DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 867 CS 012 220

AUTHOR Cairney, Trevor H.; And Others
TITLE Developing Partnerships: An Evaluation of Family and Community Literacy Initiatives in Australia.
PUB DATE Apr 95
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 18-22, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Literacy; Parent Participation; Program Descriptions; *Program Evaluation; Reading Research; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; *Family Literacy

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger Australian study on family literacy, this study obtained information about a wide range of family or community literacy initiatives currently in operation in Australia. The study was interested in how the language and literacy learning of students from a variety of schools and communities was influenced by the involvement of parents, caregivers or tutors. Advertisements were placed in newspapers, press releases were sent to major newspapers and radio and television stations, and major organizations, government departments, and institutions were contacted directly for information about parent/community literacy programs or initiatives. Over 380 responses were received, and information from over 250 programs or initiatives were added to a database. Overall, six major issues emerged: (1) most family and community literacy initiatives had not been evaluated beyond simple surveys of participants and the recording of anecdotal comments; (2) evidence concerning the impact of programs on student outcome was limited; (3) initiatives varied greatly in terms of content, process, participant control, and purposes; (4) many initiatives were "tokenistic" and paid little attention to the needs of communities, focusing instead on the needs of the school; (5) many programs that began with a concern for the support of children's literacy developed a secondary interest in the support of adult literacy learners; and (6) when programs were evaluated, some had the potential to lead to the development of significant partnerships between the home and the school. Findings suggest the need for more intensive evaluation of family and community literacy initiatives, and programs need to initiated by community groups as well as educational organizations to share responsibility, control, and ownership. (Contains 25 references and 5 tables of data.) (RS)

Developing Partnerships: An evaluation of family and community literacy initiatives in Australia

Trevor H. Cairney, Jenny Ruge, John Buchanan & Kaye Lowe
University of Western Sydney Nepean

Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association conference, San Francisco, 18-22 April.

Faculty of Education,
University of Western Sydney Nepean,
P.O. Box 10,
Kingswood, NSW, 2747.
Australia.
Fax: 61 47 360 289
Email: t.cairney@uws.edu.au

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Trevor H. Cairney, Jenny Ruge, John Buchanan & Kaye Lowe,
University of Western Sydney

Purpose of the research

In this paper we describe part of the results from a federally funded research project that sought to describe initiatives in Family Literacy within Australia. As well, the study was interested in how the language and literacy learning of students from a variety of schools and communities is influenced by the involvement of their parents, caregivers or tutors in their learning. As such, the study was concerned with a range of sites including: schools, homes, after school centres, community libraries, preschools, and homework centres. It was funded by the Australian government in recognition of the important relationship between school and community literacy practices. It was designed to:

i) map current family and community literacy initiatives in Australia;
ii) identify how the language and literacy of students is influenced by the culture of the home and community, particularly within specific target groups;
iii) develop guidelines for future family and community literacy initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

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. School factors (e.g. resources, class sizes, classroom organisation and methods) simply cannot account for the variability that occurs in student achievement (Hanusheck, 1981; Jencks et al., 1972 & Thompson, 1985). It is apparent that social influences outside the school also contribute to the variations in student achievement. Some have gone as far as to suggest that the cumulative effect of a range of home related factors, probably accounts for the greatest proportion of variability in student achievement (Rutter, Tizzard & Witmore, 1970; Thompson, 1985).

Attempts to explain this relationship 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).

Schools engage in specific discourses and hence inconsistently tap the social and cultural resources of society; privileging specific groups by emphasising particular linguistic styles, curricula and authority patterns (Bourdieu, 1977). To be a teacher in any school demands specific ways of using language, behaving, interacting, and adherence to sets of values and attitudes (Gee, 1990). There is obvious potential for mismatches between these discourses and those which have been characteristic of some children's homes and communities.

As Scribner and Cole's (1981) work showed, what matters is not literacy as an isolated skill, but the social practices into which people are enculturated (or apprenticed) as members of a specific social group. Not surprisingly, one gets better at specific social practices as one practices them. It would seem that those children who enter school, already having been partially apprenticed into the social practices of schooling (of which literacy is a part), invariably perform better at the practices of schooling right from the start.

But how does one respond to the cultural mismatches of home and school? 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 (Lareau, 1991), or find ways to help schools recognise the cultural practices of the home and community and build effective communication between these parties (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992)?

It is within this broad set of educational concerns that family and community literacy have been examined widely in recent times. Educators have increasingly begun to examine a range of options for bringing schools and communities closer together in order that such mismatches can be considered and in some cases addressed through specific programs. In this context literacy has been increasingly examined as a potential source of inequity and at the same time a possible vehicle to address the type of cultural mismatches to which I have referred.

Family Literacy is one of the 'new' literacies that have been the focus of discussion, writing and research in the past decade. As a descriptive label it has emerged from a number of related, and at times overlapping terms. These terms have included parent literacy, parent involvement, intergenerational literacy, and community literacy. The most commonly used terms in recent times have been family literacy, community literacy and intergenerational literacy. All these terms are useful and mean slightly different things. The first two terms, are labels for specific sets of literacy practices that are used in quite specific contexts (i.e. the home and community). Intergenerational literacy, on the other hand, is a term used to describe the process by which the literacy practices of one generation influence the literacy practices of another (Cairney, 1994). As one would expect, this term has considerable overlap in its usage with family and community literacy. Implicit within these terms 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).

It has been argued that involving parents more closely in school education has the potential to develop new understanding by parents and teachers of each other's specific cultural practices. This in turn, may well enable both teachers and parents to understand the way each defines, values and uses literacy as part of cultural practices. In this way schooling can be adjusted to meet the needs of families. Parents in turn can also be given the opportunity to observe and understand the definitions of literacy that schools support, and which ultimately empower individuals to take their place in society.

This project thus sought to examine what it is that schools and community groups have done in the name of Family Literacy. This paper provides an overview of our findings in Phase 1 of the project and offers recommendations for future initiatives in Family and Community Literacy. If readers are interested in the full report of our research they should consult the complete report of our research. [1]

Methods

The project used qualitative and case study approaches with some quantitative analysis used in relation to the surveys conducted. It had three distinct phases. In the first, the purpose was to map current programs or initiatives designed to equip parents, caregivers or community volunteers to become involved in children's language and literacy learning. In the second, the researchers selected a number of diverse communities and observed them; talking to parents, caregivers and adults with a role in children's literacy learning (e.g. after school care workers, librarians, voluntary tutors, etc.). Case studies were conducted from all of the following target groups: non English speaking background; people with disabilities or learning difficulties; socio-economically 'disadvantaged'; and geographically disadvantaged. The third stage of the project involved the development of a framework to be used for future family and community literacy initiatives.

[1] This paper is one of several written to share the results of a major research project funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (Australia) under the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. For complete details of this research see Cairney, T.H., Lowe, K., Ruge, J. & Buchanan, J. (1995). *Developing partnerships: The home, school and community interface*. Sydney: DEET.

The objective of Phase 1 of the research project 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 developed 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*
> *people with disabilities or learning difficulties*
> *socio-economically 'disadvantaged'*
> *geographically isolated*
>
> *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.*

In order to obtain information about as many parent or community literacy programs as possible, a number of data collection strategies were employed. Table 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 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. **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	Approximately 300 calls made to organisations / institutions. 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 part of the final report for this project (see Cairney, Lowe, Ruge & Buchanan, 1995).

Results of Phase 1

In attempting to describe the current state of these initiatives in Australia we have searched for an effective way to categorise or label programs with similar characteristics. This has proven difficult due to their diversity. Many researchers have noted the difficulty of adequately characterising these programs and have attempted to develop a variety of classification systems (e.g. Epstein, 1983; Petit, 1980). Unfortunately, all of these attempts mask great diversity and fail to address important characteristics.

As a result, Cairney (1991) suggested that, rather than trying to categorise such programs, a more productive exercise might be to discuss them in terms of a number of key variables: Content, Process, Source and Control. (See also Cairney and Munsie, 1992a). Content refers to the knowledge, resources or strategies that are shared with or between parents, teachers and children. Process refers to the manner in which programs are conducted and the approaches to teaching and learning that are adopted. Source is concerned with the initiators of any program and the form of initiation, that is, who started the program and for what purpose. Finally, Control is concerned with who exercises power in the program, setting agendas, making resource decisions, determining content and so on.

SOURCE

The source of family and community literacy programs varies widely on a number of different dimensions which reflect the initiator of such programs, how programs are funded, and who they are designed to assist.

Initiator

Parents or community <----------> System

Table 1: A summary of specific groups which initiated family literacy programs.

Initiator	Number	%
School	199	76.3
Community group	27	10.3
Other educational group or system	17	6.5
Individuals (inc. researchers, speech pathologists)	10	3.8
Libraries	6	2.3
Parents	2	0.8
Total	**261**	**100.0**

Programs were initiated by a variety of individuals or agencies. By far the most common practice was for school personnel to initiate the program (see Table 4.1). In many instances, particularly for those programs which began with a concern for the educational progress of particular children, it was the Special Education Teacher or Support Teacher who initiated (and often implemented) the program. For example at Blackwell Public School the Support Teacher designed and implemented a program which provides parents with strategies for reading with children both at home and at school. Some schools have found that a reading program has proved to be more effective if the time-consuming tasks associated with its implementation can be delegated to a staff member with few classroom teaching responsibilities. At Holsworthy Public School, the Reading Recovery Teacher coordinates the *Learning Support Team* of parents who help in activities such as paired reading. Likewise, Invermay Primary School has appointed a Senior Teacher to provide support for teachers and students and to coordinate all parent activities associated with the school. In the Doveton Cluster, several schools share a Coordinator of a home-based reading program. In other instances, programs were initiated by Principals and/or school staff members who saw a need to increase parental involvement in school learning.

A number of programs have also been initiated by government or community agencies other than schools. In most instances, these programs were a result of a perceived need for clients already served in some way by the agency concerned. For example, several Colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) have initiated programs after staff noted adult students' concerns about their own children. Warrnambool College of TAFE devised a program called *Literacy and Numeracy in the Home* to assist parents in supporting and encouraging their children with reading, writing and numeracy at home. Similarly, the Mt Pleasant Neighbourhood Centre devised a program that attempts to assist families in a variety of areas of need, including literacy tuition if required. Berkeley Neighbourhood Centre operates small-group tutoring sessions for primary and high school aged students, as does the Campbelltown Uniting Church Literacy Centre. In the latter case, it was a member of the church who has a child with learning difficulties, who drew attention to the need, with the church responding by recruiting volunteers and paid staff to be responsible for management and teaching respectively.

Volunteer Centres in various states promote literacy by recruiting and training senior citizens to work with children on relevant skills, in schools such as Wahroonga Public, where a parent (who is also a trained teacher) coordinates the *RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program)* at school level, Killarney Heights Intensive Reading Centre, attended by children from surrounding schools, and Liverpool Public School (46). The Volunteer

Centre of Western Australia also coordinates a program of recruitment and training of volunteers to assist with literacy programs in schools. Similarly, St John Ambulance provides training for volunteers recruited from the wider community. All of these initiatives stress the importance of the relationship between the volunteer and the child as the starting point for an improvement in literacy skills.

An interesting initiative is that of the Gambit Theatre Company in Tasmania. Several full-time staff members run a series of weekly groups for local children of all ages to engage in drama-related activities, including writing scripts and staging productions. In the near future, the Company plans to expand its program to specifically include children and adults from a non English speaking background. While it could be argued that literacy is incidental to the operation of the program, nonetheless it is crucial to its success.

In some cases, specialist branches of State Departments of Education have initiated programs. Such is the case with the Gosford Special Education Support Centre, where staff visit schools by invitation and run training courses for parents who want to work with their own children at home. Parent education courses serving a similar purpose are offered by the Penrith Special Education Support Centre and the Lower South East District Offices in Mt Gambier. In several states major educational authorities have provided funding for system wide initiatives. For example, in NSW the State Department of School Education provided $60 000 in 1994 to introduce the *Talk To a Literacy Learner* (Cairney & Munsie, 1992b) program to twenty three schools.[2] In a few cases, such as the *Parents as Tutors* program in Victoria, programs were initiated by a particular education system and implemented in a number of schools. While the decision concerning whether or not to participate was in most cases left to the individual schools, the program was, nevertheless, system driven.

A significant number of programs were initiated by individuals with an interest in literacy development. For example, speech pathologists have initiated programs after recognising the literacy needs of children referred to them for language assistance. In many instances, these programs focused on particular difficulties encountered by these children, especially lack of phonemic awareness. However, a speech pathologist in South Australia initiated a program titled *"Story a Day"*, and obtained funding to develop a package designed to encourage parents of preschool and school aged children to read to their children. Programs initiated by speech pathologists may operate out of private practices, such as in Lane Cove (Sydney) or through state Departments of Health. In each case, links may be established and maintained with local schools. For example, at Werrington Public School (Sydney) a visiting speech pathologist works with volunteer mothers on ways to help children who are experiencing difficulties with language and literacy.

A further group of programs was initiated primarily by researchers. In some of these cases, the type of program developed depended to a large extent on the questions guiding the research. This was particularly so in the case of funded research projects which were developed to reflect the project brief of the funding body. One example of this type of program is the *Crossroads Family Literacy Program* currently being developed in Melbourne by researchers from Monash University and the Salvation Army. In other cases, programs were initiated by individuals undertaking research as part of postgraduate studies, often in response to specific perceived needs. A program initiated at the Direk Junior Primary School and Child Parent Centre is one example of such an initiative. Having recognised the importance of parent involvement in children's learning, the initiator of the program developed an intergenerational early intervention program for four-year-olds and their parents. A program was initiated at Margate Primary School when mothers of Aboriginal children were concerned about their own and their children's learning. A staff member at the school is currently developing a program in conjunction with a group of mothers, and as part of higher degree studies.

Another group of program initiators are library staff. Librarians have attempted to involve and support parents in assisting children's literacy learning through a variety of measures. Examples range from pamphlets advising parents of the importance and benefits of reading, or of how best to assist children to complete project work for school, to programs which

[2] During the writing of this report an announcement was made that the NSW Government would spend $1.8 million on this program in 1996 as part of a special initiative.

directly involve adults and children in reading or other literacy-related activities. Singleton and Bankstown Libraries, among others, conduct a variety of programs designed to promote adult involvement in children's literacy learning. Sutherland Library is one of several which conduct *Project Busters* courses, which consist of a tour of the library by parents and their children, as well as information on how to use the computer catalogue. Participants are invited to bring along specific project information requests. At Marrickville Library, bilingual tutors are available to help students with specific school-related requests.

Much less common were programs which were initiated by parents (see Table 4.1). Where this was in fact the case, it was most likely to be in response to parental concerns about their child's (or children's) educational progress. Alternatively, parents may initiate programs after seeing (or hearing of) programs in operation in other schools. For example, staff at St Monica's School in Wodonga, Victoria, implemented the *Partners in Print* program in response to requests from parents for information on how children learn to read and write. As a result of a program operating at Blaxcell Street Public School, parents have organised an English language course for themselves, seeking advice and assistance from the school. At the request of parents, Mansfield Park Primary School in South Australia has established a homework centre. In particular, it was NESB parents, who felt that they did not have the knowledge of English required to support children with their homework, who made the request to staff.

One of the most enduring parent-initiated programs is the *Learning Assistance Program* in South Australia. Initiated twenty years ago by a parent with no teacher training, this program provides individual learning assistance to any child who may benefit, including literacy tuition if required. In South Australia, the State Department of Education and the Catholic Education Office have both provided funds to support the implementation of the program in a large number of schools, and it has been introduced to many schools interstate.

Funding

External, renewable <----------> Internal, ongoing

The issue of funding can have a great influence on the type of program developed. For example, programs which are funded by agencies or government departments other than those conducting the programs, must meet any conditions imposed by the funding body or agency. Submissions must be made, reports tendered, and program facilitators face the ever present threat of funding cuts. This uncertainty can have a profound effect on the implementation of programs. It was significant to note that many of programs initiated under International Literacy Year funding, had since ceased to operate, in most cases the stated reason being the lack of ongoing funds. One notable exception is the *Talk to a Literacy Learner* program (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a, 1992b; 1995) which has been implemented in over 200 schools in all states and territories with a variety of funding support often secured by individual schools. This has been aided by the support offered by the writers of the program. This support has included training sessions, the provision of additional resources and the publication of a newsletter three to four times per year (*Family and Community Literacy Newsletter*) which provides news on the implementation of the program at various sites, adaptations to the program to meet the needs of specific target groups and access to contact addresses for schools and centres offering the program so that local networks can be established. [3]

For many of the programs we investigated, funding was minimal or non-existent. For many of the school based programs, any associated costs must be met by funds from the school's global budget. Curtailing costs is a necessity, and may determine to a large extent the type of program developed. For example, schools may not have sufficient funds to employ an outside facilitator, so may utilise existing teaching staff to conduct parent education classes. It is here that the use of volunteers has been vital, especially for offering support services such as child care. In many instances, a small amount was invested in purchasing one of the

[3] This newsletter is to become an even more significant publication in 1995. It is to be renamed *Family Literacy Forum* and its editorial board will seek submissions on Family and Community Literacy from Australia and overseas.

available packages, such as *TTALL* or *Parents as Tutors*. Commonly, these programs were then implemented by executive or specialist personnel from within the school concerned. For several programs parent fundraising groups within the school (eg. Parents and Citizens Association, Parents and Friends, etc.), were asked to meet the costs associated with a particular program.

Some schools, however, have allocated funds from their recurrent budgets or obtained funds through such avenues as the Disadvantaged Schools Component, to support the creation of specialist staff positions with the responsibility for conducting or promoting programs. Hebersham Public School in NSW and Invermay Primary School in Tasmania are examples of this source of funding.

Holsworthy Public School serves a community of mainly Army personnel, and the Army has funded a part-time speech pathologist for the school. Other agencies maintain programs on a user-pays basis. Many after-school centres and private speech pathologists charge for their services. In some cases, government subsidies are available to offset costs. Government instrumentalities such as WSAAS (The Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme) have also provided funds for projects such as the *Family Literacy Program* operated by Bankstown City Library.

In some instances, funds were provided by education systems. This was particularly the case for pilot projects such as the *Parents as Teachers* program introduced in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. While these programs were based within particular schools, they were not funded by the schools concerned, and ultimate responsibility for the program has remained with the Departments of Education rather than the particular schools. In other instances, such as the *Parents as Tutors* program developed by the Department of Education in Victoria, education systems provided initial funds to develop a package of materials for presenting family literacy programs, and they provide support in the form of training for school personnel, but any costs incurred in actually implementing the program remain the responsibility of individual schools. Another initiative in this category was funded by the Country Area Program of the NSW Department of Education and the National Book Council. They sponsored a tour of schools in the lower Lachlan region of NSW by an author and illustrator.

Of the most comprehensive programs we encountered (that is, programs offering several different components), it was common for funding to be the joint responsibility of several different government departments or community agencies. One clear example of this phenomenon is the program currently being developed by the Adult Literacy Officer at Meadowbank College of TAFE. While Meadowbank TAFE provided funds for the initial needs analysis, funds to conduct the pilot program are being sought through the local Council and through various community agencies and service groups.

At times other agencies support programs as part of their community involvement initiatives. For example the NRMA (National Roads and Motorists' Association) has funded a literacy program through its RISE Project. The Project's primary aim is to sponsor initiatives which will reduce the incidence of crime. A literacy program operates through the Fairfield Community Resource Centre in Western Sydney, which conducts a homework and study centre. Similarly, St John Ambulance has developed the *PALS (Program to Aid Literacy)* which provides training for volunteers who then work as voluntary literacy tutors for 7-8 year old children in a range of schools. Rotary International, too, has a commitment to developing community literacy standards. Providing funding for parent education courses such as *Parents as Tutors* is just one way in which they work towards this end.

Funds allocated for research projects are another important source for family and community literacy programs. In Melbourne, for example, a joint venture between researchers from Monash University and the Salvation Army has obtained funds to conduct an innovative cooperative literacy and school empowerment program for marginalised families. This program is known as the *Crossroads Family Literacy Program* (18), and funding in this case was provided by the Monash Research Fund and the Financial Markets Foundation for Children. Similarly, The Australian Parents Council, in collaboration with Dr Julie Spreadbury of the Queensland University of Technology, obtained funds through the Department of Employment, Education and Training to pilot a parent education

program, called *Collaborating for Successful Learning*. This has been implemented in three states.

Target Group

Child <----------> Family or community group

The programs and initiatives described in this report began with a variety of aims or concerns. The starting point for each can be said to lie on a continuum which ranges from an emphasis on the child as an individual, through concerns about groups of children with some common characteristic, to an emphasis on the family as a unit.

A large number of programs began with a concern about the educational progress of individual children, and then sought to intervene to directly address the academic achievement of that child (or children), either through the parents or through the help of volunteers in schools. A few such initiatives, particularly those involving employed tutors in the home, were the result of concern about one particular child. Far more common, however, were programs which sought to address concerns about a group of children. For example, many programs were developed to serve the needs of children identified by schools as having difficulty developing literacy.

Alternatively, the starting point for family or community literacy initiatives may be a concern about the educational progress of children belonging to a particular target group (e.g. parents for whom English is a second language). In these cases, the concern is not for the educational progress of particular individuals (as in the examples above), but a more general concern for all members of the group. Hence, programs may be developed to serve the perceived needs of children from low socio-economic backgrounds, non English speaking backgrounds or from isolated communities (see Table 4.2).

Table 2: A summary of major target groups for parent and community literacy initiatives.

Target group	Number	% of total programs
Children with a disability or learning difficulty.	69	26.4
Socio-economically disadvantaged	67	25.7
Children with literacy difficulties	51	19.5
NESB	37	14.2
ATSI	19	7.3
Geographically isolated	10	3.8
Parents of children with literacy difficulties	7	2.7

Some programs aim to cater for a group which is already being served in other ways by the organisation concerned. For example, the Victorian Agriculture and Horticulture Training Board is investigating ways to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of farmers and their families. Having surveyed approximately 75 farmers and their families, the researchers intend to develop a program to meet the literacy needs of these families.

Less common among the programs reported here, are ones for which the initial target group was parents themselves. In this case there was a recognition of the influence of families on children's literacy learning, and a desire to enhance that influence for the benefit of all members of the family or community. Gordon College of TAFE, for example, provides parent education and support as a means to enhance the academic achievement of children. Similarly, a staff member from Forbes College of TAFE initiated a program called *Helping Parents Helping Children* which was conducted in a local Catholic primary school. This program offered literacy education to parents, with a focus on providing information about school-valued literacy practices, and providing parents with strategies for helping their children with homework.

The role that fathers play in promoting literacy with their children has been targeted by a doctoral student in South Australia. As a result of investigations which revealed that little attention has been given to the role of fathers in children's literacy development, a program is being developed to promote fathers' involvement in literacy-related activities, and to assess the effects of this involvement on the families concerned.

Lying at the extreme end of the continuum were programs which were designed to impact on the literacy practices of whole families or communities. Typically, these programs did not target particular groups, provide parent education, or intervene directly in children's learning. Rather, they attempted to support and encourage families in literacy practices seen to be valuable to children's school literacy learning. One clear example of this type of program is *Families Read Every Day*, a program implemented at Thabeban State School in Queensland and designed to encourage family enjoyment of books. Another example is the *Reading Together* program operated by Liverpool City Council Library, which encourages parents to read with their children, and provides advice on the selection of appropriate books. One particular program, at Parkes East Public School in New South Wales, was designed to involve parents in the educational activities of all students in the school, and included a mentor component for academically 'gifted' children.

While these differences in target groups for family and community literacy programs may not seem crucial to the design and outcomes of particular programs, it is apparent from our investigations that placement of any particular program along the continuum relative to other programs determines, to a certain extent, the type of program that is developed to serve the perceived need. For example, many programs involved the use of adult volunteers in providing reading assistance to children in schools. For some of these programs, the target group were the children themselves, the aim being to improve the reading ability of these children. In other cases, however, the involvement of volunteers was seen as a way of promoting parent or community involvement in the school, and the target group consisted of not only the children themselves but the school community as a whole.

The influence that the identified target group can have on the design of programs can be seen in a comparison of three programs which have been developed to serve the needs of children from geographically isolated communities. The Dubbo School of Distance Education has sought to enhance the academic achievement of such children by developing a program whereby parents of these children participate in an education program, *Frameworks* (Turbill, Butler, Cambourne and Langton, 1994), originally designed to enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding of language and literacy learning. In this case, the target group is clearly whole families within the program. In contrast, a similar concern for the academic achievement of isolated children led the Davidson Cluster Reading Project to develop a program in which children attend a residential program, including intensive literacy instruction, in the Sydney metropolitan area. The Far West Children's Service also offers a residential program to assist children from geographically isolated communities to develop literacy skills. Clearly, the target group for these programs was the children themselves.

CONTENT

The content of any family or community literacy program can be viewed from a number of different dimensions. Perhaps the most obvious of these dimensions is consideration of what information is actually shared with participants (what we term Curriculum), and the ways in which the effectiveness of any program may be gauged (Evaluation). However, in addition to these, family literacy initiatives differ in terms of their Focus, Comprehensiveness, Variability and Specificity. Among the programs investigated in this project, there was evidence of considerable diversity in each of the dimensions identified.

Purpose

Treatment <----------> Prevention

The main purpose of family and community literacy programs can range from an emphasis on the remediation or treatment of perceived deficiencies in a particular individual or

group, through measures to support the literacy learning of particular groups, to an emphasis on the prevention of educational disadvantage in communities as a whole. The purpose of specific programs, while not inextricably tied to the target group for the program (as discussed above), is nevertheless strongly influenced by it.

In general, programs which began with a concern for the perceived educational failure of a specific group, or at least lack of satisfactory progress of particular individuals or groups, tended to adopt a treatment type intervention. In particular, programs implemented by employed tutors often concentrated on identifying 'deficiencies' in the literacy skills of clients and 'remediating' these deficiencies. The emphasis in these programs is usually on enhancing children's proficiency in school-related literacy skills, with the aim of improving educational achievement. Examples of this type of program include the *Parents as Reading Tutors* program implemented at St Clare's, Thomastown and six other nearby schools, as well as the *Reading Tutor Program* at Windsor South Primary School in NSW.

Conversely, programs which were more concerned with families or communities (including school communities) as a whole, were more likely to adopt a focus closer to the prevention or support end of the spectrum. Typically, these programs aimed to highlight the importance of parental involvement in children's literacy learning, and to provide information and strategies to support such involvement. Thabeban State School in Queensland, for example, conducts a program called *Families Read Every Day* which is designed to support the family reading practices of all enrolled children. Similarly, the *SHARE* program developed by the Doveton cluster of schools aims to encourage parents to engage with their children in literacy-related activities, and to support home reading practices. The program involves teachers visiting parents at home to discuss family reading practices, and providing a wide selection of reading material for use at home. The Doveton model has been adopted by many other schools in Victoria and interstate.

Other initiatives which seek to impact on family literacy practices include packaged programs such as *TTALL* (250), and *Parents as Tutors*. The *Family Literacy Program* at Bankstown and Singleton libraries also aim to enhance family literacy practices, especially storybook reading. Other programs advising parents on how to optimise their children's literacy skills include *Taking Part in Reading writing and Spelling* and *Parents and Children Together*.

Comprehensiveness

One component <----------> Several varied components

Some of the programs and initiatives described catered more comprehensively for the needs of all participants in family literacy than others. Obviously, these programs can cater for the needs of children, adults, extended family, children and adult together and other combinations of these groups. As well the comprehensiveness of the content offered can vary from one-off meetings to sequences of long term workshops and the provision of support groups. In a report produced by the Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center programs reviewed were classified as child only, adult only, child and adult together, support services, and economic self-sufficiency provisions. Types of 'adult only' components may include literacy education for adults (with the ultimate aim of improving educational outcomes for their children), providing training in general parenting skills, training in the use of strategies to use when engaging children in literacy related activities, and providing information about the ways in which literacy is taught and learned in schools.

Of the programs encountered in this research, most included only one or two of these components. Most programs which offered only one component did so in the area of 'adult only', or 'child and adult' intervention. The most common type of adult only intervention was a series of parent education classes designed to increase parents' knowledge and understanding of literacy processes and how schools teach literacy skills. Examples of this type of program include *Support-A-Reader* , a P-3 Literacy Inservice Kit developed by the Queensland Department of Education, and *Towards Real Independence*, a program developed by Carol Randall and Lora Jago at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

Several programs offer an 'adult only' component as well as a 'child and adult together' component. The *TTALL* program, for example, combines parent education sessions with

activities in which parents can explore their new understandings about literacy directly in interactions with their children. Many of the programs designed to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties also combine these two components in that they provide adults with instruction in effective strategies for reading with children, and then involve these adults in reading programs within schools. The *Parent s as Tutors Program* (142) at Blackwell Public School and the *Reading Tutor Scheme* at Cooma North Public School are two examples of this type of program.

A program developed by Eurobodalla SkillShare offers several components, including adult only, child and adult together, and economic self-sufficiency support. The program targets Aboriginal families and socio-economically disadvantaged (especially single parent) families, and is based on a literacy program developed by the Aboriginal Education Officer. As well as providing literacy education for adults, the program involves parents in assisting their children with literacy learning and provides disadvantaged parents with access to opportunities for employment as teachers' aides and/or literacy tutors.

One of the most comprehensive of the programs we investigated is the Ermington Family Learning Centre. It offers a variety of components, including individual and group tuition for children with learning difficulties, adult literacy courses based on individual need, an after school program for Aboriginal students, preparation courses for adults with low literacy skills wishing to access TAFE courses, and programs to involve parents as literacy tutors of their own children. Similarly, the Elizabeth Downs Junior Primary School, which incorporates a Child Parent Centre, delivers a range of services to cater for families wishing to enhance their literacy skills.

Variability

Flexible <----------> Prescriptive

Variability refers to the extent to which the content of any particular program can be adapted to meet the particular needs of the participants. In some programs, particularly those involving the use of packaged program materials, the information to be shared with participants and the procedures for doing so are prescribed at the outset.

Packaged programs, therefore, need to address a variety of teaching contexts, as well as catering for the range of situations in which the material will be put into practice. In this sense, these authors are one step removed from the participant. One of the authors of the *Working Together* Program described the program as being more 'transportable' than some, as it relies heavily on feedback from participants. The accompanying manual deliberately minimises specific instructions. By contrast, one of the authors of the *Parents and Children Together* program indicated that the manual for this program was deliberately prescriptive, to render it more transferable. Both of these programs, however, are usually presented by authors of the programs, thus providing scope for adaptations within the original framework. It would seem that, to effectively meet the needs of diverse groups, packaged programs will invariably require modifications at specific sites, even if only minor. Some programs (e.g. TTALL) are clearly influenced by this assumption. TTALL has been designed so that it can be modified to meet the needs of participants. While it consists of a comprehensive 450 page program complete with supporting video, resources, and background reading, it is designed in such a way that it could be used prescriptively or modified to meet the needs of specific groups.

Other programs included elements which could be adapted to suit the particular needs and interests of participants. The most flexible programs were those in which the content was not specified in advance, but was specifically developed for a particular participant or group of participants. The major difficulty with many of these programs is that they are not readily transportable, being dependent on the expertise of key initiators and knowledge that they hold. Nevertheless, these programs offer flexibility which is needed for some groups. For example, some single parents indicated that the between-session demands of programs were beyond them, suggesting that certain courses assumed a two-parent family. One example of a highly flexible program is the *Mother and Infant Literacy Program* conducted by staff at the Kogarah Community Aid and Information Centre. It can be adapted to suit the particular needs of any participant group, and is changed to include

individual work or outside activities (such as travel on public transport or visits to the public library) at the request of participants.

One common practice we found was to identify a group of children whose literacy development was judged to be below the expected standard for the child's age and/or grade, and then to develop a program which involved the use of volunteers (parents or community members) to provide additional literacy teaching for those children. In some such cases, the program was flexible enough to allow variations according to the individual needs of the children involved, but in other programs a prescribed procedure was used for all the participant children.

Some of the most flexible programs we encountered were those which were not school based, but involved individual assistance for students with learning difficulties. This type of program often included employed or voluntary tutors working with individual children within their own homes. While many of these programs were not comprehensive (in that they included only one component) and utilised a narrow curriculum (teaching only specific literacy-related skills), they were nevertheless flexible in that they were specifically designed to meet the needs of each participant.

Specificity

Single specific skill, strategy or activity <----------> General attitudes, beliefs, practices

Specificity refers to the extent to which the content of programs or initiatives can be transferred or adapted to a variety of contexts and situations. At one end of the spectrum are programs which offer instruction in one specific literacy activity (such as Paired Reading), while at the other end are programs which attempt to provide access to more generic skills and attributes that equip individuals for life-long learning. A common element of the more specific program type is the offering of limited assistance in one facet of literacy development; for example, programs which teach adults effective strategies for reading with and to children.

Programs which cover a broader range of topics related to literacy generally, such as knowledge of reading and writing processes, learning strategies and the effects of social interaction, may allow participants to transfer or adapt their increasing knowledge and understanding to a variety of situations not specifically addressed by the program. One of the authors of the *Working Together* Program indicated that the single most important outcome of that program was that the parents learnt about learning.

At the far end of the Specificity continuum lie programs which impact upon the general attitudes, beliefs and literacy practices of the participants. The aims of the *Frameworks* program being used at the Dubbo School of Distance Education include: "to sensitise participants to the processes they use as learners, as readers, as writers; to the role that language plays in their learning and everyday lives" and "to introduce key concepts about language, language learning and the role that language plays in learning" (Turbill, Butler, Cambourne and Langton, 1994). It is interesting to note that the *Frameworks* program, while designed as a staff development program for teachers, is in this case successfully adapted for presentation to parents who supervise their children's distance education.

As with Variability, a certain program may focus on one particular skill or practice, but in so doing, may well encompass broader aims influencing participants' attitudes and beliefs. The *SHARE* program operating in the Doveton Cluster, while concentrating on home reading, also aims to influence parents' and children's attitudes to literacy.

Curriculum

Provision of information <----------> Development of skills & strategies

In this context, the term Curriculum refers to the specific knowledge and strategies which form the instructional component of the various family and community literacy programs. Curriculum can range from an explanation of school policies, procedures and instructional practices, through to strategies that parents and community members can employ to support children as learners.

The choice of curriculum can be influenced by a number of factors, including the Target Group and Purpose of the program (as discussed above), the ages of the children concerned, and (in some cases) the requirements or wishes of the various participants. For example, the *Parents as Teachers* program implemented in New South Wales and in the Northern Territory provides advice and assistance to parents of children aged 0-3 years. With the aim of enhancing the language and social development of these children, it includes instruction in developmentally appropriate activities and early literacy learning. Several programs have been designed and implemented by librarians with the aim of increasing parents' understanding of the importance of home literacy activities, and tend to include story-telling and book-reading sessions, as well as information and advice on the selection of appropriate books. In contrast, programs designed to enhance the academic achievement of school-aged children are more likely to include information about school literacy strategies and practices. Programs designed to impact on upper primary aged children, such as the *Working Together* program devised by staff at Altona Meadows Primary School in Victoria, typically include research skills and project or report writing among the topics covered.

In turn, the choice of curriculum can impinge on other dimensions, such as Recruitment, and in some cases, Site. It is the Curriculum dimension which highlights the dichotomy between programs whose primary aim is to foster literacy practices at home, and those which aim first and foremost to assist children in their school-related literacy. Among the former group are to be found programs such as those at Margate Primary School, the SHARE program in the Doveton cluster of schools and Gordon College of TAFE. The latter includes Liverpool Public School and Macdonald Valley Public School. Some programs, such as that operating at Blackwell Public School and *PALS (Parents as Literacy Support)* at Lyneham Primary School, aim to do both.

Evaluation

Informal <----------> Formal

Table 3: A summary of evaluation strategies employed in parent and community literacy programs.

Type of evaluation	Number	%
Informal evaluation	89	
Assess. of gains in student performance	53	20.?
Qualitative surveys	41	15.7
Formal evaluation using a variety of measures	41	15.7
No specified evaluation	37	14.2
Total	**260**	**100.0**

Of all of the factors influencing the development of family and community literacy programs, perhaps the one which revealed the greatest variability among programs was the issue of evaluation. As Table 4.3[4] indicates, the vast majority of programs have not been evaluated fully. Exceptions to this are the *TTALL* program, *Parents as Tutors* and *Parents as Teachers*, all of which have been extensively evaluated using a variety of measures.

The type of evaluation conducted, indeed whether evaluation was conducted at all, hinged on a number of factors. For example, programs dependent on external funding, particularly those reliant on research grants, were obliged to conduct some form of evaluation. In most cases, the form this evaluation would take was specified in advance.

[4] It is important to note that numbers in Table 3 are based on information provided by respondents to this research. It is possible that particular programs have been evaluated more fully than indicated on the Program Surveys completed by respondents. However, in the absence of specific information about methods of evaluation, programs have been included in the category "No specified evaluation".

Also, several programs we investigated were being evaluated as part of postgraduate studies by members of staff of the schools concerned. The *PART (Parents as Reading Teachers)* program operating at St Clare's School in Thomastown, Victoria (and six other schools in the cluster), and the *SHARE* program at Gibbs Street Primary School in Western Australia, are two examples of this context for evaluation.

Where efforts are made to conduct evaluation of programs, these commonly take the form of a survey distributed to participants on completion of the program. In a few instances, such as the *Helping Your Child With Reading* program at Roslyn Primary School in Victoria, participants were asked to respond to a number of questions about aspects of the program both prior to and on completion of the program. In these cases, there is an effort to identify specific changes in attitudes or practices that have occurred as a result of the program. A number of other programs which utilised participant questionnaires as a means of evaluation included the *Working Together* program at Altona Meadows Primary School, the *Reading Tutor Program* offered at Windsor South Primary School and the *PACT* program developed at Gosford Special Education Support Centre.

Some programs have included evaluation components specific to measurement of student competence. Among them, Holsworthy Public School, graphs student progress according to elevation through reading levels. Staff from the Lower South-East District Offices in Mt Gambier, who implement the *Parent Tutoring Program*, produce audio-tapes of children reading aloud before and at the end of the program. Students have reported that hearing and comparing these recordings gives them more assurance of progress than favourable comments from others. Similarly, the *Family Learning Program* at Gordon College of TAFE encourages student self-evaluation by giving participants the opportunity to rate their own success by comparing pre- and post-course reading and writing attitudes and achievement.

For the majority of programs, however, evaluation was far more informal, often consisting simply of comments from participants, or observations by program facilitators. Comments such as "the children's literacy has improved", "parent involvement in the school has increased", or "the volunteers feel valued" are based more on the subjective observations of organisers and facilitators rather than any form of formal evaluation. Some of these observations, however, refer to measurable criteria such as reduced absenteeism, greater numbers of parents helping in classrooms, or increased library borrowing.

PROCESS

Process refers to the manner in which information is shared between program facilitators and participants. A number of different factors or dimensions constitute the Process by which family literacy programs are implemented. Issues such as the selection of participants, the relationship between facilitators and participants, the communication methods employed, and the teaching/learning processes used all show considerable variability. In addition, factors such as the time over which programs are conducted, and the support structures offered, vary among programs.

Recruitment

Self-selected <----------> Targeted

Recruitment refers to the way in which various programs selected participants and varied from targeted selection at one extreme to self-selection at the other. In our research, the selection procedures adopted by any particular program tended to be closely related to other factors. Some programs targeted families where adults had limited literacy levels, whereas some programs avoided recruiting from these families presumably due to the assumption that the parents would not be in as good a position to support their children. Some programs which adopted a prevention/support oriented approach were more likely to allow a more self-selective type of recruitment. For example, once a program had been initiated, a general invitation to participate was extended to all members of a parent or community group.

In both of the above types of program, personal approaches to potential participants are vital to ensuring the success of the program. Some agencies have found that giving ownership of the recruitment process to a person (or team) can significantly increase interest generated in the program and, subsequently, numbers of participants. For example, the school counsellor at Werrington Public School has been pivotal in targeting participants and recruiting parents. Likewise at Hebersham Public School, the School Community Officer has been instrumental in generating interest from parents to become involved in the *TTALL* program. At Blackwell Public School, the Support Teacher has succeeded in recruiting and training over one hundred parents/volunteers to implement the *Parents As Tutors* program. The volunteers stress that the personal contact with the Support Teacher helps to maintain their enthusiasm and confidence.

Another aspect of recruitment is the methods by which program organisers and facilitators attract potential participants. The extent to which any particular program is advertised, and the manner in which people are invited to participate, can greatly influence the particular characteristics that eventual participants are likely to possess. For example, any program advertised only within one site (such as a school) is only likely to attract participants who frequent that site (eg, parents of children attending the school). Similarly, programs which seek participants only by distributing written invitations are less likely to attract a large number of people with very low literacy levels. In such circumstances, approaches made to potential participants either in person or by telephone have been far more successful. Similarly, translation of publicity material for various programs has proven essential in communities or targeted groups with a high proportion of families from non English speaking backgrounds. Marrickville Library, for example, employs bilingual tutors to assist primary and secondary-aged students with schoolwork, and advertises their availability in several languages.

From our investigations, it seems that those programs which adopted several different methods of advertising their program were most successful in recruiting large numbers of participants. Invermay Primary School in Tasmania is one clear example of this. In planning their parent education component of their *Classroom Assistance Program*, the organisers distributed written invitations to parents, but also placed notices around the school and spoke to parents directly about the program at every opportunity. When parents brought their children to school, teachers engaged the parents in conversation, telling them about the program and encouraging them to participate.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that word of mouth, particularly an invitation from a friend or trusted teacher, was the determining factor in their decision to participate. At Berkeley Neighbourhood Centre, for example, adults already attending the centre were advised of the existence of literacy tutor sessions for adults and children. Similarly, participants in the *Family Learning Program* at Gordon College of TAFE indicated that the support of a friend convinced them to enrol. By the same token, schools may well find encouragement in the fact that many parents reported finding out about programs via the school newsletter. Even if the newsletter wasn't the determining factor in recruiting parents for programs, it was being read by many of the parents interviewed, making it a significant part of the overall recruitment strategy.

Relationships

Partners <----------> Expert/novice

The type of relationship which is fostered between program organisers (or facilitators) and program participants can strongly influence the type of program developed and its possible effects. For example, in many of the programs we investigated, the relationship between facilitators and participants was very much one of expert to novice. The school personnel were seen to be the "experts" in literacy development, with knowledge to impart to the "novice" parents. This was particularly apparent in many of the programs based on published materials or packages.

Far less common were programs in which the knowledge and understanding of both facilitators and participants was recognised and shared. In programs such as this, the relationship more closely resembled a partnership. For example, Balaklava Primary School in South Australia introduced a Reading Discussion Group to strengthen home-school partnerships by sharing information on reading development and how to support reading

development both at home and at school. Similarly, the use of the *Frameworks* program at the Dubbo School of Distance Education, gave parents of geographically isolated students the opportunity to participate (along with teachers) in a program which encourages adults to reflect on their views of learning, and particularly literacy learning, and to examine these in the light of recent research. In this program, the views of all participants as well as facilitators are recognised and valued, thus leading to more equitable relationships among those involved.

Another program which attempted to establish partnership between parents and school staff was the *Vietnamese Cultural Program* introduced at Serviceton State School in Queensland. This program utilised parent expertise in developing Year 5 students' understanding of Vietnamese culture, and increased parent participation in school life. Conducted over ten weeks, the program included a variety of activities, both school-based and in the wider community, and involved Vietnamese parents in conducting group sessions. The class teacher attempted to support and reinforce students' new understandings and skills with further language and social studies activities.

Of particular interest is the program at St Clare's, Thomastown. Staff at the school presented the *Parents as Tutors* program to a group of parents. The following year, two parents who underwent training in the initial session, were invited to lead a subsequent course. These parents, having no formal teacher training, found the prospect rather daunting beforehand, but indicated that having facilitated the sessions once, they would be prepared to do so again. For them, having each other as partners in the facilitation (even though they didn't know each other well beforehand) was an important factor in encouraging them to accept their role. Both the parents and staff indicated that the arrangement had worked well, and that a sense of partnership was established.

Another initiative aimed at enhancing parents' status as partners in literacy development was a program at Holsworthy Public School. In this program, parents are given the designation of members of the *"Learning Support Team"* . According to staff at the school, this status was not just a case of empty rhetoric, but was reinforced by a school policy to treat the parent tutors as important resource personnel, for example attending to their needs 'then and there' even if other demands were pressing at the time. School practices and documentation attest to the important role that the Learning Support Team play in the literacy development of all enrolled children.

Communication

Single mode <----------> Multi mode

Communication between program organisers or facilitators and participants (or potential participants) can take a variety of forms. Commonly, initial communication designed to attract potential participants is given in only one mode, usually written. Schools may send a written invitation to parents to attend parent education courses, or they may simply advertise the proposed program without actually extending an invitation. In a few cases, several modes of communication were used to attract participants, including written invitations in several languages, and verbal invitations to parents as they delivered their child to school, or who were helping out in school activities such as the canteen. Examples of these have been highlighted under Recruitment, above.

Ongoing communication between volunteers/parents and classroom teachers was also seen to be central to the success of many programs, in that it avoided confusion for the child, who would otherwise have to contend with two separate approaches, as well as giving parents/volunteers and teachers the opportunity to reinforce each other's approach and aims. The use of different modes of communication is more likely to be found within the programs themselves. Workshops facilitators often use a combination of video, audio, written and verbal communication in the activities they present

Teaching/Learning

Interactive <----------> Transmission

The teaching/learning processes employed vary among programs. Some programs essentially involve a transfer of information from one group to another, usually from schools to parents. In other programs, however, the processes used are far more interactive,

with participants given opportunities to reflect on and discuss the information given, and to apply their new understanding in a variety of situations. The *Working Together* program at Altona Meadows Primary School, for example, uses cooperative learning strategies and encourages parents to recognise the valuable contribution they make to their children's learning.

The *SHARE (School and Home Advancement of Reading Education)* program developed at Gibbs Street Primary School in Western Australia, is one example of the variety of teaching/learning processes typically employed. The program includes weekly parent education classes conducted by the Early Intervention Teacher, and support group meetings of parents of academically 'at risk' Grade 1 students.

Programs such as the above and others like *TTALL* and *PACT* go further in inviting input from participants, appreciating that they will have insights and information which can add to the facilitators' knowledge and experience. The value placed on parents' and volunteers' background and experiences will have implications for the level of autonomy granted to participants working with children, or with other adults. As mentioned in Recruitment and Relationships above, parents in the St Clare's program were appointed to facilitate training of other parents. Other examples of organisations calling on the expertise of family (or community) members include the New School of Arts Neighbourhood House in Grafton which invited elders to relate Dreaming stories to younger Aboriginals, and Cringila Public School where parents from non-English speaking backgrounds published stories in home languages which were then illustrated by children.

One particularly innovative initiative is the *Parent Partnership Program* (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; 1995b). This was an outgrowth of the *Talk to a Literacy Learner* (*TTALL*) program and is designed to allow parents to talk to other parents about their literacy experiences. Parents who have completed *TTALL* are invited to take part in a series of workshops designed to equip them with strategies to talk with other parents about literacy. Once they have completed the additional 5 workshops these parents are then designated as Community Tutors and seek other parents with whom they can share their experiences as a result of TTALL. The Community Tutors go into other people's homes and work through six one hour informal sessions designed to share specific strategies and insights concerning literacy. Participants choose the 6 sessions they wish to complete from a list of 10 possible topics covering varied interests and child age levels. These sessions are based on a series of leaflets that are left with the participants. The program has the added advantage that it often ends with the new parents seeking involvement in the TTALL program for themselves. In this way, the program is self perpetuating, with a minimum of funding support.

Time

Single contact <----------> Extended regular contact

Among the programs investigated, there was much variability in the time over which the program extended. This range encompassed programs which offered a single contact with parents or community members, through to programs which involved long-term regular contact between participants and program facilitators. For example, several public libraries distribute leaflets which suggest ways in which parents can encourage their child to read, or how to access specific information. Likewise, libraries may offer one session for the development of, or familiarisation with, one specific skill such as using the catalogue.

Some schools and community agencies offer parent education courses which consist of a single lecture or workshop, while others may require extensive involvement over longer periods of time. For example, in the *TTALL* program participants are involved for 32 hours of contact time over 8 weeks and with additional between workshop activities. More commonly, though, schools offer courses which consist of a series of lectures or workshops (usually 6-8) on a variety of topics. Examples include the *PACT (Parents and Children Together)* program devised by staff at the Gosford Special Education Support Centre, the *Classroom Assistance Program* developed at Invermay Primary School in Tasmania, and the *Parents as Literacy Tutors* program devised by Robyn Cusworth from the University of Sydney and implemented at Harbord Public School. For many of these, direct contact with the course facilitators ends with the workshop series, but in some cases contact is ongoing, either through parental assistance in classroom programs, or through tutoring of individual children.

Support Structures

No special provisions <----------> Range of provisions

Support structures are provisions which increase the extent to which any particular program can be accessed by a wide range of potential participants. These forms of support take a variety of common forms (see Table 4.4). For example, in some instances we encountered, transport and/or child care were provided so that lack of these facilities would not prohibit potential participants from attending the program. The Brotherhood of St Lawrence in Victoria provide both transport and child care for participants of their *Families Learning Together* program, in which parents and children spend time together reading and engaging in literacy activities.

Table 4: Additional support provisions used to facilitate program effectiveness.

Type of Support	Number	% of total programs
Child care	27	10.3
Flexible session timing	17	6.5
Refreshments	14	5.4
Interpreters &/or bilingual materials	11	4.2
Transport	3	1.1

Flexible session times, and/or repeating sessions also constituted part of the support structures of various programs and contributed to their accessibility. For example, most school-based programs are run during school hours and therefore prohibit attendance of parents who work full-time. However, schools such as Minnamurra Public School addressed this difficulty by providing evening sessions, and several alternative times for attendance. In similar fashion, the Dubbo School of Distance Education rearranged session times to minimise the amount of travel to be done by participants. This entailed difficulties for the parents, in that there was considerable between-session reading to be done, and while child care was provided during the day-time sessions, parents were required to look after their own preschool aged children in the evening. Despite this, parents reported that they appreciated the reduced time and cost involved in fewer trips to Dubbo, particularly in view of the increased demands on time and finances brought about by the current drought. It is worth noting that parents from several rural areas reported that the drought was putting their children's education at a disadvantage owing to the extra time demanded of parents and children by chores such as hand-feeding stock. This was in addition to financial constraints placed on such families.

The availability of refreshments and time to socialise with other participants provided by some programs, facilitated the participation of some parents who may have had little involvement with their child's school in the past. Additionally, a few programs provided access to an interpreter as part of their support structures. As reported under Recruitment above, Marrickville Library employs bilingual tutors. Other programs such as the tutoring sessions at the Berkeley Neighbourhood Centre, are advertised in languages other than English. The *Parents as Tutors* program in Victoria (eg. 141) provides program materials in a variety of languages, as well as advice on conducting bilingual presentations of the course. The *TTALL* program has also been advertised and presented in a variety of languages.

CONTROL

An important consideration in family and community initiatives is the extent to which participants have control of their learning and involvement. Dimensions within this variable are closely linked to factors within the variable called Source. For example, in most instances the group or agency which initiated any particular program maintains control of the program. An exception to this occurred with several programs which were started by

community groups and were subsequently 'taken over' by other agencies, usually schools. Similarly, issues related to the funding of individual programs impact upon issues of accountability and evaluation.

Accountability

To participants <----------> To external agency

The issue of accountability is one which has the potential to exert a strong influence on the design of particular programs. While some programs are subject to many controls, often by external agencies, others are accountable simply to the participants. Closely related in some instances to the issue of funding, accountability factors include specified minimum numbers of participants, minimum numbers of parent education sessions offered, and demonstration that desired outcomes have been achieved.

At Invermay Primary School, for example, program organisers and participants are involved in regular sharing sessions to review any concerns about the *Classroom Assistance Program* and to evaluate its success. As a result, parents work alongside teachers so that all students have greater access to adult assistance with literacy learning. Control of the program resides to a great extent in the hands of the participants since program organisers are not accountable to any external agency. The success of the program is dependent on parents and teachers working together to enhance children's literacy learning, and the extent to which participants believe this is being achieved. Likewise, participants in the parent education course at the Dubbo School of Distance Education are given several avenues to provide feedback to the presenters. Apart from informal conversations in between program sessions, there are opportunities during sessions to write matters of concern on a whiteboard in the room, and to discuss these issues in later sessions. Feedback is also sought via participants' notebooks. Time is set aside at the end of each session for the purpose of writing in these, which are then handed to the presenter for written feedback.

Responsiveness

Predetermined <----------> Evaluation informs changes

The dimension we term Responsiveness is related to, but different from, the dimension of Content which we termed Variability. Whereas Variability was concerned with the extent to which the specific content of programs could be adapted to meet the needs of individual participants, Responsiveness is concerned with the extent to which the program itself can be changed in response to evaluation and suggestions from participants.

Amongst the programs we investigated, a great deal of variation existed in the apparent responsiveness of individual programs. In fact, the design of programs meant that some had inherently more potential for responsiveness than did others. Programs with no formal evaluation procedures in place were less likely to be changed in response to requests or suggestions from participants. In contrast, however, programs for which evaluation procedures were integral to the program showed a great deal of responsiveness. For example, school based programs which relied on published materials or packages were often conducted many times. Frequently, program personnel would monitor the responses of participants and adapt the program as necessary. Understandably, authors and publishers are keen to prevent major variations of their programs being used under the name of that program, but minor variations are often necessary to meet the needs of particular groups of participants.

Having written and conducted the *Working Together* program, one of the authors indicated that significant changes were made to the pacing of the program, owing mainly to the amount of discussion some topics generated. The presenter felt that to stifle conversation would undermine interest in the program, and the participants' positive attitudes. In similar fashion, the presenter of one school-based parent/volunteer reading program reduced the number of training sessions from two to one, to cater in particular for working parents whose time was limited.

The *TTALL* program, while seemingly prescriptive, has as a stated aim that groups using it should adapt sessions and strategies where necessary. This has lead to a variety of

interesting adaptations including the presentation of the program bilingually and its modification for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. Similarly, the *Parents as Tutors* program has been adapted to meet the needs of particular groups, and now has support materials available in more than twelve different languages. One concern we noted, however, was the number of program presenters who had adapted all or part of published programs, with no acknowledgment of the original source.

Site

School based <----------> Home &/or community based

As is to be expected, the dimensions of Site and Initiator are closely linked, with most programs being conducted on the site of the initiating organisation or group. Most family and community literacy programs are school-initiated and school-based (see Table 4.5).

Table 5: A summary of major sites used for family literacy initiatives.

Site	Number	%
School-based	210	80.5
Specialist centre	23	8.8
Community centre	10	3.8
Home-based	10	3.8
Library	6	2.3
TAFE	2	0.8
Total	**261**	100.0

Other programs are situated in community centres or agencies. The Ermington Family Learning Centre is a community centre which conducts a range of programs designed to support the literacy learning of socio-economically disadvantaged and/or Aboriginal children and adults. The Fairfield Community Resource Centre conducts an after school program for disadvantaged and 'at risk' students. Conducted in two neighbourhood centres, the program provides primary and secondary aged students with homework supervision and assistance, as well as more intensive instruction for students in need. A similar program for socio-economically disadvantaged students, or students from non English speaking backgrounds, is offered at Berkeley Neighbourhood Centre. The Kogarah Community Aid and Information Centre runs a program designed to encourage parents to become involved in their pre-school children's literacy learning, and to maintain that involvement after the child starts school. The program involves parents in reading and writing with their children in informal situations, and includes outside activities such as visits to public libraries.

Apart from assistance provided to individual children by employed tutors, few of the programs we investigated were home-based. However, the *SHARE* program conducted in the Doveton area in Victoria, while having been initiated by the schools, is essentially a home-based program in which parents are visited in their homes by program personnel who assist with strategies for encouraging literacy learning, and especially reading, in the home. Similarly, the *Parent Partnership Program* is a home-based program developed as an extension of the *TTALL* program. This program (described in more detail earlier in this chapter) gives parents the opportunity to share their experiences associated with the *TTALL* program, by conducting a series of 6 one hour home visits to other interested parents. The program is supported by a training course for the parents involved who act as the community tutors.

Certain programs require premises with specialised facilities. The Gambit Theatre Company, for example, conducts its program in its own stage-equipped hall. Children attend weekly workshops during which they write scripts in preparation for periodic public performances. Special Education Support Centres and Speech Pathology clinics are other examples of specialist centres which may be the site of family and community literacy initiatives.

We found a number of innovative programs operating in public libraries. For example, Bankstown City Council Library has introduced an 8 week *Family Literacy Program* for

pre-school aged children and their parents. Singleton Library has also developed a *Family Literacy Program*, and the City of Stirling Library in Western Australia has introduced a program called *BEAR - Be Enriched And Read.*

Considering that the overwhelming majority of literacy programs are not conducted on clients' "home ground", a significant related issue is that of accessibility to the program's site. Some schools have found that the establishment of a parent room in the school has been a useful springboard to making parents feel more welcome at the school, giving them a focal point for their activities and, just as importantly, providing a social dimension to their school involvement. Several parents at Mansfield Park Primary School indicated that knowing there was a parent room gave them the confidence to come up to the school for the first time. Other schools, however, deliberately 'downplayed' their parent room, or chose not to have one, on the basis that they wanted to avoid relegating parents to one particular part of the school premises. Some schools indicated the importance of allowing parents to feel free to have a cup of coffee in the staffroom with the teachers.

Apart from the questions of convenience and 'ownership' of the program, the site issue has ramifications in terms of who feels included in, or excluded from the program. Certain participants have expressed apprehension at the thought of attending a program conducted at a site unfamiliar to them. On the other hand, some coordinators have reported that introducing participants to a new site has been a necessary, or at least beneficial, ice-breaker for participants. The program operated at Margate Primary School highlights both of the above phenomena. Despite initial apprehension at visiting a university for the first time, mothers of Aboriginal children found that their involvement in a research program aimed at meeting the educational needs of their children increased their own confidence in their ability to assist their children and to pursue tertiary study.

Conclusion

The above discussion provides an overview of the complexity and diversity that exists in current Family and Community Literacy initiatives in this Australia. Programs vary depending on the major variables that we have outlined and also in terms of the different dimensions that we have identified. One point that needs to be stressed is that there is a relationship between various dimensions evident in the programs. While we have alluded to this at times in the above discussion, this relationship is explored in phase 2 of the project (see Cairney, Lowe, Ruge & Buchanan, 1995).

Phase 1 one our research project discovered a range of initiatives being conducted in Australia and analysed over 260 submissions from a variety of educational institutions, community groups and individuals. It also found an enormous variation in the nature and quality of what was conducted. Overall, six major issues emerged:

- most family and community literacy initiatives have not been evaluated beyond simple surveys of participants and the recording of anecdotal comments;
- evidence concerning the impact of programs on student outcomes is limited;
- the majority of programs are initiated by schools with limited or no funding;
- initiatives vary greatly in terms of content, process, participant control and purposes;
- many initiatives are 'tokenistic' and pay little attention to the needs of communities, focussing instead on the needs of the school;
- many programs that commence with a concern for the support of children's literacy develop a secondary interest in the support of adult literacy learners;
- when programs were evaluated there was evidence that some had the potential to lead to the development of significant partnerships between the home and school.

The results of this research are important not just within Australia, but in other countries where family and community literacy has been promoted as an effective strategy to bring schools and communities closer together. The work has a number of clear implications:

- The is a need for more intensive evaluation of family and community literacy initiatives.
- Family and community literacy programs need to be initiated by community groups as well as educational organisations in order to share responsibility, control and ownership amongst all participants.

- Program initiators need to examine the assumptions driving their work in order to avoid the tendency to simply impose one set of cultural literacy practices on another group of people without consideration of the ultimate effect of this action.
- There is support for the continued development of such programs if the above issues are addressed.
- There is a need for better funding of those family and community initiatives that are ultimately conducted.

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