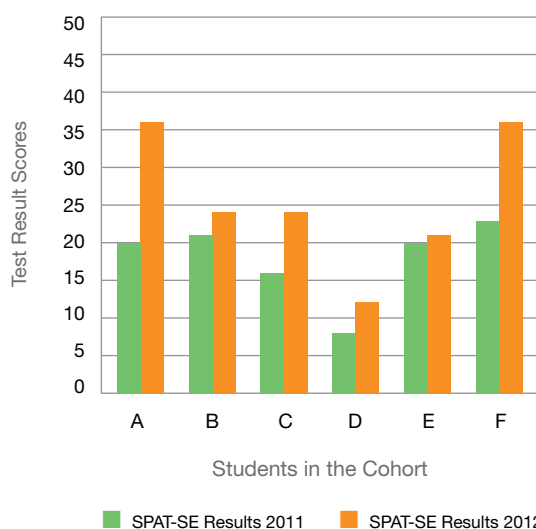
Two of the children in above cohort are too young to start school in 2013. These children scored 14 and 22 respectively. The children who will start school in 2013 have scores in the developing or competent range.

**Graph 13: Preschool SPAT-SE Pre and Post Test Scores
2 Month Pre-Post Testing**



All the children in this sample are old enough to begin school in 2013.

**Graph 14: Preschool SPAT-SE Pre and Post Test Scores
3 Month Pre-Post Testing**



Four of the children in the above cohort are old enough to start school in 2013.
The remaining two who scored 12 and 21 respectively won't start school until 2014.



SECTION THREE

Discussion

DISCUSSION OF GRAPHS

“Faced with an alphabet script, a child’s level of Phonemic Awareness on entering school is widely held to be the strongest single determinant of the success that he or she will experience in learning to read – or conversely, the likelihood that she or he will fail (Adams, 1990: Stanovich, 1986).” Accordingly, the EL&L Program is designed to address this very issue with results demonstrating successful achievements of its objectives.

Graphs 1-7

The comparison of the levels of competency of Phonemic Awareness development in the preschool and kindergarten children of the Macleay Valley represented in graphs 1-7, show that the incorporation of the EL&L Program, strategies and resources into the school’s/preschool’s chosen literacy program, brings about significant gains in the development of the Phonemic Awareness skills necessary to form a strong foundation for learning to read and write.

Graphs 8-14

The vast majority of children in the samples provided show significant improvement in Phonemic Awareness, as shown by the SPAT-SE results, after the introduction of the EL&L Program, resources and strategies.

The samples represent a variety of implementation protocols in the preschool and schools:

1. Where the EL&L Program has been used for a period of time longer than six months, the progress of the individual children is significant. Two of these sites (Graphs 8 and 9) tested their children regularly and addressed the specific needs of the children highlighted by the test. This procedure has brought about very positive results, with the majority of the children in the samples reaching competency level on the SPAT-SE. In the third sample (Graph 10) testing

was not done regularly. The children’s progress here was less marked with less than 25% of the children reaching the competency level.

2. Where the EL&L Program has been used in a more intensive way over a shorter period of time (Graphs 11-14), significant progress is also evident. The children in these cohorts were tested and their results were used to design literacy activities, using the EL&L Program, to help meet their specific needs. This shows the impact of a targeted approach to children’s specific learning needs.

It appears that it is not the period of time that the program is used, but rather the focus on children’s abilities and needs, that brings about high levels of improvement. Educationally it is far preferable to have children achieving high levels of competency in Phonemic Awareness as early as possible, preferably in their last year of preschool. It is always better to work from a strength perspective rather than a deficit point of view; therefore, the testing can be seen as providing a picture of what the children can do and what can be done to assist their continued development. Acquisition of competent Phonemic Awareness skills earlier in the year will allow the remainder of the year to embed these skills into their literacy understandings.

Having stated this, it is also worth noting that significant progress was made over a very short period of time (Graph 11) where the EL&L Program was presented in a very focused way. The results here show that the program is also beneficial as a remedial tool.

In summary, the EL&L Program as implemented within these sites has demonstrated major improvements not only in the children’s literacy, but also in eliciting strong support from the adults working with these young children and the broader community.

FEEDBACK* AND COMMENTS

Feedback from Parents

Feedback from parents who participated in workshops suggest that despite their own poor literacy, they felt confident enough to play some of the EL&L games and use some of the strategies practiced with their own children to read stories from the pictures.

Parents are becoming more interested in the program and are starting to ask questions. The response to the initial workshop suggest that many parents in the Macleay Valley do not feel confident enough to work with their children in developing pre-literacy skills; however, their response when they are shown how they can help, even if their own literacy levels are what they consider inadequate, is both very encouraging and promising. An additional issue is that parents have trouble accessing the workshops. ALNF needs to continue discussions with the preschools, schools and community groups to plan times that are suitable to parents and to discuss ways to increase parent participation.

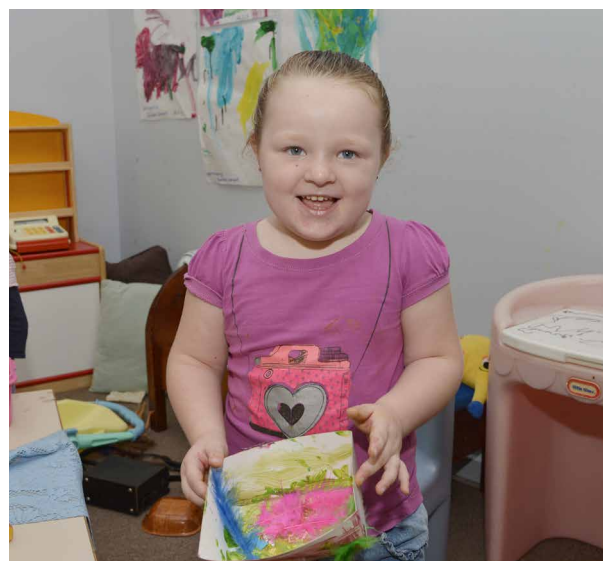
* Feedback also shows continued training for staff, parents and volunteers is requested.

Feedback from Participants

Feedback from course participants who are now implementing the program shows that:

The EL&L Program, resources and strategies have a high level of uptake due to the quality and applicable nature of the resources and the ongoing mentoring supplied by ALNF staff.

The EL&L course is successful in training a diverse group of people to enhance the literacy learning of young children.





SECTION FOUR

Conclusions

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The outcomes of The Project indicate that the EL&L Program is a valuable inclusion in the preschools, Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 learning sites and community groups of the Kempsey/Macleay Valley region.

The excellent improvement in the children's Phonemic Awareness scores provides evidence that the negative impact of Otitis Media/hearing loss on the children's pre-literacy development can be effectively counteracted. Accordingly, we can conclude that the EL&L Program's strategies have the capacity to break down the silos between health and education, thereby providing a practical method that progresses the children's pre-literacy development in spite of Otitis Media-related hearing impairment.

The success of the EL&L Program demonstrates that it represents a framework that can be effectively transferred to other communities.

ALNF's model of teaching adults (preschool, school, family and community members) how to teach children pre-literacy development, comes down to the simple fact that children need to be taught through their learning challenges, brought about by health or general disadvantage, before

The Project achievements in broad terms are:

- High engagement with coursework, workshops, mentoring and evidence-based learning/teaching exchanges with children and families as presented in this report.
- Gradual confidence building in the use of literacy resources at home and in the classroom thereby generating a proactive literacy learning dynamic within the classroom, in families and the wider community.
- Sharing of evidence based feedback on the children's pre-literacy learning.
- Development of a collegiate positive attitude/approach to the children's pre-literacy learning experiences as a powerful conduit towards English literacy proficiency.
- Increased community direction and cohesion combined with a positive belief that functional literacy is an attainable goal, inclusive of children with learning challenges and poor pre-literacy exposure (particularly those with hearing loss from chronic Otitis Media).
- Creation of pathways to employment, advancement or further study through Statements of Attainment towards a Certificate IV in Early Language and Literacy.
- Inclusion of Aboriginal staff in the teaching of pre-literacy in preschool and school sites.

they enter formal schooling if they are to have a chance of successfully engaging with the curriculum and emerge as fluent readers, writers and thinkers.

As reading is a learned language based skill governed by a set of developmental prerequisite steps and stages, what children are taught before they go to school is the foundation upon which their formal literacy learning rests. The precursor to becoming a capable older student with literacy, language and comprehension skills is a competent preschooler with robust pre-literacy and oral language development. Remarkably, prior to school developmental competency will determine a child's ability to become an independent fluent reader, writer and learner. The EL&L Program ensures that this development is assured within the appropriate developmental time frame.

Preschool children rely on adults around them to facilitate the stages leading up to and into fluent literacy and language skills. Consequently, it is essential to combine specialised Speech Pathology with Early Years Education skills as found in the EL&L Program. EL&L practitioners are the conduits through whom the children will flourish. It is the adults in the families and learning sites, supported and empowered through the EL&L method, resources and strategies, who will ensure that the children are developmentally prepared to become readers who can then participate, to their full potential, with the curriculum and gain an education.

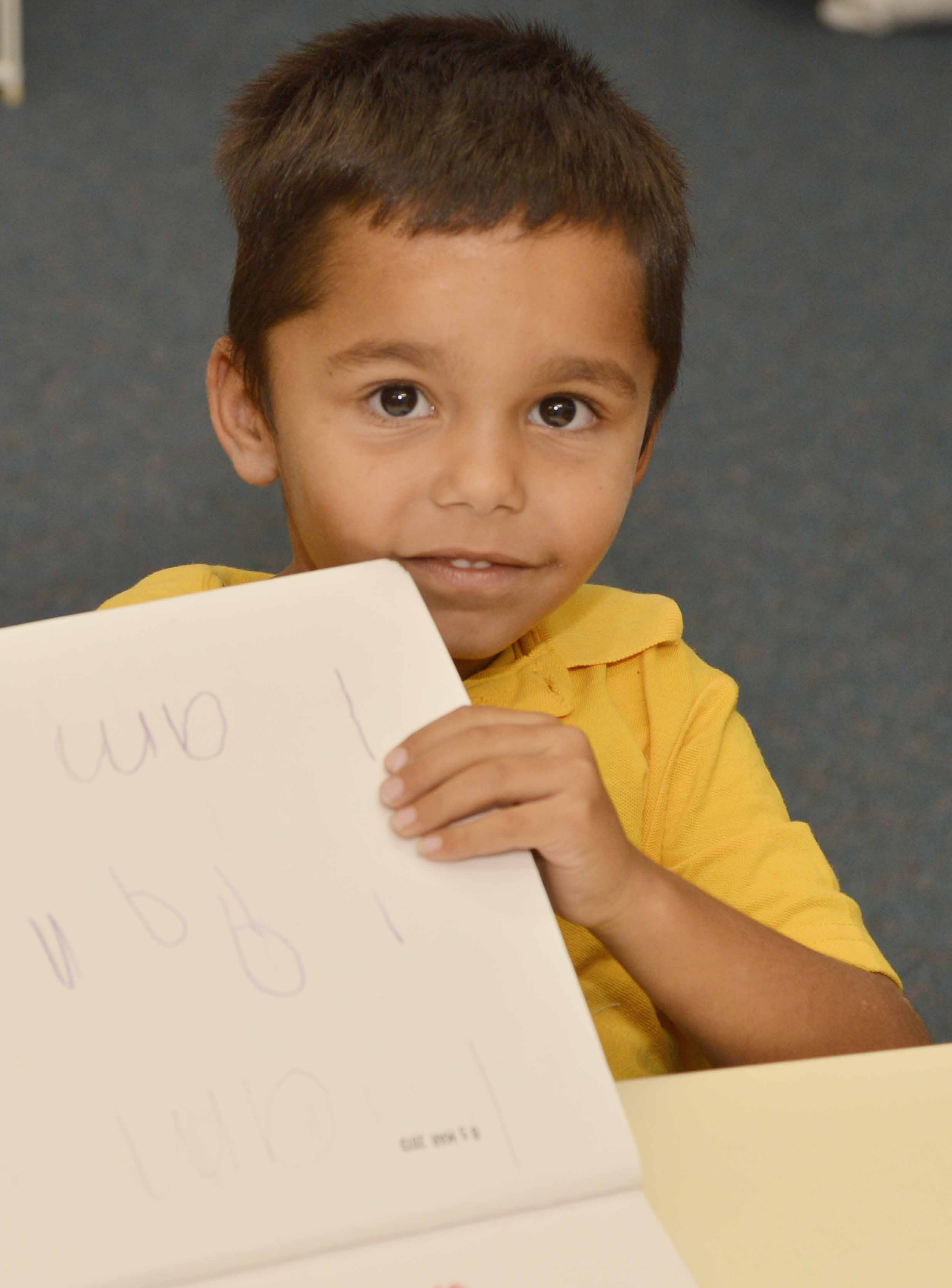
Becoming a reader, with the economic, social and educational opportunities that ensue, begins with effective pre-literacy and oral language development and experiences in their family and prior to school learning sites. Adults who are informed, resourced and skilled by the EL&L Program, ensure that this potential is realised irrespective of socio-economic disadvantage or health issues such as middle ear disease induced hearing loss within the community.



The Early Language & Literacy Program's mission is to:

Teach children through their environmental disadvantage and/or medically induced learning challenges, with an easy to use combination of Speech Pathology and Early Education practices collated and organised into the Early Language and Literacy Program, so that all children have equitable developmental access to formal literacy instruction during their early school years.

The Kempsey/Macleay Valley Project report indicates that this mission is now realisable for the children participating in this project.



SECTION FIVE

Supporting Documentation

THANK YOU LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL OF MACLEAY VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

Dear Australian Literacy & Numeracy Foundation,

Thank you for all your groups' efforts to engage our students and offer them some creative alternatives to Education, a pathway to attainment of certificates and inspiring their giving back to the community through service in the pre-school.

Looking forward to your visit in July.

Mark Morrison

Principal

Macleay Vocational College

School: 02 6563 1790

Home: 0412 656 823

Email: mmorrison@mvwlc.nsw.edu.au



LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM KEMPSEY ELDER, UNCLE BOB MUMBLER

Dear Rachel,

As Aboriginal elders, my late wife Betty and I have been vitally involved in Education for a number of years. It is with excitement that I have seen what is happening at Dalaigur.

The children are relating to and are involved with their Aboriginal heritage which is being made part of how and what they are learning. The children really want to be at school and are enthusiastic about learning. As there are some white children there and everyone gets on really well it is reconciliation in action.

I have visited the school on numerous occasions over the years. I see a big improvement in the environment and how the children are achieving in many ways. It is good to see them eating properly and being ready to learn.

The elders and other community members have been involved in what is happening. The centre is now helping Aboriginal people to be more involved in activities such as NAIDOC Week etc. Self-respect about being an Aboriginal is really evident. It is good to see Mums and, occasionally, Dads there.

Yours sincerely,

Bob Mumbler

Uncle Bob Mumbler is an elder in Kempsey strongly supportive of children's education. He has provided valuable support and guidance to the EL&L initiative since the inaugural project in 2008. This is his email of acknowledgement.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1

Submitted for the Certificate IV qualification by a preschool teacher.

“E claps the words from the story without prompting. She isolated the first and last syllable in ‘crocodile’.

E was excited by the story of ‘The Little Mole’. She anticipates what happens next and says, ‘I like it this’, pointing to the words as the phrase is repeated throughout the story.

E’s concept of rhyming is dramatically improving.

J is mastering the initial sound and is starting to identify some last sounds in words.

Couldn’t be more excited with the children’s test results. The proof is in the pudding!”



Case Study 2

Submitted for the Certificate IV qualification by a teachers’ aide. The Case Study involves two Kindergarten students with learning difficulties.

“Today was a rewarding day. Both boys are starting to get the concepts of how words are broken down into syllables.

Today I only had ... to work with. It took a little while to get involved but when he started adding ideas I couldn’t stop him. Today was a day when I went home on cloud nine.”

Case Study 3

Submitted for the Certificate IV qualification by a preschool teacher.

“In R’s case the change was quite extraordinary as her sense of confidence and her growing interest and ability within the literacy area transferred to all areas of her learning. She responded to the use of Tommy Turtle beautifully – wanting to sign in each day and writing words to her artwork, shopping lists, invitations etc – by sounding out letters with some adult scaffolding. Her ability to engage with the story grew incredibly – from being a fidgety child nearly impossible to engage to one thinking about the story and contributing to discussion. R comes from a family with very, very low literacy skills – Dad is illiterate and Mum only has low levels of literacy, so this has been so exciting for them to watch.”

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD ARTICLE

All smiles and primed for leap to big school

In almost 30 years in education, Sandra Ross has never seen children so primed for learning as those arriving in kindergarten from Dalaigur Preschool.

"They're the best prepared group of children," said Ms Ross, the principal of Green Hill Public School in Kempsey. "They're the best skilled I've seen."

At nearby Dalaigur indigenous preschool, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation runs an early childhood language and literacy program.

It mixes speech pathology clinical practice with teaching techniques, giving staff intensive training in language development. Staff test the children to identify any gaps in their development and teaching focuses on play-based learning to help them bridge the gaps, the preschool's director, Janet Jensen, said.

"The games and reading activities assist all the children in their overall language development. Their word bank and understanding of words has increased. Some of our children can read and recognise words much earlier."

The children's self-confidence and levels of engagement and concentration had also increased, Ms Jensen said.

The *Herald* is a supporter of the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, which works to improve language, literacy and numeracy standards, especially in marginalised and remote communities. The foundation's fund-raising campaign, the Wall of Hands appeal, raised more than \$220,000 for school communities in the Northern Territory last year.

The foundation's co-founder, Mary-Ruth Mendel, said indigenous children with a history of middle ear infection need "teaching strategies, resources and family support that specifically compensate for their hearing loss and difficulties with oral language pre-literacy needs".

"We need to teach them in a particular way so that their brains are fully stimulated and developmentally on track in preparation for school."

Ms Mendel said a culture which encourages the children to read, speak and explore is also creating positive attitudes, "rather than the downward spiral of compounding learning strife we have seen in the past".

Standardised testing showed that children involved in the language and literacy program are moving from below or well below average levels of achievement to average and above average levels "in a matter of months", she said.

The benefits for the children are obvious at Green Hill.

"Many of the children have speech difficulties due to hearing loss but since they've been doing this speech therapy in their learning, they're coming to school much better prepared for more formal schooling," Ms Ross said.

"We're very impressed with the difference in their ability to actually address formal learning."

www.alnf.org

The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 April, 2012
By Kim Arlington

This story can be accessed at:
<http://www.smh.com.au/national/all-smiles-and-primed-for-leap-to-big-school-20120406-1wgtd.html>



SECTION SIX

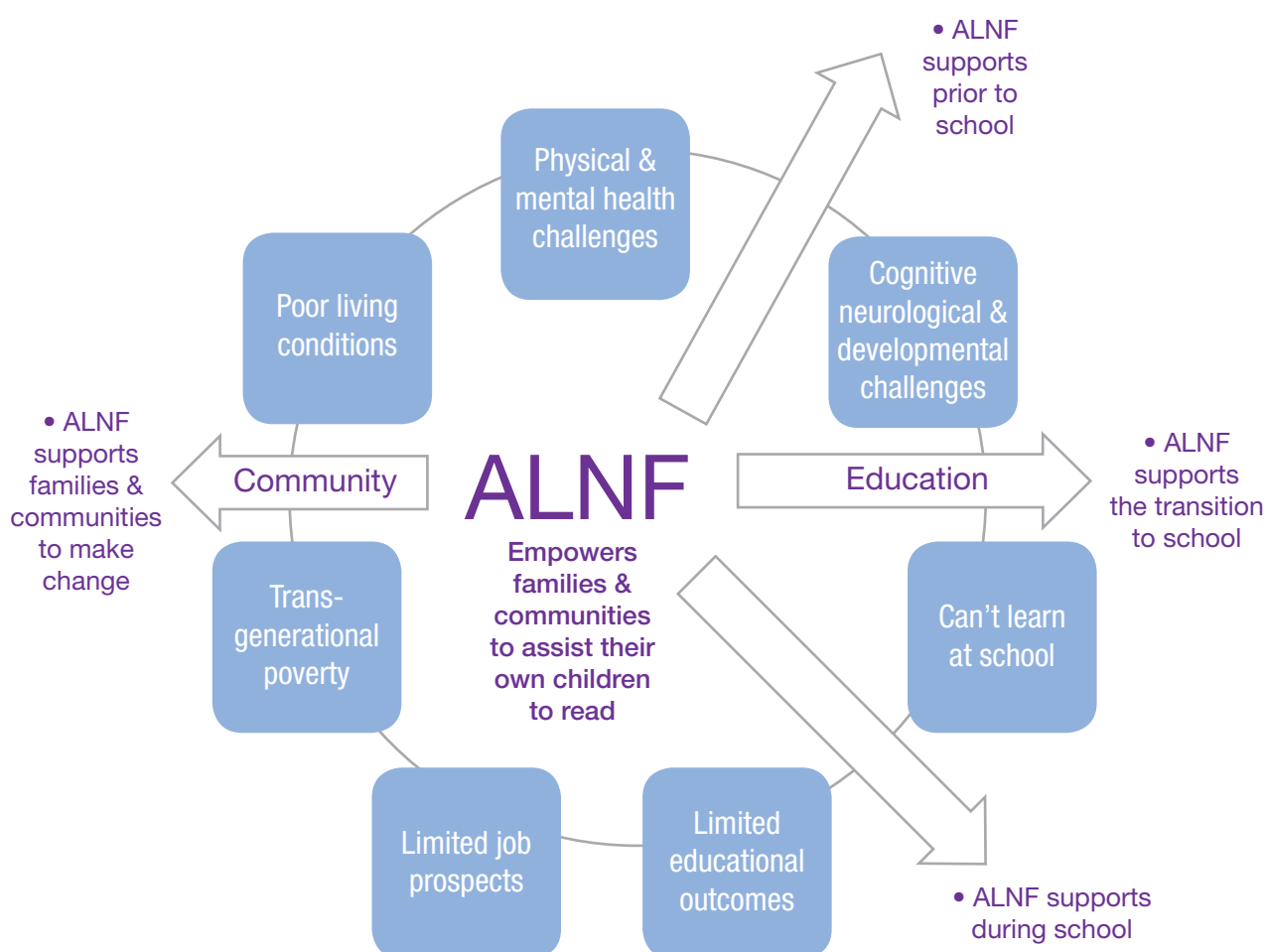
Appendix

APPENDIX A

ALNF LITERACY PROGRAMS

The ability to read breaks the cycle of marginalisation.

ALNF facilitates development through speech pathology
and education strategies.



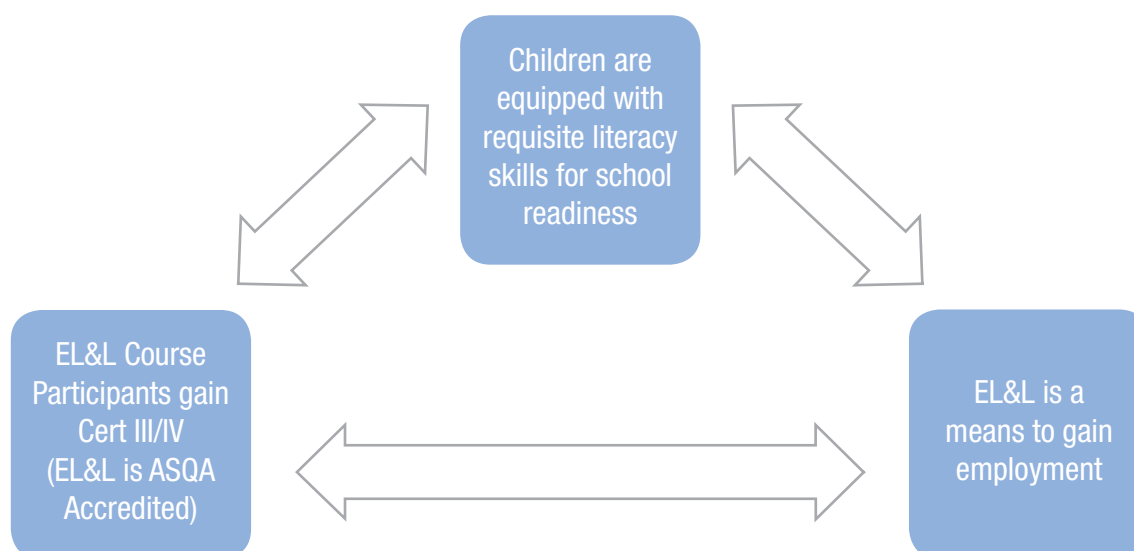
APPENDIX B

THE EARLY LANGUAGE & LITERACY PROGRAM

For the whole of community.

EL&L is beneficial to the whole of community including children and their families, teacher aides, teachers and others wishing to gain employment.

Accreditation from the Australian Skills and Qualifications Authority facilitates these employment opportunities.



Phonemic Awareness

1. Phonemic Awareness (PA) is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds.¹
2. PA is essential to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system, because letters represent sounds or phonemes. Without PA, phonics makes little sense.²
3. PA is fundamental to mapping speech to print. If a child cannot hear that “man” and “moon” begin with the same sound or cannot blend the sounds / rrrrrrruuuuunnnnn/ into the word “run”, he or she may have great difficulty connecting sounds with their written symbols or blending sounds to make a word.³
4. PA is essential to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system and requires readers to notice how letters represent sounds.
5. PA is a strong predictor of children who experience early reading success.
6. PA gives readers a way to approach sounding out and reading new words.

- PA development is the stepping stone into successful formal literacy learning.
- ‘Faced with an alphabet script, a child’s level of PA on entering school is widely held to be the strongest single determinant of the success that he or she will experience in learning to read – or conversely, the likelihood that she or he will fail’.⁴
- ‘Poorly developed PA distinguishes economically disadvantaged preschoolers from their more advantaged peers’.⁵
- ‘Researchers advocate that we consciously and purposefully attend to the development of PA as part of a broad instructional program’.⁶
- PA supports understanding of the alphabetic principle – an insight that is crucial in reading an alphabetic orthography. The logic of alphabetic print is apparent to learners if they know that speech is made up of a sequence of sounds (that is, if they are phonemically aware). In learning to read, they discover that it is

- There is evidence to suggest that the relation between PA and learning to read is reciprocal: PA supports reading acquisition, and reading instruction and experiences with print facilitate Phonemic Awareness development.⁸
- There are many classrooms where a varied engagement with print and exploration of language, is not the norm. Teachers must be sufficiently equipped with the information, tools and strategies they need to provide these kinds of learning opportunities in their classrooms. The problem is most severe in terms of consequences when the students from economically disadvantaged homes, where resources and parent education levels are lowest, enter schools that have limited resources and experience in promoting engagement with print. The students who need the most attention may be those who receive the least. We have a responsibility to promote action that is direct, explicit and meaningful.⁹
- Early identification of children outside the norms of progress in PA can significantly increase the likelihood of this cohort becoming successful readers.

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APPENDIX D

Further information about Otitis Media

The following is an extract from various ALNF documents with additional inclusions from the Australian Coalition for Hearing and Education (ACHE) which has been established as a Senate response to the Senate Enquiry “Hear Us”. ALNF is a founding participant of this committee. The key focus of ACHE is to clearly articulate the impact of Otitis Media (OM) and identify workable solutions that eradicate the negative impact within a generation.

There is a recognised link between OM and poor pre-literacy and literacy skill development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The need to address poor pre-literacy and literacy learning ability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children brought about by the high incidence of OM and concomitant hearing loss is urgent.

To break this debilitating vicious cycle, EL&L pre-literacy, language and literacy learning experiences must be provided for children, parents and teachers. The EL&L strategies and resources provide a compensatory pathway to literacy learning – even though the children have compromised hearing.

Otitis Media is a critical issue amongst Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children.

- OM is a common childhood infection which affects the middle ear. If left untreated it can lead to permanent deafness. Chronic infection leads to compromised health, education and life choices.
- The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander population has the highest rate of OM of any indigenous group in the world: in some communities the rates of OM are as high as 70%.
- The “burden of disease” of OM amongst Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities is ten times higher than the general Australian population. That is, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children suffer from OM for an average of two and half years before the age of 5, compared to an average of three months in the rest of the community. The resulting intermittent recurring hearing loss has a profound effect on language/literacy development, educational potential and psycho-social development.



- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children also have earlier onset of OM compared to the general population, compounded by a lack of access to treatments.
- Access to treatments is poor for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities: for a range of social, cultural and institutional reasons.
- OM has broad ranging and far reaching effects on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Hearing loss is linked to poor educational and literacy outcomes, as well as poor job prospects, poor health outcomes, and a higher risk of engagement with the criminal justice system. All of this leads to a vicious spiral that cements OM in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities from one generation to the next.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people are legendary for their passionate support of children suffering from limited literacy capacity brought on by disadvantage.

ALNF wishes to extend our warmest thanks to:

- The ALNF Team Members
- Dalaigur Children's Services Pre School
- The Hills Regional Skills Centre as the ALNF's Registered Training Office
- Lou's Café for feeding us so well
- All of the participating sites and individuals who are making a difference to the lives of so many children by giving them a chance to become readers and writers
- The CAGES Foundation who have funded the project and supported the Kempsey, Macleay Valley children to write their own futures

Special acknowledgement and in memoriam

ALNF acknowledges the support of the late Aunty Betty Mumbler, a great lady who guided and inspired us in the early stages of this project.

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