

Language, Literacy and Learning for Life: Policy and Practice in Northern Territory Libraries

A paper by Cate Richmond, Northern Territory Library

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Introduction

[slide – key words]

This paper begins with some thoughts about **Libraries, Literacies and Communities**. We'll move on to some background information about **Northern Territory Library and the Libraries & Knowledge Centres Program** then look at **NTL's literacy policy** and the development of our **Walk to School Strategy**, which draws on the approach of '**literacy as social practice**'. Then the fun part: a look at some of the **programs** we are delivering in **partnership with communities** to support **family literacy, wellbeing and learning for life**.

[maybe show Gates DVD first?? if there's time]

Libraries, Literacies and Communities

[slide – quote]

Let's begin with a quote:

"Building the skills of reading and writing is the key to our survival as a people ...Without these skills, we cannot run our communities and organisations properly – we cannot build and control our commercial enterprises. Lack of literacy affects our health and our chances of getting good jobs. Not being able to read and write affects our capacity to look after our country. It is vital to the strength of our culture.

Above all, we cannot be independent."

~ the late Mr Lee, Community Leader, Wugularr, NT

This describes the problem facing many remote Indigenous communities. Mr Lee's words come from a report called *Literacy for Life* published in 2004 by the Fred Hollows Foundation and the Jawoyn Association. In the report Mr

Lee articulated the vision for his community and it helped to inspire us to work out how we could assist.

[slide – Anmatjere LKC]

One of the main roles of libraries is to support literacy and learning. One of the great things about public libraries is that they are free and accessible to all and that they provide services for all ages and all groups within the community. Libraries really do support literacy and learning across the life span.

[slide – 4 pix]

If we unpack “literacy” in a library context what we are really talking about is multiliteracies: as well as alphabetic and numerical literacy, there is a strong focus on information literacy and increasingly on digital literacy. Our collections and services also support visual and cultural literacy.

This gives libraries great scope in terms of developing programs that are relevant to their communities and which reach out to diverse groups within communities.

NTL & the LKC Program

[slide – Map]

As well as preserving the documentary heritage of the NT, Northern Territory Library funds and supports the network of public libraries. We work with local councils to ensure library services are relevant to their communities. In all there are 33 public libraries in the Territory, with 22 of these situated in remote Indigenous communities.

[slide – Jacqueline]

The remote libraries come in all shapes and sizes. Some are located in the local school and are accessible to both community members and the school community. Each library is managed by one or more Community Library Officers (CLOs) employed by local Councils. They provide a regular and

sustainable service (often in very challenging circumstances) and receive ongoing professional support from Northern Territory Library.

[slide – Barunga LKC]

In many Indigenous communities, the library is the only public space where people can come to read, find information, or access computers. The Libraries and Knowledge Centers (LKC) Program was developed in 2004 in response to requests from Indigenous communities who wanted help to preserve their cultural heritage and provide community access to it. Technology is a key component of the LKC program. Each LKC has free public access computers which are connected to the Internet.

[slide – Wadeye screen]

In addition each LKC has a local *Our Story* database, which enables the community to establish a unique digital collection of local cultural and historical material. *Our Story* uses the *Ara Irititja* software, developed specifically for Pitjantjatjara communities in Central Australia. The database has a user-friendly interface and a proven record of use by Indigenous people.

[slide – Sebastian, Ti tree]

It is a great example of ‘community-created content’, where community members not only access digital photos, audio and video material, but where they can value-add to these resources by providing factual information and stories – all of which is immediately captured and added to the database by the CLO. In recent years our training for CLOs has included using digital cameras and videos to record local events, and workshops on recording oral histories with local residents. Thus the library becomes a focal point for the creation of local content, as well as an access point for published materials.

Our Story has brought more people into remote libraries ...

[slide – boys at Umbakumba]

[slide – One Mob Different Country Dancers]

The LKC Program has been described by Professor Martin Nakata, Director of Indigenous Studies, at UTS, as: “60,000 years of oral tradition meets technology”.

In 2006 Professor Nakata led an evaluation of the LKC Program. The evaluation report recommended that NTL build on the successful LKC model by working with communities to develop and deliver Indigenous literacy programs, particularly programs to support early years literacy, information literacy and digital literacy. The first challenge was to source funding to do this and the second was to decide on our approach.

[slide – Gates image]

A wonderful solution to the funding issue came our way in 2007 when Northern Territory Library was awarded the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation *Access to Learning Award*. This is an annual award to a library out side of the US which support disadvantaged communities by providing free access to technology. The award recognised our innovative approach to meeting Indigenous community needs through technology. As part of the award we received \$1 million US to further develop the LKC Program.

Next we had to decide on our approach and we realised that we needed a framework to guide the development of literacy programs; a framework that acknowledged the role that libraries play in literacy and learning for life.

We engaged Dr Inge Kral from CAEPR at ANU to assist us. We were already familiar with her work in Central Australia as an adult educator and researcher and her approach to literacy as social practice seemed particularly relevant in a library context. It also helped that she valued libraries and had first-hand experience of how remote libraries were providing opportunities for informal learning.

[slide – Girls at Wadeye LKC]

Dr Kral's recent research affirmed the value of informal learning in Indigenous community contexts, regardless of whether it leads to formal learning pathways. For the young people working with Dr Kral, technology provided the tools for learning, self-expression and creativity. In some communities the only place where young people could access the technology was the library.

[slide – Policy words]

To guide our program development we created our **Language Literacy and Learning for Life Policy**:

Policy:

"NTL views language, literacy and learning for life as central to its mission of developing communities, and considers that libraries are ideally placed to support all ages and sectors of society in the development of these important skills.

It is the policy of NTL that residents of the Northern Territory (NT) have access to library-based programs, including programs that deliver print and digital resources, that are designed to broaden language and literacy skills, and which help to create a society where every member has the opportunity to realise their full potential.

The diverse cultural and demographic composition of the NT community and the various aspects of literacy (e.g. alphabetic, informational, visual, cultural, technological, mathematical) require a prioritised and strategic approach."

[slide – Walk to School]

Walk to School Strategy

We decided to focus initially on early years literacy – those important years of birth to age 5. In 2008, with assistance from Dr Kral we developed *The Walk to School: an Indigenous Early Years Literacy Strategy for NT Public Libraries and Knowledge Centres*. The strategy articulates Northern Territory Library's

approach, which is very much about literacy as social practice. For a discussion of this approach, see Dr Kral's paper which is published in the strategy. See our website.

While the strategy aims to support young children with early language and literacy development, it is really about family literacy practices. It recognises the important role that parents and families play in giving young children positive experiences around language development and literacy. Intergenerational learning is crucial to this process and reflects Indigenous traditional learning styles.

If libraries can provide relevant literacy programs for Indigenous parents and carers of young children, those children will be better prepared when they began formal schooling. Libraries are well-placed to provide positive family and community experiences, which are important factors in determining the success of indigenous children in gaining literacy and numeracy skills. We know that positive early literacy experiences can equip young children with a developing understanding of text and a joy of reading and learning.

This is the quote that inspired the title of the strategy:

[slide – quote]

“Children who learn to read successfully do so because, for them, learning to read is a cultural and not primarily an instructed process. Furthermore, this cultural process has long roots at home – roots which have grown strong and firm before the child has walked into school. Children who must learn reading primarily as an instructed process in school are at an acute disadvantage.”

~ James Gee

To return to Mr Lee's words at the beginning of the presentation, we knew that lack of literacy affects many aspects of life and that family literacy programs are not readily available in many remote communities; but first we had to ask:

What did community members want from a library-based early literacy program? What would a successful program look like?

[slide – Revenna & children]

We held workshops with community members in the Top End and the Centre, where we invited participants to reflect on their own literacy experiences. People told us that more than anything they wanted literacy resources that were in their own languages; that featured their country, their stories, their themes and their approach to raising children. This community-centered approach has informed the development of our family literacy programs.

Programs

Now that I've shared with you some of the background and our approach, we get to the fun part. Here are some of the programs we are delivering under our Language, Literacy and Learning for Life Policy.

Firstly I'd like to acknowledge both the community participants who helped shaped our approach by sharing their ideas about family literacy practices and our excellent staff who have brought creativity, energy and innovation to our program development and delivery. In terms of the professional skills we have been able to tap into, as well as our academic partners these range from early childhood education, to music therapy, arts education, librarianship and community development.

[slide – Artstories]

Many of the programs have a strong arts focus. Again this makes good sense in a library context, and it is thanks to a very productive partnership with *ArtStories*. *ArtStories* is a model of intergenerational learning and involvement with the arts. *ArtStories* has a set of underlying core principles congruent with participatory research approaches. *ArtStories* supports learning partnerships, which may involve intercultural and intergenerational exchange.

[slide – posters]

Promotion

We began by developing some resources to promote libraries and reading.

[slide – posters]

[slide – posters]

[slide – Joy]

Joy Cardona, our Aboriginal Heritage Co-ordinator, is very active in promoting events and in modelling reading practices. She helps with community liaison and her extensive networks mean she can help us to reach many families, especially across the Top End.

[slide – Yamba the Ant]

We looked for existing activities and programs where we could add value. We engaged popular Indigenous children's TV character Yamba the Ant to promote libraries and books. We also worked with Menzies School of Health Research to produce a TV ad for Indigenous parents about the importance of reading to babies and young children.

[slide – Ti Tree workshop]

Baby Board Books

As I mentioned, community members told us they wanted to develop their own literacy resources. In six communities across the NT we have supported communities to develop bi-lingual baby board books. The themes and text are developed by community members; the books are illustrated with original artwork by community artists and the books are accompanied by a CD of local songs and chants. The baby board books are being developed in the languages of Tiwi, Warlpiri, (at Lajamanu); Mudburra (at Elliott), Anmatyerr (at Ti Tree) & Larrakia (Darwin).

[slide – Warlpiri book]

Here's a sneak preview of the covers of two of the books. The books are being designed by Batchelor Institute and will be professionally published later this year. Copies of the books will be distributed free of charge to all babies born in the communities for the next 5 years. This is the Warlpiri book and ...

[slide – Larrakia book]

... the Larrakia book. The Larrakia Minbeni Rangers have created a board book about: “Dalda the Larrakia baby”. The elements in the story reflect how little ones acquire knowledge about their culture through their first experiences of land, food and animals.

The Tiwi book is called “Amama, Apapa, Ajaja”. Here’s an excerpt from the baby chant which accompanies the Tiwi book.

[slide – Tiwi ladies – play sound]

Blank Board Books

We have also sourced a supply of blank baby board books and our next project is to develop a workshop around creating individual board books using family photos and text.

[slide – Rockhole]

Reading and Communicating with Kids (RACK) Program trains and supports community-based reading champions, who offer regular family reading activities in their communities and link families with their local library. The RACK program promotes the use of high-quality early literacy resources and reading within family groups.

The RACK program is an example of intergenerational teaching and learning. The literacy focus is book familiarity: we model reading behaviours through interaction with a range of reading materials by community members across the lifespan. It is a way of supporting Indigenous families to build social practices around reading in a relaxed and non-threatening environment. The RACK program is currently being delivered in 5 communities in the Katherine region, with plans to extend it to other regions within the library network.

[slide – Reading Mentors]

Community Reading Mentors are supported by NTL staff and indeed are on our payroll as casual staff. They participate in regular workshops to develop their skills and knowledge. At a workshop held earlier this year the Reading

Mentors were asked to pick three key points which they considered to be the most important part of their role. All agreed on the following:

1. Learn while young
2. Learn skills for reading
3. More parents/kids to be involved

In the workshop evaluation, when asked what they enjoyed most about the workshop and their role comments included:

- “meeting reading mentors from other community, sharing other ideas, parents joining in with RACK program” ; and
- getting to meet other mentors and getting new books”

[slide – Annie]

This photo shows Annie and Quavon from Binjari, a small community near Katherine. Annie does not read or write herself but she brings two young boys to story time each week. Annie is modelling literate behaviours even though she is not literate herself.

[slide – Pip & kids]

Bonding, Bopping & Books

Bonding, Bopping and Books is an arts-based community library program designed to increase family and community involvement with early childhood learning. Active, shared, creative play involving family members and young children emphasises listening and responding to music, visual art, dance, literature and multimedia, as a foundation for early literacy and numeracy learning, and an important step towards school-readiness.

This program is funded through the Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE) program. It's currently running as a 10-week community library program in Angurugu on Groote Eylandt.

This is Pip and children at an outstation on Groote. I'll share a story about BBB at the end of the presentation.

[slide – Shirley]

Bilingual storytime

One of the aims of our program development is to find successful models of practice that can be replicated in libraries across the NT. Evaluation is built into each program so we can assess its effectiveness, refine it if necessary, and develop support and training materials around it.

Bilingual storytime began with weekly sessions at Yirrkala in East Arnhem. The sessions were run by Northern Territory Library staff member Shirley Shepherd who is Manager of Nhulunbuy Library. Over the course of the sessions Shirley worked with women from the community to find high quality children's books that worked well in a bilingual setting. Shirley then developed a training package for community workers in how to plan and deliver a bilingual story time session for 0-5 year olds. The package includes a list of culturally appropriate published picture books, which have been tested in various community settings. The story time session includes craft activities, quiet reading, snacks and drinks, and it all takes place on a large colourful mat that can be set up under a shady tree or on the beach, or wherever there are parents and young children.

The key to its success is the active involvement of one or more community members, who translate the English language text into local language, page by page. The role modelling of reading and sharing books provides opportunities for families to engage with written and oral story traditions and encourages them to continue this practice at home, using books selected from the library. In 2008 Shirley won an ALIA *Library Stars Award* for the Bilingual Story time program.

We are now offering the program and training in other regions....

[slide – Milikapiti]

... here's a session at Milikapiti on the Tiwi Islands.

[slide – Community Stories]

Our Story / Community Stories

As I mentioned earlier, each community library has an *Our Story* database of local cultural and heritage material. NT Library in partnership with Pitjantjatjara Council has developed a new version of the software, which we have branded as *Community Stories*, and in 2011 we will roll it out to remote libraries in the NT.

This will provide more opportunities for literacy and learning as people interact with their local digital resources and enhance them with stories and other forms of 'user-generated' content. They may also want to re-package existing items to create their own digital books.

[slide – Kylie & Tomiah at Barunga]

Another program aimed at supporting multiliteracies is the **National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (RIPIA)**. NTL has received funding from the Australian Government to provide improved internet connections, hardware and internet training to remote communities. Training and IT equipment were delivered in 19 communities last financial year, with additional communities to be included this year. The funding covers visits to communities to provide face to face training. In communities with libraries we train the Community Library Officers as internet trainers and they provide the training to community members. As you can see here CLO Kylie is multitasking during one of her internet training sessions!

The training program focuses on social networking tools, information literacy, financial literacy and where possible we try to source Indigenous web content. We've included some great digital literacy games and some digital stories with Indigenous themes.

The face to face training has been quite successful but how do we keep the learning going in between community visits?

[slide – CLO forum]

Training & E-mentoring

We do bring CLOS into Darwin once a year for a week of training and professional development. This gives everyone a chance to work together and to get to know each other. As part of the internet training we have created a private Facebook page for CLOs so they can share stories of what's happening in their communities and what they are doing in their libraries.

[slide – webex session from Ngukurr]

At the end of last year NTL staff received training in e-learning and e-mentoring, and we are now supporting remote library staff using web conferencing. The e-mentoring sessions helps the CLOs to feel more connected with us and with each other. They also add value to and extend the effectiveness of face to face training.

[slide – Charlie & kids]

We also use web conferencing to plan and run library events, like this one for National Simultaneous Storytime. CLOs came online every Wednesday leading up to the event to plan it and to practice how it would work in their library. On the day we had local ABC presenter Charlie King reading the story to primary school children in Darwin and five community libraries across the Territory connected in via the web conference.

In development

We also have a couple of programs in development: one involving the Darwin Symphony Orchestra and another one focusing on youth, music and multimedia. These will both involve partnerships and external funding.

Conclusion

[Slide – Albert & Mum & grandmum]

Pip, who runs the Bonding Bopping & Books program on Groote Eylandt writes: “This is Albert with his mum Alvira and Grandma Melva. This photo was taken at Second Creek and shows Albert enjoying looking at the photo album of earlier BBaB excursions and activities. Albert’s Grandma and Mum were telling him the stories of each of the photos in language. He was very happy.”

Remote libraries in the NT are key community facilities and offer many opportunities for sustainable and sustaining programs. Our recent success in attracting external funding to run library programs like the ones I've mentioned confirms that the message is getting out there that libraries support family literacy and learning for life in many ways and in many settings. We hope that continues into the future! Thank you.