



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	Bilingual Storytimes in the Community
Project practice	Outreach literacy development for children of isolated CALD families
Project undertaken by	Hume City Council through a partnership between Hume Library Service, Hume Family and Childrens Services and the Hume Early Years Partnership
Start date	January 2006
Focal areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting families and parents • Early learning and care
Program	Communities for Children
Issue	<p>In Hume City, 36.7% of households speak a language other than English in the home (2006 Census). It has been identified by bilingual workers from Victorian Cooperative for Ethnic Children's Services and other family support agencies, that some CALD parents see their role as purely custodial and the importance of their role in shaping their child's future social, communication and learning skills is not well understood. Speech pathologists and teachers in Hume report children starting school have poor oral language skills. Best Start data indicates low levels of first language pre-literacy in the first two years of primary school in Broadmeadows. To address this issue, Hume Library Service implemented an innovative approach using cultural storytelling to target isolated CALD families in Hume and engage them in activities to support their child's early learning and development.</p>
Program context	<p>The program is a partnership between Hume Library Service, Hume Family and Children's Services and the Hume Early Years Partnership under the umbrella of the Hume City Council.</p> <p>The Bilingual Storytime Program is managed by the Community Literacy and Engagement Officer of the Learning Community Department. This position has the two objectives of engaging the CALD community in the library and learning opportunities and supporting the development of early literacy in the 0–8 age group. This officer recruits staff for the Program and skills identified as being conducive to the fulfillment of the positions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to work with a wide range of people; • fluency in the written and spoken aspects of the language; • organisational skills; and • qualifications or experience in early childhood, teaching or community development are also highly desired skills. <p>The storytellers receive training in child development, working with families, storytelling techniques and early literacy and language development.</p> <p>The objectives of the program are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support the development of emerging literacy and numeracy in the early years; • support cultural inclusion and maintenance of first language for young children; • increase parent skills and confidence to share songs, rhymes and books with their children; and • increase awareness of library services and increase library membership.

Practice description

Hume City Council's Bilingual Storytimes is a fun and engaging activity for isolated CALD families and their children aged 0–8 years. The Bilingual Storytime sessions are conducted in Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Assyrian, Singhalese, Farsi and Dari.

Conducted by trained storytellers, children and parents/carers are treated to stories, songs, rhymes and craft activities. The Bilingual Storytime program is unique because the service is outreached to community settings including, early childhood services, playgroups, schools, women's groups and locations where there are families with young children from these language groups.

This program is different from other storytime programs because the storytimes are not in the library, they are held in settings that are familiar comfortable place for members of the CALD community—for example, at primary schools and playgroups.

The key activities and ingredients of the Bilingual Storytime Program are:

- storytimes in 5 languages—Arabic, Turkish, Assyrian, Vietnamese, Singhalese;
- storytimes outreached to community settings and early childhood services;
- themed storytime sessions;
- library storytimes;
- bilingual resources used (e.g., Languages Other Than English (LOTE) children's books);
- networking and role modelling by bilingual storytellers with parents and communities; and
- bilingual storytellers are library and learning opportunity advocates.

Storytimes delivered in the five most common languages in the community

Storytimes are provided in five languages representing the 5 largest language groups in Hume outside of English—Arabic, Turkish, Assyrian, Vietnamese and Singhalese.

Storytimes outreached to community settings and early childhood services

Storytellers present stories to playgroups, child care centres, preschools, schools, festivals. Services ring the library officer who is responsible for making bookings at the beginning of the term. Priority is given to programs where parents are present such as playgroups. By outreaching the storytime service storytellers are able to network with these communities and this builds links between the library and the particular community.

Themed Storytime sessions

Sessions are themed so that language can be built around a specific concept. For example if a session is on a particular animal then the books, songs and activities during the session will relate to that concept. The library provides storytime tubs based on themes that have books, songs, rhymes, resources (e.g., puppets and craft activities on that particular theme).

Library Storytimes

Storytimes are offered in the library in Turkish, Arabic, Assyrian. These storytimes commenced after the Bilingual Storytime Program created a demand in the community for storytimes in the library. The bilingual storytellers talk to participants about library services, letting them know about our community language collections, the programs and events, they provide translated information about library services and encourage membership and borrowing.

It is through repeated contact with the bilingual storytellers that members of the community increase their level of comfort with Hume library services. The increased level of comfort combined with knowledge of the services provided moves people from only attending bilingual story-times in the community to coming into the library and becoming a library member and therefore being able to access full library services.

When parents/carers attend the library storytimes, LOTE resources are displayed so that parents see and are encouraged to borrow books and resources to use at home.

Bilingual resources used

The program is an opportunity to promote the language resources of the library. LOTE children's books are used from the collection. Many parents are not aware that there are resources in their language available at the library. Providing parents with this information gives parents access to children's books in their own language and encourages them to read to their children.

Bilingual resources including songbooks have been developed to support the program. The songs in the songbook were contributed by the bilingual storytellers and parents. They are the songs most often used in the storytime sessions and the songs that are most popular with the children. Council's Communication/Education Officer also had input in relation to design and layout.

Networking and role modelling by bilingual storytellers with parents and communities

The bilingual storytellers are central to all Hume literacy programs and play a key role in building relationships and networks. They have excellent people skills and are incredibly well connected to their community networks. The bilingual storytellers have qualifications in early childhood, community development or teaching and are trained Mother Goose facilitators.

The bilingual storytellers are role models for women in their community. Teachers have commented that mothers feel inspired and motivated to "have a go" themselves when they see the other bilingual storytellers presenting. It gives them confidence when they see women like themselves using their culture and language in a professional capacity.

Bilingual storytellers are library and learning opportunity advocates

Weekly Storytimes in Turkish, Arabic, Assyrian have commenced in The Age Library in Broadmeadows. The program is often the first contact that participants have with the library services and it helps to break down the barriers to accessing full library services and learning opportunities. The bilingual storytellers talk to participants about library services, letting them know about our community language collections, the programs and events, they provide translated information about library services and encourage membership and borrowing.

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Research base

Research from the United Kingdom demonstrates that children who miss out on early years learning rarely catch up with their peers who do participate in early years learning. It is indicated that the difference in achievement can be seen in children as young as 22 months and the gap gets wider the older they get (Bird, 2003).

Research by the Effective Provision of Preschool Education Project (2003) in the UK shows that the home environment can really make a difference. More important than the mother's educational qualification is what the parent does with the child:

Education matters, qualifications matter, but if the parent reads to the child, plays rhyming games, sings songs, talks about letters and sounds and takes the child to the library, these behaviours at home are more important and can compensate for a low education level. (Sylva et al., 2003)

Research also identifies that actually showing parents how to communicate is

more effective than simply providing information. Practitioners need to model how to share nursery rhymes and stories. This research supports the approach taken with the Bilingual Storytime Program.

Other data clearly illustrate the difference where the crucial home literacy support is absent. For example, research data indicate a typical middle class child enters first grade with 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, whereas a child from a low income family averages just 25 hours (Adams, 1990).

Summary of AEDI findings for children in Hume

The findings of the Australian Early Development Index for Hume (2005) illustrate the need for programs that address language, literacy and communication skills. In 2005, over the Broadmeadows site (20 schools and 629 Prep children), 15% of children are considered developmentally vulnerable in the Language and Cognitive skills domain. The suburbs of Campbellfield (29.6%) and Dallas (26.8%) are the neighbourhoods where children are most vulnerable in the language and cognitive skills domain. AEDI Results for 2008 will be available early 2009.

Language and cognitive skills domain (child is interested in reading and writing, can count and recognise numbers, shapes):

- 9.7% of the children were considered *developmentally vulnerable*. The highest proportion of developmentally vulnerable children was in Campbellfield (26.1%) and the lowest proportion was in West Meadows (2.0%).
- There are 32.3% of children *performing well*. The highest proportion of children performing well was in Attwood (78.3%) and the lowest proportion was in Dallas (12.2%).

Communication skills and general knowledge domain (child can tell a story, communicate with adults and children):

- 16.0% of the children were considered *developmentally vulnerable*. The highest proportion of developmentally vulnerable children was in Dallas (27.7%) and the lowest proportion was in Greenvale (3.7%).
- There are 36.0% of children *performing well*. The highest proportion of children performing well was in Attwood (61.7%) and the lowest proportion was in Broadmeadows (21.3%).

Vulnerable on one or more domain (children who are below the AEDI cut off on one or more domains):

- Overall there were 27.3% of children vulnerable on one or more domains.
- The highest proportion of children vulnerable was in Dallas (43.4%) and the lowest proportion was in Greenvale (10.4%)

Outcomes

The following have been the direct outcomes/impact of this activity.

Children

- Increased interest in reading books and singing songs.
- Development of listening skills.
- Greater access to books in their home language.
- Maintenance of home language.
- Children and parents learning songs to sing at home.
- Children developing pre-reading skills such as retelling stories, vocabulary and concept development.
- Development of social skills.

Parents

- Increased social connectedness—parents socialising with other parents.
- Parents learn ways of making books more interesting and gain confidence to use these strategies at home.
- Increased use of library—exposure to Arabic picture book collection.
- Involvement in their child's learning—increased understanding of

child development.

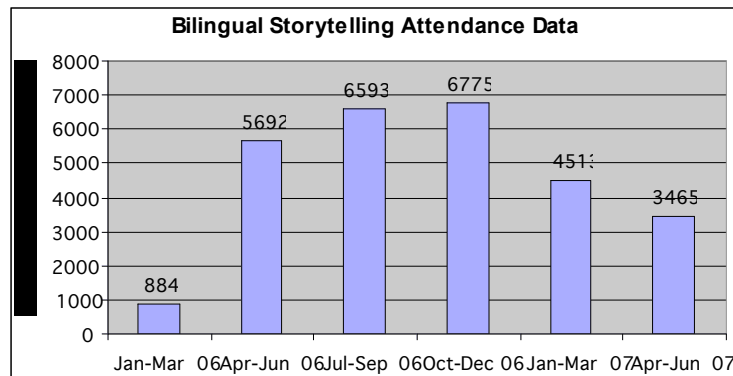
Evidence of outcomes

Bilingual Storytelling in the community appears to have contributed to parents' use of the range of Early Years services by promoting the benefits of language and literacy through bilingual storytelling activities. The figure below shows attendance at bilingual sessions in the community.

Outcomes for children

A total of 27,922 children and parents attended storytelling sessions in the period January 2006 to June 2007. It is likely that these include repeat visits. At sessions where adults attend, additional information was provided around a range of topics including local services, reading programs and parenting issues.

Figure 1: Numbers of parents and children attending bilingual storytelling sessions



A survey was conducted of parents who participate in the Program. Preliminary data shows that the Bilingual Storytime Program has encouraged children to increase their interest in:

- listening to stories (92.6%);
- retelling stories (81.5%); and
- singing songs and reciting rhymes (92.6%).

It has encouraged children to:

- interact with other family members around songs and stories learned at the sessions (92.6%).

It has helped children to:

- be more confident (96.3%); and
- have improved concentration (88.9%).

Some of the major themes coming out of the comments made by parents about their children are:

Increased interest in reading books and singing songs

He enjoys singing them at home. Confidence with others (adults and children)—he is much less shy.

The children learn to listen to stories. [My son] now likes books and he asks me to read to him and asks questions about the stories in the books.

My daughter hears different stories and she is learning about different things, like all the animals.

He always tells me he wants to go to the library and [when he gets here] walks around confidently looking at books and choosing different ones to read here and to take home.

My daughter is 20 months and she comes home from storytime and points to animals in the book and she names them. She knows the songs a little bit.

I have learned how to help my son at home. I sing the songs with

him and I read stories at home. He learns some words—animals names and about animals. He learns about new things [that have not thought to talk to him about].

Development of social skills

[My child] interacts with other children, she [now] sits on a mat and listens, she normally didn't do this, she is learning that there are boundaries, set by others not just me. She understands I am not out of line setting boundaries.

Loves singing and interacting with kids his age. He is speaking more in both languages—English and Arabic.

Maintenance of home language

They are at different levels learning both languages, learning to share and learning to interact with other children.

My son concentrates when he comes here and sees the other children sitting down. [He has also] learned to talk a little Assyrian, to take a pencil and hold it correctly for colouring and he now does this at home.

Outcomes for Parents

Some of the major themes coming out of the comments made by parents about the impact of their participation in Bilingual Storytimes include:

Parents developing skills to support early literacy and ways to interact with their children.

My daughter opens books at home and asks me to tell her about the pictures. I have learnt how to read a story. I have picked up skills as to how to make a story interesting using my voice.

I have learned how to read a story to my son, learned songs that we can sing together and I have learned some English words.

I have learned music, stories and rhymes. Sometimes more about how to make them interesting and I am more confident about using them at home. Also how to interact in better ways with my child. I used to know only English songs, stories now I have some Arabic.

I am learning how to read a story like the storyteller and now try and do this at home.

What happens here I can do at home. I now know that it helps to talk and play with my son.

I have found out how to communicate better with my child. We came for a while then went overseas and as soon as I came back I found out whether it was still on because it has been so helpful to me. I feel I learn something new each session. [This has included] the special way the Roula reads, she is like an actress, so I feel it is OK to be more happy, more sad or whatever when I read a book, the kids really respond well, they are always expecting something to happen—before they would be bored.

[Participating] has taught me a lot of the songs and exposed me to the Arabic picture book collection.

Social interaction and the development of social networks

Interaction with other women and I see the progress of my child.

I hear other parents experiences of their children, share stories and advice. [I even] found the right godmother. I now have new ideas about parenting [have] learned songs to sing with my child.

Time to meet other women and talk to them. I don't have any family here and this is where I have met people who have become my friends. It is a bit like a family gathering.

<p>Policy analysis</p>	<p>This model meets policy objectives in a number of respects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is innovative in that it outreaches storytimes to community settings, networking and building relationships with those communities and breaking down barriers to use of the library. • The practice has been replicated by other Libraries with similar demographics, for example, large numbers of recently arrived non-English speaking migrants. • The practice can be replicated in early childhood services and playgroups by bilingual staff provided they employ bilingual workers fluent in reading and speaking the language and English. Training in session structure, resources, storytelling and bilingual strategies enhances the effectiveness of the program. <p>The practice can be incorporated into the day-to-day operation of early childhood services, playgroups and family support service groups by bilingual workers who have been trained to deliver the program. It enhances the programs provided by services and supports the development of language and literacy in those children and families.</p>
<p>Project evaluations</p>	<p>The project has been subject to external independent evaluation.</p> <p>Hume City Council and Broadmeadows Early Years Partnership (June 2008). Bilingual Storytime in the Community Evaluation. Funded by the Australian Government Communities for Children Initiative under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and Hume City Council.</p>
<p>References</p>	<p>Adams, M. J. (1990). <i>Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.</p> <p>Centre for Community Child Health & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. (2005). <i>Australian Early Development Index 2005. Building better communities for children: Community result 2004–05</i>. Retrieved 15 January 2009, from www.australianedi.org.au</p> <p>Bird, V. (2004). <i>Literacy and social inclusion: The policy challenge. A discussion paper</i>. London: The Basic Skills Agency.</p> <p>Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2003). <i>The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period</i>. London: Institute of Education.</p>
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<p>More information</p>	<p>More information on Bilingual Storytime in the Community project and <i>Promising Practice Profiles</i> can be found on the PPP pages of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia website at http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html.</p>



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