

Adult literacy and socio-cultural learning at *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* (Yuendumu learning centre)

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Introduction and purpose

The Whole of Community Engagement (WCE) initiative commenced in July 2014, led by the Office of Pro Vice Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership at Charles Darwin University (CDU). WCE aimed to build the aspiration, expectation and capacity of six remote and very remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to participate and achieve in higher education. Using a place-based, Indigenous-led, community development approach, the initiative developed a model that could be applied by other Australian universities and agencies through engaging closely within Indigenous communities and promoting local level management, leadership, decision-making, research and action. The WCE included participatory action research and developmental evaluation approaches. Campus-based and remote Indigenous community-based staff worked together to identify educational needs, priorities and activities from the ground-up. Some of the main messages communities emphasised were that:

- Aboriginal leadership and governance in remote education are essential

- Education and higher education are a priority for many Indigenous people
- Aboriginal cultural knowledge is foundational to other learning
- Education should be 'both-ways'
- Education was viewed holistically by Indigenous participants and includes wellbeing, spirituality and livelihood
- English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) is central to progress

In response to this last point, a Strategic Priority Project (SPP) on Aboriginal adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy was put in place. The SPP was aimed at promotion of policy development and systems change, increased information sharing and collective action for improved English LLN for Aboriginal adults across the NT, and in the long term.

Both the Commonwealth and NT governments have made statements about the importance of NT's Aboriginal population to economic development in Northern Australia, and have strategies that target stronger participation in local community decision making, greater education and employment success and improved health and safety.

Indigenous people make up 30 per cent of the NT population and are highly significant to economic development and cultural richness. Competency in English Language, literacy relates strongly to the ability to participate in all these areas. Fifty four per cent of Aboriginal people in the NT don't speak English as their first language.

For anyone with aspirations for post-school education or employment for themselves, their family and community – English is essential. For anyone who wishes to understand any information issued by government or business, read a book or a newspaper, navigate the health or legal system, understand the writing on a prescription, find their way around an airport, the ability to communicate in English is vital.

A 2017 statistical overview report¹ revealed that 85 per cent of a sample of 660 Aboriginal adults from across the Northern Territory lacked the English language, literacy and numeracy skills to function independently

¹ Aboriginal adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy in the NT: A Statistical Overview, Fiona Shalley and Allison Stewart, Office of the PVC of Indigenous Leadership, CDU Uniprint, Sept. 2017

in life, education and work, and that there is very little assistance currently available. Data for this statistical overview was provided to CDU from multiple service providers – an indication of extent of need and goodwill. Aboriginal elders from 6 remote communities supported the SPP and statistical research. These leaders spoke about the need for English alongside recognition that Indigenous language and literacy are central to their lives and that first language literacy should come first.

Purpose of this case study

WCE research has shown that at this time the majority of the adult Aboriginal population are missing out on any form of assistance with English LLN – particularly those who are at the lower measures of the scale; and most people, especially those in remote areas, are at that end of the scale. Among the innovative strategies to emerge in the past decades internationally, is ‘family learning’ which stands out as a transformative approach that works across generations and between institutions. Family learning is breaking down barriers between home, school and community.

Research evidence supports a ‘whole family’ approach to literacy and other educational challenges that disadvantaged families and communities face. The only Council of Australian Governments (COAG) indicator for adult literacy in Australia focusses on employment and jobs – a good thing, but many people are missing out given that:

- a) There is no (or minimal) assistance for people at the lower end of the LLN scale.
- b) There are so many people at the lower end of the LLN scale.
- c) There are so few remote employment opportunities.
- d) Many people are not in the labour force.
- e) There are very few adult learning centres in communities.

Solutions are not simple and sustained effort of multiple players is required over time – a wide-ranging commitment to Aboriginal-led policy and the implementation of diverse and appropriate models informed by LLN specialists and linked to related policy initiatives. One model that has emerged and is supported at local level is the community/family learning centre model. This case study draws on

the Yuendumu experience of literacy development and socio-cultural learning and has been commissioned to inform discussion and debate and inspire action. Literacy provision that is underpinned by what is happening in social and cultural practices, rather than what is not happening², and the building of local delivery capacity matched to people's real-life needs, preferences and realities.

This report strongly suggests that the local learning centre is key to improvement, to the embedding of literacy and the maintenance of any successes.

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23 November 2017

Recommendations

Any English LLN delivery for adults should take into account socio-cultural learning practices, including new and old ways of learning, and the use of digital technologies.

A family/community capacity building approach is seen as the most beneficial in order to capitalise on the existing skills and competencies of Warlpiri adults, so that they are more able to mentor and support others in community.

Any model should include a component for non-Indigenous workers to ensure that their communication is appropriate and that they have the right skills to support the needs of local learners.

A bi-partisan approach is required, whereby government recognises and adds value to the financial commitment that the Warlpiri Education Training Trust (WETT) has made in the past ten years, and has committed to in future years. WYDAC is unwavering in its commitment to adult LLN in remote Northern Territory, and is setting a strong precedent for culturally responsive and respectful ways of supporting communities to participate fully (through LLN) at the local, national and global level.

² Guenther and Kraal 2017

Background

The Warlpiri Education Training Trust (WETT) established in 2005 in collaboration with the Central Land Council and Newmont Mining, funds community learning centres in the four Warlpiri communities of Nyirripi, Willowra, Yuendumu and Lajamanu (Disbray & Bauer, 2016, p. 6). The establishment and operation of the learning centres in each community has a varied history, but in the last few years Batchelor Institute has had the contract for managing all four learning centres.

In 2017, the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) was successful in obtaining the contract to manage the learning centre in Yuendumu (Disbray and Guenther, 2016, p. 81). This learning centre is now known as the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku*, which in Warlpiri language means “to learn”. WYDAC’s aim is to provide a centre that offers a flexible and responsive approach to adult learning, integrating individual, family and community priorities. Its real underpinning strength, however, is in solid governance and the Aboriginal Board’s commitment to Warlpiri aspirations for learning and education, particularly with regards to adult literacy. This case study describes the WYDAC and WETT model and approach to improving English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) in Yuendumu.

The four LLN program delivery areas

The WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* has responsibility for working with a local advisory group, providing access to computers and the Internet, case managing the learning journeys of participants and providing mentoring and support to local learning centre employees.

In addition, there are four areas of program delivery:

1. Informal
2. Non-formal
3. Formal
4. Warlpiri language and culture

Informal learning

Informal learning is the program area that has the highest participation

rates. Warlpiri people access the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* for many purposes; including using email, searching the internet, reading newspapers, chatting online, accessing their myGov account to check Centrelink information, filling out forms, applying for a driver licence or Ochre Card, ringing their bank and to get help reading and understanding letters from Court and other government services. People also like to read local texts such as the School newsletter, Central Land Council News, Land Rights News and *Junga Yimi*, which is the old Yuendumu School magazine. *Junga Yimi*, which means “true story”, is very popular because it is full of stories about the community in the past 30 years, with pictures of people and places that have a great deal of meaning to the reader.

Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning is community driven education sessions that provide information about important community issues. Some examples of these sessions include domestic violence awareness, healthy eating, how to set up myGov accounts and understanding legal rights. One of the most popular community education sessions has been about cyber safety and how to respond to online bullying.

Formal learning

Formal delivery is accredited training that is provided by training organisations that travel into Yuendumu and usually stay for one or two weeks. Most of this training is organised and delivered in workplaces. Other training delivered in the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku*, such as Sport and Recreation (Charles Darwin University), Education Support (Batchelor Institute), Mental Health First Aid (National Employment Services Association) and Domestic Violence (Lifeline). WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* has focussed on the delivery of community services this year, because it is an entry level or pathway qualification that is suitable for many different kinds of jobs and workplaces.

Warlpiri language and culture

The reference group determines Warlpiri language and culture, Board and any other interested community members. Some of the activities include artworks, creating Warlpiri literacy resources, story and designs

for artefacts in the learning centre space, Warlpiri signs, participating in off-site cultural activities and Warlpiri literacy development such as reading, find-a-word and using online language resources.

Learning literacy – a socio cultural model

Literacy learning takes place in every part of our lives, in informal ways such as our personal, social and community practices and in formal ways through school, vocational training and higher education. Daily literacy practices that we are all familiar with include talking to other people, using a key card, writing a text message, checking our bank balance, reading a community poster, listening to the radio or attending a meeting. The literacy for all of these types of tasks develops over a lifetime of different experiences and using literacy in different contexts, it is not separate from who we are. Literacy is real, authentic, and is embedded or natural occurring in the routines of our life. When adults learn literacy in all of these ways – from their interactions in their family and interactions in the community, where the learning has real meaning, it is called a social practice.

The way in which people learn and develop thinking skills as part of a social process, through interaction with others, is known as socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The behaviours of people are influenced by their society and culture, including learning behaviours. It is a two-way process whereby people learn from themselves and from each other. This is evident in the way Warlpiri people learn new literacies amongst family, friends and social groups in the community or social groups in the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku*. In other words, in marlpa – to have company or learning with others.

The following information was presented by Barbara Napanangka Martin at the Australian Council for Adult Literacy 2017 Symposium: ‘Action for Change: Indigenous adult, English, language, literacy, numeracy’. Barbara Napanangka Martin, a teacher at Yuendumu School describes her view of socio-cultural learning.

Barbara Napanangka’s view of socio-cultural learning

Socio-cultural learning is about people’s behaviours, it is about what is happening in the community with our family, sitting

down talking story about what they want to teach their young children, older children and young adults. If you have a bedtime story to your child, it means sitting around a camp fire, which is a way of socio-cultural learning. Young people are learning from their elders and are really listening to dreaming stories and things around them. It is a form of literacy teaching for young people to learn from elders because it is the way we have done things for a very long time. Reading a book is important too as they are reading and listening it can be like elders telling story in real life. But it is also playing, making jokes, laughing, and thinking about family together in a circle. All the family is there. No one is missing out from this beautiful way of learning through story.

In Kardiya way, they read books to their children but in Yapa way it is outside sitting, watching the stars and talking about things they can see. It is important it is coming from an elder. When we take them out bush we tell them about the land, dreaming, songs and ceremony, which is important for them to learn. It's all about what we believe. All of these are important for Yapa people to learn about their jukurpa. We always think, talk and tell story. It is an emotional way of thinking of using our literacy teaching. Social and emotional learning is a feeling thing. When people use story to teach something it uses more parts of the brain, the emotion part, the feeling part and the memory part as well.

My grandchildren brought a poster to me and asked what it said. It was all about asbestos on the airstrip and how dangerous it was, warning people not to go there. I told them a long story about what happens to people when they breathe in asbestos. It makes you sick and you will have health problems, possibly cancer. Dogs will die too. Nobody is allowed to go in that area, not even for bush bananas. So I made it into a story so they could understand the danger.

It is important for them to learn literacy with support from other Yapa because Yapa will have the opportunity to teach them about what to do for phonics and sounds. Some people have never learnt

sounds and so they need to break words into single sounds and syllables to help them understand English sounds. When I go on bush trips I use these times to make sure that I teach Warlpiri literacy and English literacy at the same time. Bush trips are good opportunities for teaching and learning all language because learning the Warlpiri helps to learn the English.

Young people connect through Jaru with other Yapa workers and Kardiya workers and volunteers. They participate in different programs and they increase in self-esteem by being proud of who they are. They develop positive connections because they are always working with older Jaru workers who are role models. They are learning with them. Young people don't have a lot of knowledge but if they are learning in Jaru the way we do in our culture, this helps them. It is important because they are being supported and learning through older mentors. They learn by listening and being strong in their identity. It is what is inside you, not separate. This is what socio-cultural learning means to me.

The *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* has consistently provided a place for Warlpiri people to engage in learning in a safe and supported space and where their value as learners has been respected through informal skills development. This is fostered through socialisation with peers and family, where learning in a group has a long history in cultural origins. Literacy provision that is underpinned by what is happening in social and cultural practices, rather than what is not happening is key to success (Kral & Schwab, 2012, p. 6).

The recent review of the learning centres by the Warlpiri Education Training Trust made very clear the gap in adult education policy in the Northern Territory and indicated that English LLN was critical to success in all areas of learning (Disbray and Guenther, 2017, p. 87 & p. 100). Many of the recommendations in the Review that refer to mentoring and development of Yapa staff are highly dependent on improvements in English LLN. Training and education in the Northern Territory are delivered in English language. Therefore, adult learners need to be competent in the language of instruction (Hanemann, 2016, p. 9). It is an imperative for Warlpiri people to develop competency in English literacy in order to progress along the education and training pathway.

It is important at this point to note two factors. Firstly, there is ample evidence on the value of first language literacy to support second language literacy (Hanemann, 2016) and secondly, that the maintenance of Warlpiri language and culture is strong, as evident in the vision and recommendations of the WETT Review (2017). The consistent message is that English LLN is an additional skill and this is reflected in the Whole of Community Engagement initiative across six Northern Territory communities, which states that ‘Aboriginal people reiterated the centrality of their own languages to their cultural practice, identity and connection to country, however many understood the importance of supporting their children to learn English and wanted to improve their own’ (Shalley & Stewart, 2017, p. 3).

According to the statistical overview of the Aboriginal English LLN in the Northern Territory ‘More than 85% of a sample of 660 NT Aboriginal adults assessed against the Australian Core skills Framework (adult LLN assessment tool) have English reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy skills below the level needed for independence in the workplace and for having the confidence to participate in all aspects of the broadest Australian society’ (Shalley & Stewart, 2017, p. 71).

This is typical of the data from Workplace English Language Literacy Programs in Yuendumu and assessments conducted in the learning centre space over the past five years. Clearly, there is work to be done in addressing this inequity, so that Indigenous people can participate fully in all aspects on their lives.

The WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* has a new, whole of community approach to literacy that occurs inside the learning centre and literacy that occurs outside of the learning centre in Yuendumu. This has been informed by our *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* data and extensive experience in the historical challenges in delivering formal training that is dependent on a classroom approach over consecutive days and/or weeks. Patterns of engagement whereby incidental, short, discrete learning opportunities occur have been most successful. These challenges are best described by Musharbash (2010) during her anthropological research in Yuendumu:

Immediacy shaped my fieldwork every day in multiple ways ... I could not plan ahead ... specific data collection, language lessons, everything happened when it happened, rather than when I wanted it to happen. Big events (such as mortuary rituals in the case of death) overruled any other activity, but even without

them, everything had to be slotted in with what was happening in the settlement on that particular day ... appointments simply did not work.

In addition, the WETT Review (2017), in considering models of adult learning opportunities, reviewed the ‘ Yes I Can ’ adult literacy program (implemented by the Literacy for Life Foundation and with origins in Cuba), and deemed it unsuitable for Warlpiri contexts, based on its delivery restrictions (classroom based, 74 consecutive lessons) and lack of experience in English as an Additional Language (ADL) context (p. 154). The Review also notes that “language, literacy are best learned incrementally and purposefully” (ibid., p. 87), reinforcing the need for socio-cultural approaches in Warlpiri communities.

Given the anecdotal and statistical evidence that WYDAC has gained through service delivery experience in Warlpiri communities in the past two decades, an increasing number of community leaders recognise the value of the fundamental role that socio-cultural learning and social interaction plays in the development of the way that adults think and learn. This view is also supported by Kral and Schwab (2017).

Approaches to learning

1. Literacy approach: in the learning centre

All of the delivery by WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* inside the learning centre is connected to improved English LLN through incidental learning opportunities. For example:

When a young Warlpiri woman uses the phone to ring her bank, she is using numeracy to read numbers and English language to talk to the bank staff members – which are both literacy practices.

When a young Warlpiri man fills out a driver licence application, he is reading and writing – which are both literacy practices.

When a Warlpiri grandmother checks her myGov account, she is using numeracy, reading and technology – which are all literacy practices.

When an old man comes into the learning centre to read the school newsletter, he reads in English and/or Warlpiri, two-way learning – which are literacy practices.

Every single time a young person comes into the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* to use a computer, they could be either reading, writing, learning, talking or using numbers; all literacy practices which help develop English LLN competency.

In the period January to August 2017, there were 1600 instances of informal support provided to Warlpiri people. This translates to 1600 opportunities where Warlpiri people have either engaged independently in a task that required English LLN practices or asked for English LLN support to complete a task. The tasks are usually for either a personal reason, for example, a birth certificate application, a community activity such as a poster for a funeral notice or for an educational goal such as completing a boarding school enrolment form. In all of these instances, the literacy was embedded in a task that had meaning for the learner. In almost every situation, the person seeking help was with a family member (older or younger depending on the task) who often provided literacy support, demonstrating the effectiveness and strength of intergenerational learning. Encouraging and scaffolding (by providing support and then reducing the amount of support as the learner acquires more confidence) are very typical of the ways in which Warlpiri learners support each other.

2. Literacy approach: in the community

There is a great deal of literacy support provided to local Warlpiri people that occurs outside of the learning centre. Family members, Yapa workers and Kardiya workers (Walpiri and non-Aboriginal) provide this support. Everyone becomes a teacher when they are asked for help that is about literacy, they are *pinangkalpa-wati* – those who have learned and who are teaching others. WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* is planning a program to provide some specialised support for those helpers in partnership with its existing community engagement program, *Jintangka Mardaninjaku* – ‘Coming together to Learn’.

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) recognises the need to address the low levels of adult LLN in remote communities. However, evaluation of the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE), program (the primary LLN delivery program of the Australian Government) clearly demonstrated that overlaying this mainstream national program has not worked for Aboriginal people in the NT. This

viewpoint was supported by SEE management at the November 2016 Aboriginal English LLN workshop at Charles Darwin University where the Australian government acknowledged key stakeholder feedback and invited ideas for positive change.

WYDAC has recently been in negotiations with the Department for some additional support with application of the learning centre model. Some level of recognition and acknowledgement of the issue has been formally expressed (for example at the November 2016 LLN workshop at CDU) and informally expressed, see below:

During my time in Central Australia, I have become more aware of the importance of English literacy and numeracy for First Nations adults to better participate and take more control of their economic and social futures. There is value in approaches that come from the community, for the community, and that are contextualised to local organisations. So, for example, in relevant parts of Central Australia, Warlpiri adults engage in learning drawing on their resources and organisations and Arrernte adults engage in learning using their organisations (G. Powell, September 27, 2017).

2.1 Drawing on the 26TEN model

The new pilot program in Yuendumu will formally commence implementation during 2018. The design of the program has drawn on ideas from the Tasmanian Government's adult literacy campaign, 26TEN. The 26 stands for the letters of the English alphabet and 10 stands for the numbers that make up the English counting system. 26TEN's collective approach supports and encourages everyone in the community, and across different sectors to take an active role including: various government departments, libraries, businesses, community groups, volunteers, educators, training organisations and individuals; all working together to improve the literacy levels of adults in Tasmania with clearly articulated joint-goals and long-term funding arrangements firmly in place (www.26TEN.tas.gov.au). The 26TEN program goals are that:

1. Everyone knows about adult LLN
2. Everyone is supported to improve their LLN & help others
3. Everyone communicates clearly.

26TEN strategies are broad and include:

- plain English and literacy awareness-raising workshops for organisations and the general public
- referral services and a website
- public access to a hotline and social media messages and interaction
- ongoing support for literacy workers including those employed in training organisations
- training and support for volunteer tutors
- funding to workplaces and communities which need LLN support
- advice to businesses and industry
- partners with the statewide library network called LINC to deliver embedded literacy

The WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* Yuendumu pilot will use some of the ideas from the Tasmanian model. These include discussions on raising community awareness and understanding of English LLN, workshops on how to communicate in plain English and training in strategies to support local Warlpiri people with literacy tasks. For the first part of the pilot, WYDAC *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku* is focussing on raising awareness and supporting reading in English. These workshops and discussions are being developed with two different target groups. One group will be Kardiya workers and Kardiya community members, with all services agencies, for example, CDP supervisors, youth workers, media workers, school staff, shire staff, invited and welcome to participate.

2.2 Literacy and storytelling

In addition to those named above, other activities will be aimed at local Yapa (Walpiri people) who have high levels of English LLN and who are consistently called upon to support family in English LLN tasks. The really unique aspect of delivery to Yapa literacy leaders is that delivery will occur in each of the Walpiri camps in Yuendumu and that the learning will be done through narrative. Storytelling has sustained Warlpiri knowledge transmission for generations. As an example, consider the ways in which world faith systems use storytelling to explain the creation and the beginning of time and to set down rules to

establish and moderate codes of behaviour and to provide comfort in times of grief and chaos. There is probably not a better example of socio-cultural learning, as in the way that religious systems are embedded in story. For Indigenous peoples, cultural heritage, identity and knowledge are passed through each generation by language and are integral in affirming and maintaining wellbeing, self-esteem and a strong sense of identity.³

Furthermore, the importance of storytelling can now be explained in brain research. When learning is constructed into story, rather than just facts, it activates more neural parts of the brain including sensation, emotion and memory. Research has shown that learners have much better recall when they learn new things in narrative, and they are able to transfer or use this information more effectively (Science of Learning Research Centre, 2014).

Reading is so important in understanding writing and in learning an additional language but access to hard copy based texts in Yuendumu is limited and they are not readily available in homes or in 'camps'. English and Warlpiri books are primarily housed in the Yuendumu School, the Bilingual Resource Development Unit and the *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku*. Newspapers and pamphlets are available in various other service organisations but in all cases access to these texts is during school or business hours. A part of the whole of community approach will include the distribution of locally produced texts such as the school newsletter, Land Rights News, Central Land Council News, Junga Yimi and Koori Mail to every camp on a regular basis.

2.3 Access to digital technology

Access to technology is a different story. There is also a lot of evidence about the way in which young people from remote communities are using digital technology and the way that this is transforming learning and literacy practices (Kral & Schwab, 2012), including English alphabetic awareness (Kral & Schwab, 2017). This uptake and interest in technology is evident in the data from *Pina Pina Jarrinjaku*. Of the 1600 learning incidences mentioned earlier, the majority involved the use of technology and it seems that almost everyone has access to some

³ From the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities – Our Land Our Languages, 2012.

sort of mobile device. The use of digital technologies has contributed to the skills of reading and writing, which have been enhanced over time because this approach is both meaningful to the learners and determined by the learners (Kral & Schwab, 2017, p. 11–12).

Furthermore, there is a certain amount of freedom, and reduced risk, in using technology for writing. Errors in writing using traditional pen and paper can be considered as failure to the adult learner who lacks confidence, rather than an understanding that this is part of the writing process. Writing a text message or an email enables the learner to experiment with ideas, drafting, spelling and self-correction (all good writing strategies), which encourages the risk in writing without the threat of failure or impact on confidence.

3. Literacy approach: Intensive and individual

There is an increasing need to provide more intensive support to Warlpiri learners who have significant English LLN challenges. This is usually about developing alphabetic skills and letter–sound relationships, spelling strategies and understanding how language can be used to meet individual needs. Learning the different sounds of a second language can be difficult for young adult learners, who also may not have literacy in their first language. Building confidence in learners who are at this stage of learning is also very important.

During 2017, WYDAC Pina Pina Jarrinjaki enlisted the support of volunteers who have been involved in a variety of roles in the learning centre. A new focus for future volunteers is planned to provide this intensive English LLN support to learners. Local texts and other reading and writing materials that are meaningful to the learners will be used while digital technology and multimedia will play an important role. Family members will be encouraged to be part of this activity to observe, provide bilingual support and develop their own competency in literacy tutoring. This is another way in which socio-cultural learning strengthens and reinforces the skills of the learner and the skills of other family members. As bedtime reading and other family literacy practices are not part of everyday practice, it adds value to the literacy practices of the broader family group, raising awareness of literacy. The Board also hope that this reinforces the important roles of playgroup and early childhood participation, which are critical in acquiring new literacy practices, which falls within the scope of

WYDAC's broader commitment to caring for young people.

The national Reading and Writing Hotline will be partnering with Pina Pina Jarrinjaki on this initiative by circulating volunteer opportunities to specialists and organisations in their database. The aim is to capture the interest of suitable LLN practitioners who have the skills and expertise to develop phonics and spelling in context with learner needs.

The following is an extract from a presentation given at the Symposium, Action for change: Indigenous adult, English, language, literacy, numeracy, Symposium, by Enid Nangala Gallagher, from Yuendumu.

In this presentation, Nangala described her niece Kaylisha's learning journey, embedding English LLN in her day-to-day socio-cultural practices.

This is a story about Kaylisha, who is my niece. Before, when she was a Jaru participant, she would look at the older Jaru about how they would run activities. She would listen and see how things are working. She has been looking at older Jaru, watching and seeing how to learn and how things are working so that she can join in the activities. For her, Jaru is a safe place and a place that she wanted to get socially involved with other people. It was good that she stayed out of trouble when she was younger and Jaru was the best place for her to go. She had lots of encouragement from the older Jaru workers to join in. She was quite happy staying at home playing with the young ones and helping her other aunty and when she was 15 she started going to work with Jaru.

A few times she was shy and the youth workers would say to me "Napaljarri is a bit shy". But when I went back home I kept encouraging her to be strong. I told her to keep going, they need you to be Jaru worker and be confident in your work. Today, by hearing about her and seeing her she makes me feel proud. She has been to a conference in Canberra and one in Darwin to talk about the Jaru Pirrdiji program. She is a strong Jaru worker and a leader as well. She is a teacher for other young people.

By using English in the workplace and using English in the learning centre Kaylisha's literacy and numeracy has become stronger. She worked on a cyber bullying program with other young people. She didn't understand all those words because she hadn't used them before. One of the older Jaru explained to her what those words meant. Words like cyber and fraud and server.

Getting involved with the youth workers, planning the program, setting out sports equipment, working out which areas can be used and how long activities should go for – that is learning literacy of language, time and space. Napaljarri texts and emails while she is at work and downloads things from the computer. That means she is reading, writing and using technology in the workplace. When Jaru cook for movie night she counts the carrots and potatoes to make sure they have enough food and reads recipes to cook it the right way. She transfers those literacy skills to what she does at home helping her aunty cook for the little ones. Kaylisha knows all of her banking details and how much she receives from Centrelink. She knows all the times she works and reports this to Centrelink. She knows how long she works for, which days, the start and finish time and so she knows how much she will be paid. There's lots of numeracy and reading in those skills. When Kaylisha helps get ready for bush trips, she teaches the young girls how to pack the boxes for each camp, working out how much food and dividing up the number of utensils to go in each box. More numeracy, language and planning skills.

Kaylisha also works some days at the Outback Store using all the skills she has learnt through Jaru. She went to the shops and asked if there were any jobs there. The manager told her the days, hours and times she would work. She learnt about Work Health and Safety, read warning signs about electricity and read the shop policies and protocols. She can read and write her hours in the timesheet, use the till, the eftpos machine, process power cards and help people when they buy phones and iPads. In this job she is reading, writing, using numbers, speaking, listening, learning and using technology. She helps family members activate phones and recharge their credit because she can read the instructions on the box. As she continues to work,

she improves her English literacy and numeracy to help herself and then helps others in the family and community.

I know that if I asked Kaylisha to go to a literacy class every day and sit in a classroom for weeks and weeks with people she was not comfortable with, then she wouldn't go. So you see, it is hard for us to talk about English literacy and numeracy unless we can talk about the things that we do in our community and the things that matter to us, and then the literacy and numeracy become a part of all that.

Kaylisha is a leader for young girls and that is what socio-cultural learning means to me.

Lessons learnt

What we now know

1. Learning centre data shows that Warlpiri adults demonstrate strong engagement through embedded incidental (on the spot) learning opportunities, in contrast to fly in, fly out delivery models.
2. Informal learning is significant for socialisation into literacy, as using everyday activities grows a person's identity as a successful learner, and increases confidence.
3. Once people are in employment there is increased opportunity for contextualised and ongoing English LLN support.
4. Learning and knowledge that is developed through human interaction (socially constructed learning) significantly enhances the relevance of English LLN.
5. Traditional classroom training models are high risk, likely to fail, and do not reflect Warlpiri patterns of engagement in learning.
6. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of English LLN, as a value add to literacy competencies, but not at the expense of Warlpiri language and literacy.
7. There is a strong uptake of digital technologies, increases confidence in writing skills, problem solving more than traditional pen and paper approaches.
8. Cultural obligations of Warlpiri life take priority above all else.

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Notes

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