Rethinking Parent Participation:

A Process Evaluation of the Parents and Learning Program in Napranum

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Abstract

Wide recognition of the value of close links between home and school for children, their families and educators has, in recent times, led to the development of programs and policies supporting the concept of home-school partnerships and encouraging parent participation in education. However, the reality for many Indigenous families is that policies have not translated into practices that fit within the cultural context of family and community, and parents have few opportunities to gain knowledge of the education process and how it affects their children.

The Parents and Learning program views parent participation in education in Indigenous communities as home-based. It is a two year program that actively engages parents in educational activities with their children outside the constraints of the school. Development of the program was in response to Napranum parents' requests for help in preparing their children for the rigours of formal schooling. This thesis presents a process evaluation of the Parents and Learning program in Napranum. It examines how and why things happened, in addition to exploring the impact of the program in the community.

Qualitative methodology was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for the context as it enabled me to capture both the essence of the program and the participants' perspectives. In an effort to determine the effectiveness of the program I focussed on the perceptions of the Indigenous parent participants and personnel as the main stakeholders and key informants.

The research shows that the PaL program was effective in translating concern into action. By providing practical, structured support and concrete, fun activities, the PaL program has begun to unlock some of the mysteries of schooling for parents and children in Napranum. Children and parents are actively engaging in Western literacy and numeracy experiences in their own environment, using their own frameworks of interaction with the support of people they know and trust. These processes are enabling bridges to be built for their children between the culture of home and the culture of school. The identification of the core elements of the PaL program also highlights some of the processes critical in supporting and strengthening families, particularly during the early childhood years.

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Prologue

Since 2001, Indigenous parents in the Napranum community on Cape York Peninsula have been involved in a home-based early childhood education program known as PaL or Parents and Learning. The PaL program was developed by early childhood professionals in collaboration with the Napranum Preschool staff and community for parents of young children in Napranum. It is an early literacy and numeracy parent support program which views parent participation in education as home-based. Although still in an evolutionary form, the program was trialed during 2001 and 2002 in the Napranum community. The evolution of the PaL program and the impact on its participants forms the basis of this thesis.

My involvement in the PaL program began at its inception when I was the Director at Napranum Preschool. Although I resigned from this position in December 2001, I continued to be involved in the ongoing development and support of the program, together with colleague Roshni Senapati. Our commitment to our main work roles of Director and Language Program Coordinator within the Preschool required us to be responsive to community needs. Our involvement in the PaL program was originally an extension of that commitment. We did not foresee the possible potential of the PaL program at its inception but viewed our involvement as following through on the task with which we were both challenged and entrusted by the Napranum Preschool community.

Funded initially with a seeding grant from the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation, the PaL program has been formally evaluated by an independent consultant commissioned by the Foundation. I was involved in the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation evaluation in the collection of data and by assisting the consultant to access stakeholders. I also used this opportunity to collect data for my own research.

My research focuses on the views, expectations and outcomes as perceived by the Indigenous participants. It is my intention to honour the stories of the Indigenous families, parents and personnel involved in the PaL program in this thesis.

Chapter 1   Setting the Context

…this is a resource that comes to your doorstep that your own kids can use... I guess some of the community would never have a resource like it at home.
Napranum PaL participant

Introduction

Wide recognition of the value of close links between home and school for children, their families and educators has, in recent times, led to the development of government and education authority policies supporting the concept of home-school partnerships.   However, the reality for many Indigenous families is that policies have not translated into practice and little has changed. The gaps between home and school remain wide. This thesis examines the Parents and Learning program in Napranum to determine its effectiveness from the perspective of the Indigenous participants. The identification of the critical elements of the program's effectiveness allows for some conclusions to be drawn about the ways in which participation in education outside the constraints of school can benefit children and families and how policy might be translated into practice in a way that makes a difference for Indigenous families.

In this chapter I first locate my research by providing a brief background history and description of the Napranum community before describing the education facilities currently available to parents and children. I then present the research background and context from which this thesis developed, paying particular attention to issues regarding

parent participation, home-school connections, and Indigenous education. This is followed by an overview of the Parents and Learning program in Napranum, including the structure, the tools and the people. The chapter concludes with the questions regarding the impact of the program that are addressed in this thesis.

A Brief History of the Napranum Community

The Napranum Community is an Indigenous community of approximately 813 people (Census 2001) located 11 kms south of the bauxite-mining town of Weipa on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland (Fig. 1). Formerly known as "Weipa South", Napranum was originally an Aboriginal mission station. The original mission, (then known as the Weipa mission), was located at Spring Creek, 32kms inland on the Embley River and was established in 1898 by Moravian missionaries on behalf of the Presbyterian Church. The mission residents, who represented about twelve different language groups from landowning groups in the Archer-Embley-Wenlock Rivers area, were subjected to strict controls by the missionaries. In addition to controlling basic provisions such as food and shelter, the mission regime also controlled the care of children by separating them from their parents and families, denying them access to their traditional languages and culture and providing education only in English (AIATSIS, 1988).
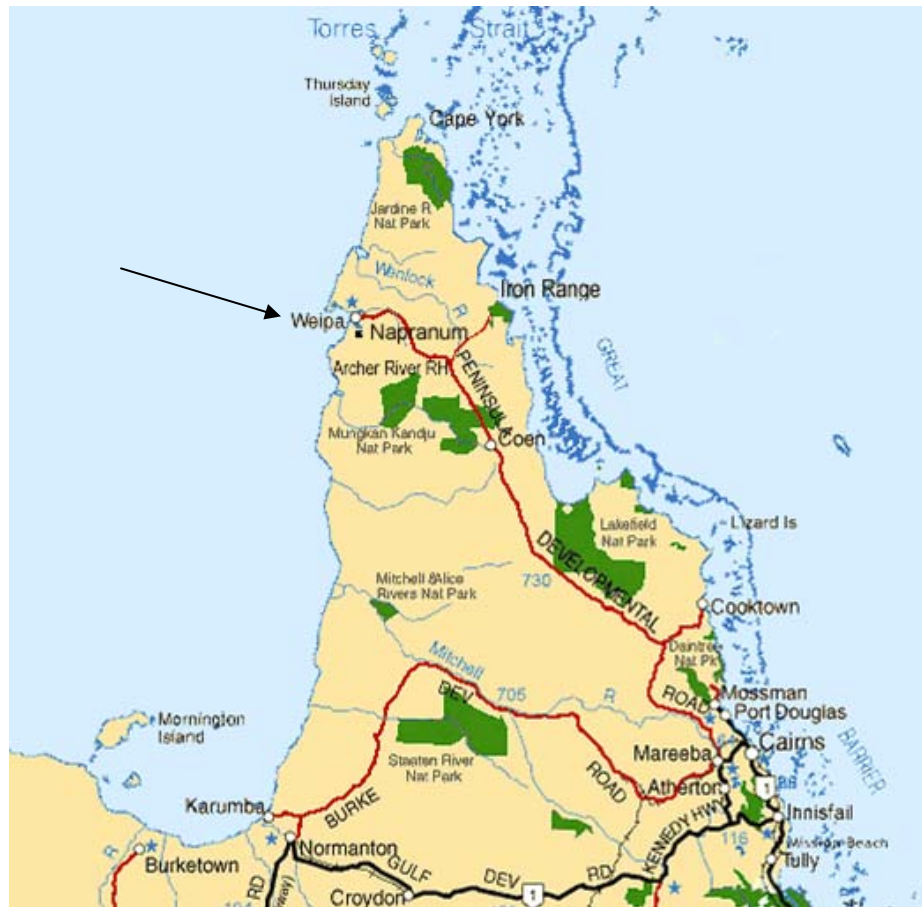
Fig. 1. This map shows Weipa and Napranum on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, Australia.

In the 1950s, bauxite was found in the area near where Weipa now stands. In response to this discovery, an agreement which provided for the granting of a special mining lease known as the 'Comalco Act' was signed between the Queensland government and Comalco (Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation) in 1957. This revoked the reserve status of 93 per cent of Aboriginal reserves in the Western Cape York area including the reserve of the Weipa South mission (as it was then known), which had been relocated to Jessica Point. The Aborigines of Weipa had no title to the land on which they lived nor to its mineral deposits, both being crown property. The Presbyterian Board of Missions renegotiated an area of only 308 acres immediately around the mission site as reserve. The mission population increased in 1963 when the

Mapoon mission closed and Mapoon residents were forced to move to either New Mapoon (near Bamaga) or Weipa South. In 1966 the mission became a state government settlement administered by the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (AIATSIS, 1988) and remained known as Weipa South until 1987, when the Weipa South Council (a community elected body) changed the town's name to Napranum, the Aboriginal name for the town area. The Aboriginal people of the area had been denied the right to manage their own lives for more than 80 years. The mission and state bureaucratic structures that controlled the lives of Aboriginal Queenslanders up until this time have been described as being the most intensive ever imposed on any sector of the Australian population (Fitzgerald, 2001).   When the community of Napranum received DOGIT (Deed of Grant in Trust) status in 1988 and the elected council took over local government functions, the community they inherited was the legacy of an appalling history of external control and privation.

In describing the Indigenous communities of Cape York Peninsula in 2000, the Cape York Justice Study (2001) paints a bleak picture of communities such as Napranum. Of the twelve communities included in the study, Napranum rated 4th lowest on the index of socio-economic disadvantage. As with other Cape York Indigenous communities, the main form of employment and source of income for the majority of people in Napranum is through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). CDEP provides no sustainable jobs, no career paths and wage rates and working hours that can result in a household income of less than those receiving unemployment benefits.   In Napranum, many families struggle in welfare based

households and life is increasingly impacted upon by poverty, violence and substance

abuse (Fitzgerald, 2001).

Eleven kilometres north of Napranum, the bauxite-mining town of Weipa,

provides a strong contrast in terms of services, infrastructure and income. The mostly

non-Indigenous township (of approximately 2000 people), which was built in 1965-66 to

accommodate mine workers and their families, boasts a swimming pool, library,

shopping centre, hospital, two hotels and a range of sporting facilities. Although

Napranum people can, in theory, now access these services, many of the facilities were

previously only accessible to company employees and Weipa north residents. In practice,

a lack of transport and feelings of intimidation and discomfort prevent most Napranum

people from using facilities other than the shops and hospital.

As non-Aboriginal people moved to Weipa for employment in the mine, so too

did people from the Torres Strait Islands. Many Torres Strait Islanders stayed after their

employment finished and made Napranum their home. With Torres Strait Islanders now

making up approximately 18% of the Napranum population (Census, 2001), there are a

significant number of mixed marriages/partnerships in the Napranum community and

adults and children who relate to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Historically an Aboriginal mission, Napranum is still a predominately Aboriginal

community, but it is also now home for a mixed group of Indigenous people. Census

figures also show Napranum to be a relatively youthful community with 33% of the

population aged 14 years or younger (Census, 2001) and only 15% of the population over

44 years of age. This has implications for social policy, particularly in the areas of family

support and education and may well be where a program such as PaL has a role to play.

Educational Facilities in Napranum and Weipa

Education Queensland provides primary school education (yrs. 1 -7) in Napranum at the Napranum campus of Western Cape College.   Napranum Community Preschool provides preschool education for children aged 3 -5 yrs.   Licensed by the Napranum Aboriginal Community Council in partnership with the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland, the preschool is a 3 unit kindergarten and preschool catering for up to 65 children. In the year 2001, the enrolment was 100% Indigenous students although the preschool is open to non-indigenous enrolments as well. It is this preschool which "houses" and provides the infrastructure for the PaL program.

Education facilities in Weipa include 2 preschools, (one community Crèche and Kindergarten affiliated and one Education Queensland) and schooling for years 1 -12 provided by the Weipa campus of Education Queensland's Western Cape College. Both Weipa and Napranum schools are part of Western Cape College and offer the same curriculum, however Weipa is considered to be more "mainstream" because it services a largely non-Indigenous clientele. Parents have a choice of which campus they will enrol their primary school aged child in, and many Napranum families choose the option of schooling in Weipa. The reasons why parents choose the Weipa campus over the closer campus of Napranum is not covered in this research, but it is worth noting that some parents consciously exercise that choice despite the extra organization such as transport that is required. 11 of the first cohort of PaL children (of 14) began primary school at the Weipa campus.   Although limited, there is some research that suggests that children from cultural and linguistic minority groups who are able to access the resources of

mainstream communities, achieve higher in literacy instruction than those children who

live in school communities with limited access to mainstream resources (Snow, Burns &

Griffin, 1998, cited in Hohepa & McNaughton, 2002).   We cannot say whether this is

applicable to Weipa/Napranum, but we do know that Napranum parents were concerned

about literacy. Their concerns were one of the main factors that led to the development

of the PaL program. Napranum parents have some choice regarding education for their

children and are clearly exercising that choice.

Equitable Outcomes in Education for Everyone?

> Children are entitled to education that not only empowers them but also enables
>
> them to maintain their own identity, perspectives and social practices in everyday
>
> contexts (Hanlen, 2002, p. 231).

In Australia, as in other western countries, we assume that education is a

guaranteed "right" for all children (Luke, 1994). However, the effectiveness of education

for the diverse and different cultures within our society varies enormously.   Despite the

belief that schools should provide students with educational outcomes which enable them

to succeed and thrive in the future, the evidence suggests that schools and education

systems are failing many of those it was supposedly designed to empower. There is

compelling evidence that, despite the best efforts and intentions of many teachers, school

systems are not providing equitable access to the powerful literacies and children from

socially or culturally different groups continue to be marginalized (Luke, 1994).   This is

indeed the case for Australian Indigenous children.   Compared with non-Indigenous

Australians, Indigenous Australians are well behind in educational achievement, obtain

fewer and lower-level education qualifications and are far less likely to get a job (National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2000). The 1996 National School English Literacy Survey found that less than 20% of students in the Indigenous sample met the reading standards and that less than 30% met the writing standards (1999). Although the Australian Federal government continues to sponsor research projects focusing on Indigenous education, home-school connections and literacy practices in urban and rural communities, the questions of equity remain. Indigenous students are the group at greatest risk of not attaining adequate literacy skills to function effectively in today's society (Clancy & Simpson 2002).

Whilst it is doubtful that Indigenous parents in the Napranum community had any awareness of this body of research knowledge, they were concerned about their children's chances of attaining educational success. This was a driving factor that led to the initiation of the Parents and Learning or PaL (as it is known) program. The PaL program was developed as a trial program in response to requests from parents of children attending Napranum Preschool. These requests sought activities and strategies which parents could use at home with their children to help prepare them for formal schooling. Their requests also indicated a desire to participate in their children's education on their own terms.

Although frameworks for Indigenous parent participation in educational settings such as ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) have existed for some time, the frameworks are just that. The ASSPA program strongly supports parent participation in education, but decisions as to how to achieve this are left up to individual committees and school communities. As Jon Ah Kit (cited in McGinty, 2002, p. 1) says,

there is no point in Aboriginal people having power to make decisions unless we

make sure they have the knowledge, skills and capacity to make those decisions

Parents of Indigenous students who want to help their kids succeed are left with policies

and rhetoric but few practical ideas that make sense to them within their own social and

cultural context. This was the case in Napranum. Despite the fact that parent

participation programs were available in the public domain, parents were reluctant to

adopt them. The preschool parent community wanted materials and a structure relevant

to the Napranum Indigenous community.

The Parents and Learning Program in Napranum

Current research tells us that children from disadvantaged and culturally different

communities often experience discontinuities and disconnections between home and

school and that this affects educational success (Freebody &Ludwig, 1998, Cairney,

Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995). In response to the growing awareness of the

need to address the mismatch between school and home, there has been considerable

development of programs that seek to involve parents in educational partnerships.

Parents are continually encouraged to be involved in their children's education because it

is alleged that their "involvement" benefits children's development. However, some

researchers (Ashton & Cairney, 2001, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999, Sampson, 2002)

have debated the effectiveness of parent involvement at school, as perhaps serving the

schools' purposes but not necessarily those of the parents and children. Earlier research

shows a majority of parent participation programs as school based, school initiated, and

often one sided, with educators assuming a position of knowledge over parents (Cairney

et al., 1995, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). More recently, there has been some development of programs which recognize that relationships between home and school achievement are complex and require initiatives that do more than simply offer parents information or seek to involve them at school (Spreadbury, 2002).

The Parents and Learning (PaL) program is a recent initiative. It is a two year home-based program which actively engages parents with their children in educational activities outside the constraints of "the school" and aims "to provide practical structured support for parents and to promote the belief in themselves as effective contributors to the early education of their children" (PaL mission statement, PaL Handbook, 2001, p.3). It focuses on elements of early literacy and numeracy, on parents teaching other parents and parents as teachers of their own children. The philosophy supporting the PaL program states:

- All parents want the best for their children but do not always feel well equipped to provide this.

- Success for children in the early years of schooling is crucial to their continued success throughout the education process.

- Parents learn best from other parents from their own community and culture who face the same issues of living and bringing up children in difficult circumstances.

- Helping parents support their children's early education in their own home will foster positive self esteem for both parents and children.

- Supporting and promoting parent's role as their child's first and most important 'teacher' will increase the chances of positive early school experiences.

- Involvement of parents in the early education of their children may also have implication in areas such as the arts; cultural pride; health; nutrition and community development (Napranum Preschool, 2000, p.3).

The PaL program involves a parent (or extended family member) working together with their child on a particular set of educational activities relating to a different storybook each week. The activity takes place in the parent's own home, and is delivered and demonstrated by a home tutor.

The PaL program participants are all Indigenous, are resident in either Napranum or Weipa and have a child of preschool age (4-6yrs) when they join the program. Home tutors are Indigenous parents or extended family members who also have children participating in the program. The number of families who can participate in the program is limited to 15 families per level. For the period 2001 and 2002, there were 27 children from 22 families involved in the program.

The PaL tools consist of 60 activity packs (30 for each level of the program) that each contains a high quality storybook, a related educational activity and an instruction card. There are two levels of the program, Level 1 – the preschool year, and Level 2 – the first year of formal schooling. The story books and activity cards are written in Standard English, with an understanding that use of the books and activities may be in a home language or English.

The basic PaL program model (Fig. 2) shows the coordinator as central to the program, with home tutors working directly with families and the coordinator. Program development and support, which is provided by a qualified early childhood professional familiar to Napranum families, supports the central role of the coordinator. In 2002, PaL personnel consisted of a coordinator, a training support person and four home tutors (one of whom also acted as assistant coordinator); these are all paid positions. The coordinator is an Indigenous woman who grew up in the Napranum community and went to school in Napranum and Weipa. Although not formally qualified, she has experience in early childhood settings (preschool and lower primary school) and is a parent herself. She had "on the job training" as she worked with trained early childhood personnel in the developmental stages of the PaL program. Her role involves recruiting parents, training and support of home tutors, the documentation and maintenance of records, and delivery to some parents.
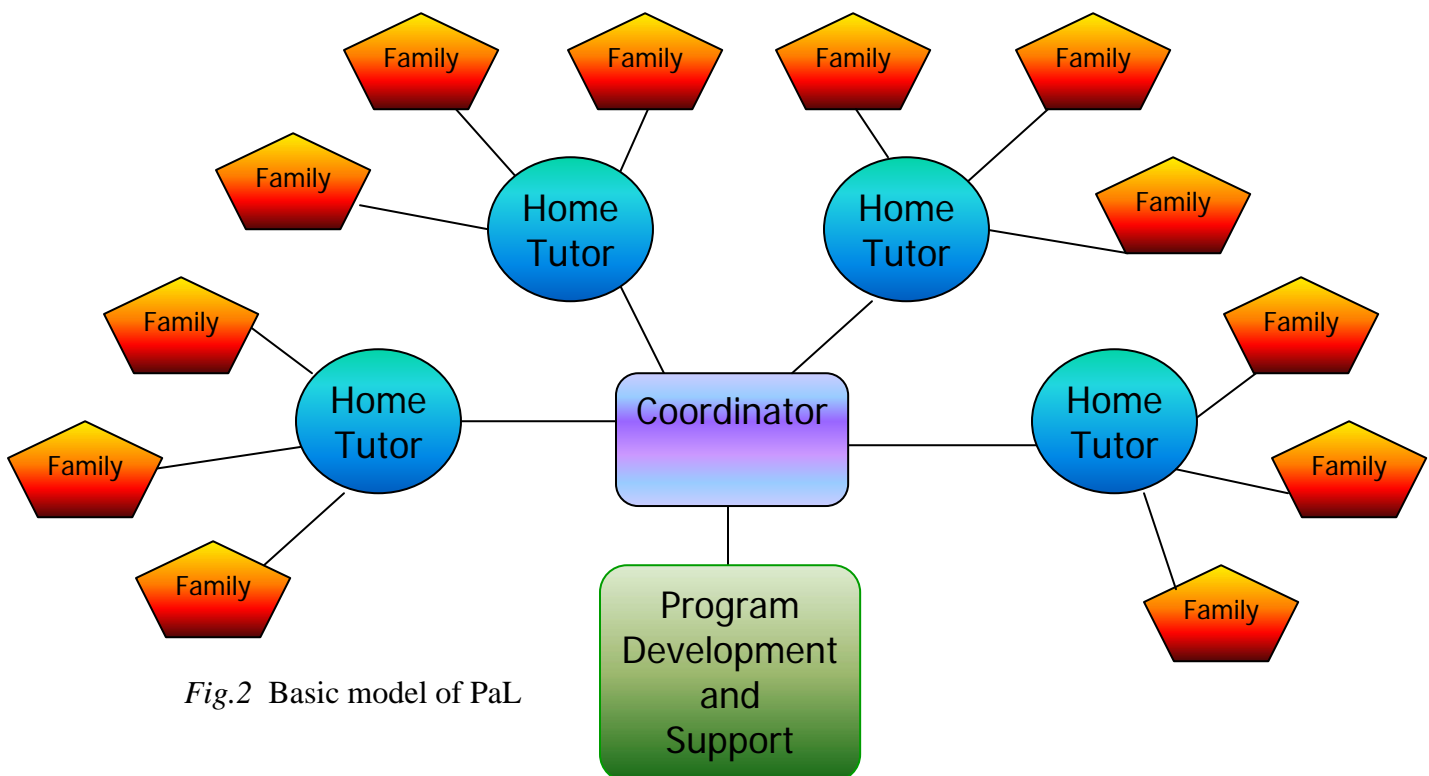

Fig.2 Basic model of PaL

Home Tutors are Indigenous parents or extended family members who also have children participating in the program. Home Tutors are paid for their role, which involves attendance at weekly training sessions and the delivery and demonstration of weekly activity packs to participating families in their own homes. The paid role acknowledges the valuable role the tutors play and recognizes their knowledge of families, cultural protocols, community languages and social etiquette in Napranum as privileged knowledge. It also confirms the belief that community people can and do play a key role in children's learning and development.

Literacy and Partnerships

Because of its presumed importance in school learning, literacy has been the focus of many "parent participation" and "partnership" programs (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). Certainly, success in school literacy affects children's life opportunities (Makin & Spedding, 2003, Tripcony, 2002, Williams, 2002). But what is literacy?

Literacy is not just reading and writing. Jones Diaz and Makin (2002, p. 9) describe literacy as "a tool with which our values, attitudes, aspirations, opinions, dreams, goals and ideas about the world are constructed, represented and reconstructed". Hohepa & McNaughton (2002, p.198) when considering Indigenous literacy talk about "proper" and "improper" literacy.

Proper literacy enables people to participate in the understanding and transformation of their society. In contrast, improper literacy restricts people to the role of passive participants by enabling them to read and write words across a page but with little control over what information they access or how the information might be used.

Literacy is tied up with the distribution of knowledge and power (Lankshear, 1997, Luke, 1994) and if we are serious about providing equitable outcomes for Indigenous students, then we should also be serious about programs that empower the participants and address "proper" literacy. The PaL program set out to empower participants through a supportive structure that not only addressed early literacy and numeracy but endeavoured to assist parents to gain an understanding of the schooling process and how it affects their child. PaL acknowledges parents as children's first and most important teachers and not just as tools for implementing a school literacy agenda.

The processes which contribute to continuities between home and school, or which optimize continuities, need to be clarified for families, children and teachers. This is not explicit knowledge. This is not to suggest that schools teach parents how to teach their children or to suggest that teachers need to know everything about what goes on in children's lives in homes and communities. It is about building bridges between schools and home, and it is about exploring how alternative programs such as PaL, which views parent participation in education as home-based, might work to effect change.

The Impact of the PaL Program

   In recognizing parents as the first and most important "teachers" of their own children, the PaL program has an unstated objective of "empowerment". Parents wanted to "help their kids" and some parents wanted to help other parents.

   Naturally, funding bodies have a desire to know that their support has led to positive outcomes for the target group and a classic evaluation would focus on the intended goals or objectives of a program. This thesis however, focuses on process and implementation. A process evaluation investigates how programs come into being, how and why they develop in particular ways and the things people experience that make the program what it is (Patton, 2002). Participants' perceptions are a key process consideration. By describing and understanding the details and dynamics of a program's processes, it is possible to identify core elements that contribute to program successes and failures. This thesis identifies Napranum parents and children as the key stakeholders in the evaluation. It tells their stories as I describe the ways in which families have been involved in the PaL program and identify what potential the program might have for the community in the future.

   If the processes involved in how and why programs work to benefit parents and children can be identified, the discontinuities which exist between the settings of school and home might become less of an obstacle in the path of children's success. This thesis addresses the following questions:

- Why develop a home-based early childhood program that engages parents as teachers of their own children?

- How was the program developed and implemented?

- What factors determined the evolution of the program?

- What processes were involved in "fitting" the program to the community?

- Is the program effective?

- What potential does the program have for the Napranum community and other

  Indigenous communities?

Chapter 2   Reviewing the Literature

"…Black people are tired of being roped around the neck and pulled off the horse.

They let us get on but they never give us a chance to ride that horse…"

Roy Jingle, Chairman, Napranum Aboriginal
Community Council, 1986 (AIATSIS, 1988)

Introduction

When the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was
launched in March 2000, there was formal acknowledgement of every young Australians'
entitlement to equal educational opportunity (Kemp, 2000).   Equal educational
opportunity has not always been available to Indigenous Australians, and even when it
has been available, it has not resulted in equitable outcomes (McConaghy, 2000,
Tripcony, 2002).   Although Roy Jingle's quote (above) was not spoken in relation to
education, it could well have been. Indigenous Australians have been allowed to "get on
the education horse", but have been given few chances to really ride it.

This chapter reviews the literature relating to social justice and Indigenous
education. It looks at the connections and disconnections between home and school and
the development of programs and policies seeking to bridge these gaps. The chapter
concludes with a discussion of community capacity building and the role it plays in
addressing educational disadvantage.

Social Justice and Indigenous Education

The relationship between Indigenous Australians and the dominant "white" or "western" culture is a complex one. The myth of *terra nullius*, which was perpetuated by the Australian legal system in order to legitimize Indigenous dispossession, lies at the heart of this relationship (Martin, 2003, McConaghy, 2000). Issues of land rights, reconciliation, poor health, housing, and educational outcomes, all of which have yet to be fully addressed, have meant that Indigenous Australians remain the most socially disadvantaged, marginalised group in the country.

Education, which has a fundamental connection with the idea of human emancipation (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982, Friere, 1976), has failed Indigenous Australians. Comparative statistics of attendance, retention and educational achievement indicate that the majority of Indigenous students across Australia are still not engaging productively in the schooling process to the same degree as their non-Indigenous peers, nor are they gaining maximum benefit from their experiences at school (Williams, 2002). In Cape York communities, 79.4% of the Indigenous population left school before the age of 16 (Census, 1996). This is almost double the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

Historically schools have played a role in the production of socio-cultural inequality (Luke, 1994). Comparisons between the education provided for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians provide strong examples of this inequality. Hanlen (2002) believes the distribution of power and knowledge, which should have been possible through education, was never intended to include Indigenous Australians. She

provides evidence of what she refers to as "two parallel racialising and discriminating educations systems…Indigenous and non-Indigenous" (p. 221). Whilst education for Indigenous Australians appears to have been intent on transforming social practices (by prohibiting the practice of traditional language and culture and by breaking up families) and producing farm and domestic workers for "white" Australia, education for non-Indigenous Australians was specific in its objective of providing the basic skills of literacy and numeracy (Hanlen, 2002, McConaghy, 2000).

Tripcony (2002) in her brief summary of the history of education for Aborigines refers to education being used as a controlling mechanism. She describes how, during the "protectionist era", which began in the late nineteenth century, Aboriginal children were refused admission to the white school system. Schooling for Aborigines was delivered on reserves and missions by unqualified, inexperienced teachers (McConnochie, 1982).   In the late 1950s, when the policy of assimilation was adopted, schooling for Indigenous Australians changed (McConnochie, 1982). The assimilationist discourse that prevailed reflected a belief that Aboriginal people were culturally deprived and that they lacked in linguistic and cognitive abilities. Consequently, remedial programs were introduced to compensate for this perceived "deficit" (Tripcony, 2002). The deficit discourse flourished, and although some things have since changed, Tripcony believes the deficit model is still evident today.

McConaghy (2000) in her discussion of the different phases of Indigenous education introduced the notion of "Indigenous incapacity" and how it was invoked in various ways to continue the deficit discourse.   The practice of subjecting Indigenous people to training and behaviour modification programs solely to explain their

unwillingness to change is provided as an example. McConaghy described systems such

as these as being complicit with slavery. She also believed the notion of incapacity was

used to justify the practice of doing things to and for Indigenous people. McConachy

referred to this philanthropic "rescuing", as pastoral welfarism. These phases of

education described by Hanlen, Tripcony and McConaghy are all identifiable in the

history of education for Napranum people.

Educational rights, not privileges

The 1960s were an era of significant social change. While fundamental questions

about knowledge and power were being articulated through social movements such as

civil rights movements and feminism (Smith 1999), Indigenous children had only just

gained rights to access mainstream schools (McConaghy, 2000, Tripcony, 2002).

Educational rights and access however, have not always translated into educational

equality. The question of the cause of educational inequality in general was taken up by

Connell, Ashenden, Kessler,& Dowsett (1982), in their early studies of families and

schools. They highlight the four main types of answers given as to why educational

inequality exists:

> Answers stressing differences between individuals; the characteristics of schools
>
> and families; the relationship between home and school, and class lifestyle; and
>
> the place of schooling in the social structure (p.184).

Whilst each one of these types of answers has its own complexities, they are still relevant

today and some of the more recent research (Clancy & Simpson, 2002, Freebody &

Ludwig, 1998, Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 2002, Munns & Connolly,

1996) reflects the continuing interest into why educational inequality exists. Of course the simplest answer could be that schools are designed to produce inequality. The history of education for Indigenous Australians, as presented so far, tends to confirm the fact that the process of schooling has done little more than reproduce social inequities. However, the current government rhetoric reflects a strong belief that the process of schooling has the ability to transform social inequities.   Educational equality for all Australians is recognised as a basic human right and not just a privilege.

A major focus on education by both State and Commonwealth governments seeks to redress inequities which have arisen from past government and institutional policies and practice (Tripcony, 2002) and a constant theme of the National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (2000) is that *education is the key* to achieving reconciliation.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989), which was implemented in 1990, was the first coordinated "mainstream" approach initiated under the authority of the political project of social justice (Tripcony, 2002). It had the broad goal of "achieving access to, and participation in, education at all levels, as well as equitable educational outcomes for Indigenous students"(Tripcony, 2002, p.4). However, the project of delivering social justice for Indigenous students through education is not an easy one.

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2000) refers to a number of mindsets that have been obstacles in the path of education for social justice.   One example is the assumption or mindset that social inequality is a natural phenomenon that has always existed and always will.   Another is the attitude that associates Indigenous poverty and

oppression with individual incapacity and deficit knowledge. Similarly, a discourse of cultural difference focused attention on students rather than systems and structures of education (McConaghy, 2000). These attitudes or mindsets have all added to the difficulty of finding a way forward on the path to education for social justice.

Friere's (1976) views on the emancipatory role that education can have for oppressed groups is quite emphatic that education must never be in a donating or aiding form and that it should take on the "educatees'" critical perception of reality. Education in the Friere mode rejects any concept of students as passive recipients of knowledge. Until recently, education for Indigenous Australians has been quite the opposite of Friere's ideals and there was little hope of delivering social justice through education.

Access and Exclusion

The research project "100 Children go to School" conducted by Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid (1998) shows that questions about social justice in education are not just about access, but ultimately, about who gets what from schooling and what they can do with it. McGinty (2002 p.16) confirms this view that education is not just about access and participation but also about equality of outcomes; "equality of access does not mean that all people are able to benefit from services because not everyone is equally capable of accessing the services available".

McGinty (2002), uses Klasen's (2000) social exclusion framework to help us understand how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in being denied access to an adequate and effective education become "socially excluded". Klasen's notion of social exclusion as it relates to children calls for maximising the potential of every child.

Although the processes that can lead to social exclusion are complex, Klasen makes the point that even where children are well integrated into schools, their individual needs may still be neglected. Unfortunately the formula of public schooling assumes that services that produce the best outcomes for the dominant group will also produce the best outcomes for all students. Yet this is not so. When schooling does not meet students' individual needs, the result is often social exclusion later in both their schooling and life.

Research shows that some children are able to make good use of what schools make available and some schools are better able to work with what children bring to the schooling process (Clancy & Simpson, 2002, Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 2002). Longitudinal studies in education (Comber & Hill, 2000, Bynner cited in Klasen, 2000), show that as children move through education, the gap between the educational haves and have-nots gets wider; progress is enhanced for some while held back for others. For Indigenous Australian children this is also the case.

The Standard Australian English and languages research project conducted by the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Board (2001-2002) reported that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement in English literacy increases by 29.5% between the Year 3 and year 5 benchmarking. The long-term consequence of this widening gap is often that the "have-nots" are denied access into the social and economic aspects of broader society. This translates later in life to being denied the opportunity to feel they are valid and contributing members of society (McGinty 2002). That is, they are socially excluded. In contrast, those who achieve their potential in school life, develop the capacity to successfully participate in paid work, family, the community and civic life (Williams, 2002).

A raft of policies (National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century,2000, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Education Policy, 1989, The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2000-2004) confirm at policy level at least, the process of schooling in Australia has a role to play in reducing social exclusion. Schooling of Australia's children is acknowledged as the foundation on which the nation's future depends. The preamble of The Adelaide Declaration on National goals for schooling in the 21st Century (MCEETYA, 2000) states:

> Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society. High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.

Goal Three of The Adelaide Declaration states that "schooling should be socially just" and highlights the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes that match those of other students. The twenty-one goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy come under the headings of four major goals:

1. Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making.
2. Equality of access to education services.
3. Equity of educational participation.
4. Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

Throughout the document, the goals reflect the aim that education should deliver social justice and result in outcomes for Indigenous students "at the same rate as for other

Australian students" with the underlying implication that social justice will not be achieved until educational outcomes improve.

Connections and Disconnections in Education

If schooling is to be socially just, then education systems and structures and their relationship to those who are marginalised must improve. Relationships between homes and schools and the ways in which they connect or disconnect are now recognised as playing a significant role in educational outcomes for the populations they serve (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 1998). Basic skills of literacy and numeracy, which are understood as essential to educational, social and economic success, are often the focus of research into home-school connections (Clancy & Simpson, 2002, Comber & Hill, 2000). The research shows that the closer the "fit" or "match" between home and community literacy practices and school literacy practices, the more successful the literacy learning (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie 1995, Freebody & Ludwig, 1998, Hill et al., 1998, Makin & Spedding, 2003).

Making connections between home and school can be a challenge for all young children, but Clancy and Simpson (2002) believe it is particularly difficult for young Indigenous Australians who have to adjust to an extra range and layer of different experiences, demands and expectations relating to their cultural, language and social skills. The experiences of Napranum parents and their children confirm this belief. Hanlen (2002, p.215), who calls on practitioners to "de-westernise their approach to literacy teaching by deconstructing western perspectives and practices and reconstructing them in a manner that is inclusive", emphasises the need for practitioners to provide

connections based on culture, social practices and prior knowledge. Finding ways of helping schools to recognise, understand and acknowledge the cultural practices of the home and the community should help to improve home school connections but initiatives involving families also need to be considered. Napranum parents recognized a need to do something about improving the transition to a structured school program; the PaL program grew out of this perceived need.

Families and Literacy

Although a relatively recent phenomenon, partnerships between school and home are recognised as promoting a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility in children's education (Ashton & Cairney, 2001, Delgado-Gaitin, 2001). A wide range of "parent participation" and "parent involvement" projects which have as their main purpose the involvement of parents, teachers and children in educational partnerships, have developed in response to the need for greater continuity between the settings of home and school. Literacy, because of its presumed importance in school learning and its role in the social justice agenda, has often been used as the vehicle in the development of such programs.

In 1995, Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie conducted a detailed mapping of "Family Literacy" initiatives throughout Australia. Of 261 programs surveyed, they found only two that were parent initiated. The rest had been initiated by school personnel. They also found that few of the initiatives had been formally evaluated, with most evaluations taking the form of anecdotal evidence and focusing on outcomes for children. Although all programs were considered family literacy initiatives,

parents appeared to be secondary considerations in both the developmental and the evaluative stages of programs.   This supports the notion that although partnerships are sought between schools and homes, it is most often schools that dictate the agenda. Under these circumstances, parents can only be recipients of whatever schools propose (Delgado-Gaitin, 2001).

Further evidence of parental disadvantage in the home school partnership is presented in Freebody & Ludwig's (1998), report "Talk and literacy in schools and homes". Although not focussed on home-school partnerships, the study identified the wide discrepancy that exists between the views held by teachers and those held by parents. This was particularly so with teacher attitudes towards families designated as "disadvantaged". Freebody & Ludwig found that school personnel consistently attributed the cause of poor literacy achievement to students and their families rather than to school practices, organization or the curriculum. In addition, parental support for children from homes designated as disadvantaged was often viewed in negative terms. The literacy practices of poor and culturally different groups appeared to be valued less favourably than those associated with white middle class groups (Freebody & Ludwig). This contrasted with the view of parents who believed that they provided positive support for their children. Unfortunately for many families, the diverse and different literacies of home are often ignored or identified as deficits by educators.

Makin and McNaught (2001), conducted a study in New South Wales to investigate literacy practices in early childhood services immediately prior to school. They also explored staff and parental understandings of early literacy development to determine how congruent these understandings were. One of the major findings of this

study was that staff and parents often held very different perceptions of what constituted appropriate, high quality support for early literacy.   The findings of the study support earlier research, which shows that a wide discrepancy exists between parents' and schools' understanding of literacy learning and that home-school relationships tend to privilege schools and educators as the dominant group.

Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) examined 162 items published in the 1990s that had parent involvement as their key concern to find that much of the literature on the subject of parent involvement was concerned with problems that have been associated with it.   Again, problems seemed to arise from differences in expertise between parents and staff; expertise appeared as a hierarchy that either privileged or discredited parents or staff.   Hughes and MacNaughton also found that three views of parent involvement in early education dominate the literature; "parent as teacher, parent as collaborator, and parent as decision-maker" (p.29) and go on to describe the assumptions upon which the three views appear to be based.

Hohepa and McNaugton's (2002) discussion on continuity and matches or mismatches between family literacy practices and school based literacy practices suggest that the disjunction for Indigenous families is particularly marked. They described general strategies that have been adopted in Maori communities to increase continuity between school and home by; i) adding to family practices and ii) adding to school practices, and suggested that under ideal circumstances, educators should consider doing both.

The literature to date suggests that despite parent participation and parent involvement sitting high on the education agenda, continuity between the settings of

school and home still remains the privilege of the white middle class. If schooling and

education is to achieve the goal of social justice, then home-school connections and

disconnections need to be explored more critically. This should involve a

reconceptualizing of parent-staff relations (Hughes & McNaughton, 1999), a review of

what parent participation and partnerships really means and the adoption of a broader

view of the development of literacy. The view of parent participation in education as

needing to be home and community based provided the foundation for the PaL program

in Napranum. This was a simple but different approach to be trialled.

Literacy and Power

Literacy is regularly included in discussions of empowerment and social justice

for disadvantaged groups within affluent communities (Comber & Hill, 2000, Luke,

1994). Viewed in this way, literacy and literacy education is a political enterprise (Luke,

1994). Lankshear (1997) argues that since "empowerment" means all things to all

people, proclaiming "literacy for empowerment" as an educational goal worth striving for

requires educators to understand how power is produced and distributed. Understanding

the issues that are background to the lives of many students is necessary if educators are

to better understand the varying circumstances and aspirations of students and families.

Literacy as social practice, the theory that young children's understandings about

literacy develop within their socio cultural and linguistic communities, links strongly

with the idea of literacy for empowerment. According to Jones Diaz and Makin (2002)

literacy is not just a cognitive achievement but also a social and cultural phenomenon in

which the attitudes, values and beliefs of all participants play a central role. The

development of literacy practices do not take place in isolation, but occur in association with other social practices and interactions within communities, families, and with other adults and children. Literacy as social practice also accepts that literacy is inextricably linked to social, political and cultural conditions (Jones Diaz & Makin, 2002) and the role of parents and family is paramount in literacy development. It requires educators to see themselves as partners with the child and his or her family in each child's literacy growth.

The importance of family in the development of literacy is also acknowledged at policy level in the Adelaide Declaration and in the Literacy Challenge report:

It is acknowledged that the home and parents are important first educators of children. The acquisition of literacy begins in infancy and is a developmental process founded on the events and interactions which occur within the child's family (DEET 1992, p. 7 cited in Spreadbury, 2002).

Current government policies (National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the 21st Century, 2000, National Literacy and Numeracy Goals) which enunciate "…that every child leaving primary school should be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level" and that "…every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years" reflect the priority that has been given to the development of high levels of proficiency in English literacy and numeracy. These goals are seen as "a matter of major importance for all Australian's personal, social and cultural development" and a number of strategies have been developed to implement these broad goals.

The introduction of literacy and numeracy testing and benchmarking is an assessment strategy that has demonstrated serious gaps in the competency levels of

certain groups of students. This is particularly so for Indigenous Australian students whose results are considerably lower than those of other students. The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, (2000-2004) which was launched in March 2000, aimed to address this inequity. The main objective of the strategy is: "To achieve English literacy, numeracy and attendance outcomes for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other Australians". The implicit message is that literacy in Standard Australian English will give Indigenous students access to power and status in the mainstream.

In Queensland in 2001-2002, the Indigenous Education Consultative board implemented a series of research projects designed to examine policies, practice and key issues in schools and education systems in relation to Indigenous learners. Amongst the findings from the project that focused on Standard Australian English and languages was a strong belief shared across Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, Indigenous Elders, community leaders and parents that powerful levels of competence with Standard Australian English in its written and spoken, print and digital forms, is of the highest priority for Indigenous education. However the researchers also suggested that, "it is a matter of which literacies, which practices, which skills and knowledges will count as learning English" (Tripcony, 2002, p.8).

Reconceptualising Partnerships

A recurring theme in recent literature concerning partnership in education (Ashton & Cairney, 2001,Pearson, 2000b, Wyatt, 2001,Williams, 2002) is that parents must be viewed as equal partners and that there must be a reciprocal relationship. However, as

many schools still hold a limited conception of what constitutes a partnership, the practice often fails to meet the rhetoric (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). As we have seen, parents' expertise and knowledge of their own children is often ignored or discredited (Cairney, et al., 1995, Freebody & Ludwig, 1998, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999) by school personnel. Spreadbury (2002) believes families need to be convinced of the importance of their influences on the learning outcomes of their children and that parents need to believe in themselves as having a great deal to teach educators when it comes to discussing their child. Convincing educators to listen to parents in ways that enable an equal partnership to develop might be the challenge.

Current policy documents and research papers concerning Indigenous education frequently use terms such as parent participation, parent involvement and partnerships (ASSPA, Heslop, 1998, MCEETYA, 2000, Partners for Success, 2000, Wyatt 2001). The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program, which was introduced in 1990, was the first federal government strategy supporting the NATSIEP that aimed to increase the participation of Indigenous parents in educational decision making. The term 'parent participation' featured strongly in education during the 1990s but recently "partnership" has become the buzzword. While the simplest definition of partnership provided by The Australian Oxford dictionary is a "joint business", the word partnership is usually associated with the concept of working together to achieve a commonly agreed goal with partners being equally responsible for the outcomes (Wyatt, 2001).

In Queensland, the most recent strategy, Partners for Success (2001), provides a set of new policies based on the principle of responsibility being shared between

Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The new policies are "designed to enable schools and their communities to develop solutions responsive to local circumstances within a state-wide monitoring and accountability framework" (p.1). The policies echo Pearson's (2000a) call for partnerships that recognise the rights of community members to decide or to be a real part of the process of deciding things.

While partnership rhetoric in schools and policies is strong, what actually constitutes home-school partnerships is more limited (Ashton & Cairney, 2001, Hughes & McNaugton, 1999). The concept of what constitutes a partnership or parental involvement is fraught with difficulties when it comes to what actually happens in home /school relationships. Despite the policies, partnerships are not always equal and participation does not necessarily mean that someone is always involved. This does not point to a dismissal of the concept of parent and community partnerships, but of the need to deconstruct hierarchical relationships and reconceptualize partnerships (Hughes & McNaughton 1999). If social justice and academic equity is to be a feature of schooling for all children and their families, we need to find a way forward where practice matches rhetoric.

Building Stronger Communities

Recently there has been a great deal of interest in the notion of "social capital" (Scott, 2002). Intellectual, cultural and social capital is becoming more highly valued as having the capacity to create alternative solutions to societal problems. The Queensland Government's 2010 (Education Queensland, 2000) document acknowledges that to

become a learning society – "the Smart State", the key resources will be human and social capital. Williams (2002) draws attention to the notion of social capital/social connectedness and the role schooling can, and should play, in developing social capital as a means of reducing social exclusion.

What is "social capital"? Social capital as defined by Scott (2002, p. 2), is "that reservoir of social cohesion, trust and reciprocity which makes a collection of individuals into a community". Eva Cox (2000) describes social capital as being "learning about relating to others through processes built on respect for diverse views and recognition of commonalities". Cox also talks about trust being the currency of social capital because "no one owns it but it measures how we relate to others".

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the social environment as being akin to a series of concentric circles. From the innermost circle of family to the outermost circle of the global society, each circle represents a differing level of analysis and because they are embedded, they also impact on each other. Scott (2002) links this ecological perspective proposed in Bronfenbrenner's theory to the notion of social capital because of the perspective it provides in understanding the links between family and community, and the impact that the social world has on family relationships. How society treats marginalised groups and how that is reflected within families is one such example. The ecological perspective shows how families can have an impact on their communities and societies. Developing social capital, by way of definition, should provide a means of reducing social exclusion, and as such must have a role in education.

Social capital also provides the base for community capacity building.   The Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body's Strategic Plan (2000 –2001),

identifies community capacity building as an area of focus which highlights the need to develop school-community partnerships based on mutual respect, common and agreed goals and a shared acceptance of mutual obligation and responsibilities. In the context of the QIECB'S rationale for this area of focus, McGinty (2002, p.2) defines community capacity building as a process in which "…all the players achieve a higher degree of understanding of one another and, with it, a higher degree of respect for the skills, knowledge and underpinning value that each player contributes". As the group appointed to support Education Queensland's Partners for Success Strategy, IETA (Indigenous Education and Training Alliance), provides (amongst others) the following definition of community capacity building:

> Strengthening of the ability of a community – or a region, or society in general – to become collectively self reliant by increasing social cohesion and building social capital is often described as developing its community capacity.

The Solid Foundations discussions paper (MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001, p.33) states

> Indigenous people see community development and capacity building processes and programs which give expression to these processes as bridges to the wider exercise of their rights as citizens and as Indigenous people … Intrinsic to these processes are the processes which build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to contribute to sustainable improvement in the social and economic circumstances of their families and communities.

If education is to be socially just for Indigenous Australians, the establishment of learning communities that have the capacity to work collaboratively to address the issues which

contribute to educational disadvantage must be formed in the sense of a true partnership. This will lead to Indigenous families and communities becoming empowered to exercise their rights and take a more equitable part in the social and economic life of the wider communities in which they live.

Summary

The literature reviewed clearly demonstrates a strong belief that education is the key to delivering social justice for Indigenous Australians. However, changes in policy over the past 15 years have not resulted in significant improvements in educational outcomes for Indigenous children, and Indigenous Australians remain the most socially disadvantaged, marginalized group in the country. Acknowledgement of the importance of relationships between schools and homes has also led to more recent changes in policy and a focus on partnerships, but as most schools' views of partnerships are limited, so is the change. If social justice and academic equity is to be a feature of schooling for Indigenous children and their families, we need to think differently to find a way for practice to match rhetoric. Identifying the core elements of partnerships and processes which build the capacity of individuals, families and communities might be a good place to start.

Chapter 3   Research Relationships and Methodology

This chapter describes my journey as a practitioner and neophyte researcher in the exploration and description of the Parents and Learning program. There are two main sections to this chapter. The first section describes the theories that influenced me and have determined the methodological framework for the study. The second section describes the data collection methods, and methods chosen for data analyses.

Theoretical Influences on Methodology

This chapter begins by introducing a number of ethical dilemmas that I was presented with as an inquirer undertaking insider research in an Indigenous community. The ethics of research in Indigenous contexts, the ethics of insider research and the advantages and disadvantages associated with both are examined in this first section. My choice of methodology and approach to evaluation was strongly influenced by ethical principles appropriate to the research context and this is also discussed in the first part of the chapter.

A Question of Ethics – Research in an Indigenous Community

Designing an appropriate research methodology requires careful consideration of the context and culture of the research setting as well as the research question that has been formulated (Bryman & Burgess, 1999, Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The question of ethics must be addressed in any well-designed study and universities provide for this

with a system that determines if a research proposal meets ethical requirements before approving the research. In this research, the James Cook University guidelines for ethical research set the standards for conduct. However, research in an Indigenous community presents its own range of ethical dilemmas, which must also be addressed.

In the past, research into Indigenous communities was largely exploitative and was often conducted by non-Indigenous researchers without the permission, involvement or consultation of the people who were to be the "objects" of the study (Smith, 1999, Hart & Whatman, 1998). Many Indigenous scholars note as deplorable, the fact that Australian Indigenous people are amongst the most researched groups in the world (Williams, 2001, Rigney, 2001, Hart & Whatman, 1998). The following quote from Kevin Gilbert (1974) echoes this sentiment:

> Aboriginals have had the pants studied off them. There are unending, limitless sums of money wasted on bloody research and what the hell has it all led to apart from a recurring harvest of MAs, PhDs etc. (cited in Williams, 2001)

Research questions that focus on problems in Indigenous contexts are another issue. Questions such as "Why aren't Indigenous students finishing school?" which continue to be posed by non-Indigenous researchers are generally based on the misguided premise of solving the problem for the benefit of the Indigenous people concerned (Hart & Whatman, 1998, Smith, 1999). Although perhaps useful in determining necessary policy and systemic changes that need to occur, this type of research often has little meaning and is of limited use to the communities for which benefit of the research was intended (Hart & Whatman, 1998).

Confronted with this knowledge and these scenarios, I felt compelled to review my own position as a non-Indigenous researcher. Should I be embarking on this research journey? Who would benefit, and could the research be conducted in a way that reflected useful information for the participants as well as a contribution to research in the field? The questions of who should and should not do research in communities relate not only to the people concerned and the purpose of the research, but also to the ways in which access to knowledge is gained by the researcher, who is involved in imparting it and how the resultant information is to be used. Although I was well aware of culturally appropriate research protocols developed by organisations such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) "to control the behaviour of non-Indigenous researchers in our Indigenous communities" (Rigney, 2001, p.10), some serious self questioning was needed. In considering the documentation of the program, I also needed to give careful consideration to issues of ownership of knowledge, intellectual property, and access to information. Questions of "respect" and "trust" which are the underlying premise of culturally appropriate research guidelines and protocols (Smith, 1999, Australian Research Council, 1999), were foremost in my mind when I considered why I wanted to undertake this research and who would really benefit from it**.**

Establishing and maintaining secure interpersonal relationships should form the basis of research in Indigenous contexts (AIATSIS, 1999, Sheehan & Walker, 2001). I already had an established and authentic relationship with the Napranum community when I first became involved in the Parents and Learning program. I left the community at the end of the first year of the PaL program's trial period to fulfill personal and family commitments. I had been there for 13 years. By continuing my involvement with the

PaL program through the research process, I was able to maintain my relationship with the community despite a geographical distancing.

Undertaking research that would document the PaL program provided an opportunity to support the initiative of the community in their continued efforts to "help their kids". In addition, it allowed me to give something back to the community in return for the learning and support I had been given during my 13 years there.

The other benefit I anticipated was an improvement in the effectiveness of the program and an assessment of its future potential. By evaluating the program from the Indigenous participants' perspective, I hoped to determine what benefit they had gained from it. Thus, if the community wished to continue with the program, the information I delivered could be useful in future funding applications.

Researchers working in Indigenous contexts have been challenged to look at approaches to research which give voice to Indigenous systems of knowledge and meaning and to adopt methodologies that are culturally acceptable and workable (Smith, 1999, Rigney, 2001). To address these issues as a non-Indigenous person undertaking research in an Indigenous community, I needed to define not only my own position in relation to the community and the project, but also to adopt a methodology that would meet the criteria of being workable and culturally acceptable at the same time. The research framework needed to be rigorous, unobtrusive and be able to honour the voices of the Indigenous participants.

Insider Research

 "Insider research" which refers to the exploration of issues by practitioners who remain in the field of practice into which they are inquiring, has both advantages and risks that require careful consideration. Some of the advantages include the fact that insider research enables authentic engagement of the researcher in the research context, that it often provides rich data, and that it enables the researcher to use their insider knowledge to communicate with participants appropriately. In qualitative research, immersion in the research setting on the part of the researcher is often required to achieve a true understanding of the situation being studied (Bell, 1999, Guba & Lincoln, 1998). An "insider" is usually already immersed. From a research perspective, I was already immersed in the setting under study and could therefore be considered an insider. My relationship with the Napranum community was established over 13 years. I did not just live and work in the community as Director of the Napranum Preschool, but actively participated in the cultural and community life of Napranum. My own children were raised in the Napranum community and kinship relations with Indigenous community members were established during this time. However, my position was unique in that I could be considered both an insider and an outsider.

 Smith (1999) believes there are multiple ways of being both an insider and an outsider in Indigenous contexts and this applies to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. She believes that what is important in these contexts is that the lines of relating, specific to the project, as well as those previously established, must be clearly defined. An honest appraisal that situates oneself in the cultural context helps to address this issue. My personal involvement with the PaL program and my established

relationship with the Napranum community participants located me as an insider. Community members were very familiar with my presence both in a social and professional context. However, being non-Indigenous and being in a position of power (as Director of the Preschool) I might also have been considered an outsider.

At the end of the first year of the program, I resigned my position as preschool director and moved away geographically from the community to become a university student. The fact that I had not lived or worked in the community in any official capacity for over six months and that a new director was in place, helped distance me from the program but not the community members. In these ways I became more of an outsider with insider relationships guiding behaviour appropriate to the community context. One of the advantages of being an outsider is being in a position to present as a non-judgemental listener. This can sometimes enable participants to feel that they can comment freely about any subject under discussion (Roberts & McGinty, 1995). Although I could see myself as both insider and outsider, I am not sure that participants viewed me in this way. As my relationships were established over many years of community engagement, I think community members still viewed me as "belonging". In fact, some of the participants thought I still lived in Weipa.

The main risks associated with insider research relate to issues of power and assumptions about existing relationships. Power relations always exist in research situations and have the potential to influence subjects (Clarke, 1995). In insider research it is important to identify possible power issues and anticipate what their likely effects might be. I had concerns before I began interviewing participants that because of my previous role as director of the preschool, participants might tell me what they thought I

wanted to hear. Although I had acquired some distance and my relationship now was more that of "a friend", I was also aware that I was still a teacher in their eyes. In addition, my research required me to make enquiries about an educational tool and I thought this might influence people to tell me what they thought a teacher/researcher might want to hear. These concerns were addressed by being honest with participants about the purpose of the research and my position in relation to the research. I made it very explicit that I had no stake in the outcomes and that criticism of the program was important for the evaluation. Participants were encouraged to tell the "good, the bad and the ugly".

Another risk of insider research is the assumption that research will be approved and supported because of existing relationships. No researcher can expect or demand access to a potential research situation and this is particularly so for insider research (Bell, 1999). Community representatives and participants need time to consider and understand the proposed research project and they need to believe that the project is worthwhile and in their interests. As an insider, one cannot assume that because of an existing relationship, the community will trust you to "do the right thing" including doing what you need to for your research project. The correct consultative processes need to be followed and become part of the learning process for all involved.

In Napranum, a meeting of parents and home tutors revealed that participants were very unfamiliar with the notion of research and evaluation. The Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation, as the main funding body and a key stakeholder, had indicated their desire for an independent evaluation of the PaL program and this was discussed at this meeting. After some discussion, parents expressed support for an evaluation because

they understood how it might be useful in securing funding to continue the program. They were also very interested in finding out what effect the program was having for parents and children involved other than themselves. They were however, hesitant about an unknown "outsider" coming in to ask questions. The question raised was "Why can't you do it? Parents know you and feel comfortable; they won't feel comfortable with someone from outside."

As an insider, I had been given tacit approval to conduct the research. It was my responsibility to ensure the research was at least as ethical and respectful as outsider research, but also humble (Smith, 1999). As an insider I would expect to be more aware of appropriate ethical behaviour relative to both relationships and the gathering of knowledge for research purposes, but I could not assume that just because I knew people well and had taught many of their children that they would be willing to help by participating in the research project.

Insider research presents unique challenges, but in the qualitative domain where engagement is a desirable, not negative element of inquiry, the advantages outweigh the potential difficulties. In Indigenous contexts, the western notion of ethical distance from the subjects of research is a negative concept (Sheehan & Walker 2001); researchers should engage authentically with the community. Insider researchers usually have the advantage of prior engagement.

An Appropriate Methodology

The most appropriate methodology for any research is dependent upon the research question and the inquiry paradigm guiding the investigator (Bryman & Burgess,

1999). Although both quantitative and qualitative methods may be used with any research paradigm, the investigator's inquiry paradigm will determine many aspects of the practical conduct of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

My research was conducted in the Napranum Indigenous community where the PaL program trial was in operation.   Whilst my knowledge and understanding of appropriate ethical behaviour in Indigenous community contexts guided my interactions as a researcher, it was imperative that my research methodology also reflected this knowledge and understanding. My own worldview as it relates to this research is best described by the constructivist paradigm, where knowledge is created through interaction between and amongst the investigator and the investigated and priority is given to the inclusion of participant values (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Qualitative methodology, which is appropriate for a constructivist approach, is well suited to Indigenous contexts because it assumes the value of research in natural settings. A culturally acceptable methodology is one that stresses the importance of context, setting, and participants' frames of reference (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These criteria could be met using qualitative methods.   In addition, it was important in my project to humanise the research and enable the participants' voices to be heard. This could only be achieved using qualitative methods.   As the researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative methodology, I was able to build on my existing relationships and enhance the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Engagement, not detachment, on the part of the researcher, is a key element of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) and this was particularly appropriate for my inquiry.

Evaluation Research and Theory

Evaluation is often thought of in terms of accountability and outcomes that can be measured, compared and validated. Product oriented organizations are able to evaluate their effectiveness and ultimately the success of the organization or product by using methods that count, weigh, measure and compare. Although the evaluation of people oriented services generally has the mission of assisting the improvement of the quality of the service (Posvac & Carey, 1985), the approach or methodology adopted will be determined by a number of factors.

A range of approaches shape the field of program evaluation , each emphasizing different purposes and different methodologies (Patton, 2002).   The main intention of my research was to tell the story of the PaL program in Napranum. It was important therefore to choose an evaluation methodology that enabled me to capture both the essence of the program and the participants' perspectives.

Program evaluation, which originally focused on measuring the attainment of goals and objectives to ascertain whether a program "worked" (Monette, Sullivan & deJong, 1994) often relied heavily on experimental designs and quantitative measurement of outcomes (Patton, 2002).   Although some aspects of the PaL program could be evaluated in terms of quantity (e.g. number of people joining or leaving the program), many attributes were unable to be quantified. Numbers alone could not adequately capture program quality nor would they be able describe the effect of the program on the quality of life experienced by participants (Patton, 2002). A quantitative approach to evaluating the PaL program would not only have de-humanised the process, it would fail

to capture the meaning of the program to the participants and the quality of their experiences.

Evaluations, like any good research, should generate information that is useful and believable to those concerned with the program (Stringer, 1996). In the case of my research, the information generated needed to be useful and believable to the Indigenous parents, children and families as the main stakeholders. But it also needed to provide insight into the program for other interested parties not intimately involved.

A constructivist approach employing qualitative methodology personalizes and humanises research and evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In qualitative research, the evaluator has close contact with the program and sets out to understand and document the everyday reality of participants through face-to-face contact. Qualitative methods enabled me to tell the story of the Parents and Learning program by capturing and communicating participants' stories.

Patton, (2002) describes the constructivist view of evaluation as one that expects different stakeholders to have different experiences and perceptions of a program, all of which deserve attention and all of which are experienced as real. The emic constructions of stakeholders are not regarded as biased perceptions, but are considered completely legitimate (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). This view communicates total respect for participants' perceptions (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods permitted me, as the inquirer into the PaL program, to be especially sensitive to the differing perceptions of all the participants and allowed me to capture how the program was viewed by all the participants.

To effectively tell the story of the PaL program in Napranum it was necessary to focus on process. A process evaluation involves looking at how things happen rather than, or in addition to, outcomes (Patton, 2002). Emphasis is given to the importance of understanding people and programs in context. Detailed descriptions of how people engage with each other help depict the process and enable people not intimately involved in the program to understand how the program operates. Process evaluation allowed me to examine issues such as the things people experienced that make this program what it is, as well as what the participants actually did. By describing and understanding the details and dynamics of the program processes, I hoped to identify critical elements that contributed to the program's successes and failures.

Documenting how the program was implemented is an important part of the process evaluation. Implementation is often a critical factor in the success or failure of a program and local circumstances, rather than the nature of the program model, may play a more critical role in the effectiveness of a program. It was important to understand how implementation might have been affected by such elements. Only a process evaluation would help to uncover these details. It was expected that the information revealed would be useful in determining if the PaL program is a model worthy of replication, and if so, in which contexts.

Data Collection

The Complete Participant – an Interpretive Moment

The first phase of my research is interpretive and reflective. My involvement with the Parents and Learning program began at its inception when, as Director of the

Napranum Preschool, I responded to a number of interests and inquiries which lead to the later development and implementation of the program. During this phase, I was a complete participant, immersed in the setting in which I was already a member, but also completely unaware of what might be considered a research position and my future role in the research process.

The documentation of the evolution of the Parent's and Learning program from inception to implementation is an essential part of this research thesis. The investigation of how the program came into being and how and why it developed in its own particular way is a requisite part of a process evaluation (Patton, 2002). The history of the program, which emerges through the process evaluation, adds richness to the context of the research (Silverman, 2000) and completeness to the PaL story. It is intended that this description will enable people not involved with the program to gain valuable insight and understanding into how PaL began and developed in Napranum.

The processes involved in the data collection for this part of the research were:

- Documentary review– analysis of original submissions, goals, meeting records

- Informal interviews with program personnel

- Personal diary notes

- Interpretive research – making sense of events which had already taken place through a process of reflection (Cresswell, 2003)

The processes involved in fitting the program to the community are also important and as a developing program, flexibility and responsiveness were considered paramount. Although many issues associated with fitting the program to the community were dealt with during the initial development phase, development was continuous over the two-

year trial period. When the second year of the trial began, I was no longer living and working in the community but my commitment to continue to be involved with the program until the completion of its trial phase maintained links with PaL personnel in Napranum. Financial support from the funding body enabled me to continue my involvement through field trips to the community, and on my return to base, by regular phone contact. Whilst I had begun my involvement with the program as an unaware "complete participant", during this phase I moved further along the continuum towards "participant observer" (Adler & Adler, 1994). Data collection during this phase consisted of a written personal phone journal, and both written and audio taped personal reflections, which I recorded at the end of each day in the field.

The main research question focuses on the impact of the Parents and Learning program from the Indigenous parents' perspective. To gain this information, two broad questions of "what impact is the PaL program having on participants?" and "what are the things people experience that make the PaL program what it is?" were used as a guide in the design of the interview schedule (See Appendix A). The interview schedule comprised 17 questions covered under the following six categories:

- How do parents/families come into the program?

- What were parents' expectations?

- What is the process of learning for parents and children?

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

- What is the nature of home tutor/parent/child interactions?

- What have parents/children/families gained from participation in the PaL program?

Interviews

Parents' views, expectations and outcomes with regard to the program and their families were sought through an individual interview process. I wanted to record participants' own perceptions of the program and felt that individual interviews provided the most effective method to access this information. Participants' ideas and opinions form the main source of this evaluation. The process of interviewing is not only vital in collecting ideas and opinions; it is also invaluable in communicating respect to participants (Patton, 2002). As I wanted to gain a broad scope of information, I chose to interview all adult participants in the program. To begin, I contacted all participating parents and employees of the PaL program personally to discuss the research process prior to arranging interview times. This gave participants time to think about the process and to make an informed decision about whether or not they wished to participate in an interview. Participants were contacted again later to arrange an interview time suitable to them. All participating parents and employees of the PaL program agreed to be interviewed by me. Each participant also nominated the location for the interview. In most cases, participants chose to be interviewed in their own homes, usually sitting on the front veranda, but sometimes at the dining room table. In four instances, participants nominated their workplace as more convenient and interviews were conducted there. Permission was sought to record each participant's interview on audiotape for later transcription. In all but one interview, parents permitted me to record our conversation. In the one instance, permission was granted to takes notes instead of audio taping the interview.

An interview schedule of open-ended questions provided guidance for each of the interviews. "Semi –structured" interviewing, which is one of the most common approaches to interviewing in qualitative methodology (Bryman & Burgess, 1999, Cresswell, 2003, Marshall & Rossman, 1999), best describes the interview process I undertook. Although the same set of questions was covered in each interview, participants were encouraged to "tell their own story" in their own way. I also drew on the theory of hermeneutics, which requires a dialogue between the researcher and the research participants to co-construct reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Hermeneutics takes the position that nothing can be free of some perspective, so the first priority is to capture the perspective and context of the people being studied (Patton, 1990). The interviews were a "conversation with a purpose" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999); uncovering participants views but respecting how the participants framed and structured their responses. Participants were given a written copy of the interview schedule before commencing the interview so they could also direct the conversation and an uncomfortable "question-answer" dialogue could be avoided. As I was familiar with participants' families, conversations concerning general family well being were engaged in before commencing what was considered to be the more formal interview process. Re-connecting in this way helped set both participants and myself at ease.

Data Analysis

Although some focus in analysis derives from the questions generated at the beginning of the research, and some general themes emerged during fieldwork, the process of inductive analysis (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, Alexander & Stynes, 1990,

Patton, 1990) was the main data analysis method applied. Inductive analysis allows for ideas to emerge from the data as they are collected as well as during the more formal process of analysis involving the coding or categorizing of data (Ezzy, 2002, LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The process of developing coding families and coding categories as described by Bogden and Biklen (1982) was used as a guide for organising the data. This was achieved by working with the data over several time frames. Recorded interviews, being the main data set, were listened to twice; initially when I transcribed my own tapes, and a second time when I checked the transcriptions against the recordings. Interview transcripts were read and re-read, with possible codes, or families of codes being noted as I continued the reading.

Taking a break and distancing oneself from the data has value in allowing the researcher to regain perspective on the research relationship and view the material afresh and perhaps better informed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Before working through the data in a systematic manner to code it, I spent some time distancing myself from the raw data and returned to reading literature relevant to the project. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest reading, reading and re- reading enable the researcher to become very familiar with the data. This was certainly the case for me. The process of coding, by assigning letter codes to units of data, was undertaken after the break and during a third and fourth reading. After assigning words and phrases to represent the topics and patterns that emerged, I assigned identifying letters to each topic and systematically coded each transcript accordingly. Having done this I found I was able to group the codes into family codes such as those described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). Four main family codes covered the 22 coding categories that emerged from the data. These were:

- Perspectives held by subjects and subjects' ways of thinking about other people – which covered topics such as how parents thought about themselves, their children and other community members

- Process codes – encompassing the processes involved in development and participation

- Activity codes – which covered what actually happened and what people did

- Relationship and social structure codes – which covered topics focused on relationships, communication and interaction.

I also reviewed how I might combine Van Maanen's (1990) technique of phenomenological analysis with coding to discern the main emergent themes. Phenomenological analysis is a method of trying to determine the themes or experiential structures that make up a particular experience (Van Maanen, 1990). I wanted to try to grasp the meaning of the experiences of the PaL program participants and the process of phenomenological reflection and thematic analysis provided the methodology to do so. Coding of interviews provided the method of analysis for answering questions relative to program impact but I also wanted to ensure that I captured the essence of participants' experiences.

The process of phenomenological reflection might be considered incongruent with the mechanical application of coding (Van Maanen, 1990), but I believe the process of reading and re-reading the raw data helped define the themes, whilst the coding helped locate the evidence supporting the theme. Phenomenological reflection involves reflecting on the lived experience to discover the thematic aspects of that experience, to "see" the meaning (Van Maanen, 1990). In my analyses, phenomenological reflection is

used to determine the themes that make up the experiences of the Indigenous parents as participants in the PaL program.

My own personal positioning in relation to the research context and the program participants was the most influential factor in determining my choice of methodology. Researching as an insider in an Indigenous community presented some very specific challenges, including the choice of an appropriate methodology, which needed to be addressed. Qualitative methodology provided approaches that were respectful, contextual and utilised tools that could give voice to the perspectives of the participants. To reveal how participants had responded to the PaL program, the process of coding and the process of phenomenological reflection provided the tools for analysis. The following two chapters present my findings.

Chapter 4   From Inception to Implementation

"Empowerment is not a tangible commodity, it is a process" (Delgado-Gaitin, 2001)

This chapter documents the evolution of the Parents and Learning program in Napranum from inception to implementation. It helps tell the PaL story by describing how the program came into being and why it developed in the particular way that it did. This part of the PaL story is significant because it highlights the importance of relationships and community participation in decision-making. By recording the history of the development of the program, it is hoped the reader will gain an understanding of the role of process and how process influences ownership, commitment and empowerment.

Data for this chapter is derived from an analysis of documents (original submissions, goals, meeting records), informal interviews with program personnel and interpretation of past events on the part of this researcher as a participant in the process. The factors contributing to the PaL story are outlined under separate headings.

Positioning of Self

The researcher self encompasses more than one's positioning within the research project (Roberts & McGinty, 1995) and is an important part of the story one tells about the community under study (Delgado-Gaitin, 2001). Although I have discussed the researcher self and my positioning as an insider researcher in an earlier chapter (see

chapter 3), my own personal history with the Napranum Preschool staff and parents, and the lessons I learned over the years both professionally and personally, affected my responsiveness to the community.   My own personal philosophy, my position as an employee and resident in the Napranum community and my experiences as a parent all had an influence. Initially as a facilitator, and now as a researcher, I am able to reflect on this influence and the role it played in the development of the PaL program.

During the years preceding the development of the PaL program, parents had, on a number of occasions, approached me (as Director of the preschool) with requests for assistance in preparing their children for formal schooling. My response was to encourage parents to spend time doing things they enjoyed with their children to develop their children's confidence and self-esteem.   Whilst this was and still is important, I was later to reflect that I had really missed the point and had not really been listening to what parents were asking. This became apparent as parents' requests continued and increased to include requests to photocopy pre-writing books which they had purchased themselves. What parents really wanted to know was how they could help their children be ready for school literacy learning.   As an early childhood professional, I, like many other early childhood educators, had regarded the formal teaching of literacy skills as belonging in the school, not the preschool environment (David, Raban, Ure, Gouch, Jago, Barriere & Lambirth, 2000) and had been consciously resisting what I considered to be a "pull from the top".   My experience as a parent however, caused me to think differently.

My own experience as a parent of a child, who began mainstream schooling having lived only in the Napranum community, was an intimidating one.   It challenged me to reflect on what the beginning school experience might mean for those parents who

did not belong to the dominant white society, whose schooling experiences may have been negative and for whom schooling had yielded less than satisfactory results (Fitzgerald, 2001). I also became very aware of how schools encourage parent involvement but always dictate the terms, allowing parents to only take part in what schools see as important. When schools dictate the terms, parents can only be recipients of whatever is proposed (Ashton & Cairney, 2001, Delgado-Gaitin, 2001, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). The level of interest in school based parent participation activities is not a fair indicator of parental interest in children's education (Sampson, 2002) and the Napranum parents' interest in a program such as PaL verify this.

Being in the unique position of living and working in the Napranum community for 12 years enabled me to observe the educational progress of many of the children I had taught as preschoolers. As preschoolers, I considered their enthusiasm and readiness to begin formal education similar to any other group of children, yet positive school outcomes beyond preschool seemed to elude many of them. My observations were confirmed with the statistics that demonstrate the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school achievement (National School English Literacy Survey, 1997, National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000) and suggests that transition from preschool to formal schooling resulting in positive outcomes appears to be particularly difficult for young Indigenous learners and their parents (Clancy & Simpson, 2002, Fleer &Williams-Kennedy, 2002, Munns & Connolly, 1996). This concerned me as a teacher and as a parent. It obviously concerned Napranum parents as well.

An interacting set of circumstances set the development of the PaL program in motion, but it developed essentially in response to the increasing number of requests from

preschool parents wanting guidance on preparing their children for the rigours of formal schooling and a desire by Napranum Preschool staff to rethink and reconceptualize parent participation in young children's education. It was fortuitous that at the same time, the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation expressed an interest in supporting Indigenous parents through early childhood programs.

The Right Place at the Right Time

Early in the year 2000, the HIPPY (Home Instruction Programme for Preschool Youngsters) program and the possible benefits the program might have for Indigenous children was brought to the attention of The Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation by the Director of Aboriginal Education Programs, New South Wales. She had attended a HIPPY workshop in Israel in 1999 and felt that a HIPPY program could greatly benefit Indigenous children. An Australian chapter of HIPPY was operating in Fitzroy, Melbourne, with families derived from a wide range of disadvantaged and ethnic backgrounds but there were no HIPPY programs targeting Australian Indigenous children and families.

The Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation is a philanthropic body that operates independently of the company and gives expression to the company's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Policy. As a relationship already existed between Comalco and Napranum Preschool, a Foundation member contacted the preschool to gauge opinion of the HIPPY program and its possible application in the Napranum Indigenous community. Initial inquiries were conducted through the HIPPY Australia program and in July 2000, an Indigenous preschool staff member, (who was also a parent of young

children) and myself (as Director of the preschool) attended the inaugural HIPPY mini-conference in Melbourne.

In attendance at the conference were representatives from the La Perouse Aboriginal community who had just returned from HIPPY international training in Israel, coordinators of the two Victorian HIPPY programs, and representatives from the Aboriginal community in Shepparton. This conference provided the opportunity to find out first hand what HIPPY had to offer and how it actually worked in the community. We were able to observe a program session in action, view a sample of the teaching materials, listen to the experiences of Melbourne and Geelong staff with HIPPY and engage in discussion with representatives from other Indigenous communities. Both Shepparton and Napranum representatives at the conference felt that HIPPY might be very difficult to sustain, that the materials were not particularly relevant or appropriate to Australian Indigenous families, and that role play, which was the principal training tool, would be difficult because of issues of "shame". They did however, like the structured nature of the program, the concept of parents teaching other parents and the fact that the program was delivered to families at home.   As an early childhood professional, I reacted negatively to the highly structured nature of the HIPPY materials, but felt the concept of parents teaching other parents had a lot to offer.

Armed with this information, we returned to Napranum to share our experience with Napranum Preschool staff and community members who had similar responses. The aspects of concern regarding HIPPY raised by preschool staff and community members were:

- Hippy was a franchised program that had to be set up and run according to guidelines set out by the parent body in Israel.

- Training took place in Israel and staff were not supportive of travelling to Israel.

- The community wanted teaching materials that would be relevant to the Napranum Indigenous community.

- Because of training requirements and franchise agreements, it would not be possible to begin a HIPPY program by 2001. It was felt something should be put in place as soon as practicable, while there was strong interest and support within the community.

The aspects of HIPPY regarded as valuable were:

- The structure of the program; coordinator, home tutors, parents teaching other parents, home delivery.

- Simple, but well planned and highly structured teaching materials not dependent on high levels of literacy on the part of the user.

- Clear instructions for carrying out every stage of the program.

- The program supplemented preschool and was not a substitute for attendance.

The final response to the HIPPY program for Napranum was "Why can't we develop our own program with materials and a structure relevant to us?" It was felt there was enough expertise in the community at the time to pursue this as an alternative. The concept of the proposal was taken to a parent meeting in September 2000 and was met with enthusiasm and a request for a program as soon as possible. The responsibility to set the process in motion for development of a program was entrusted to two preschool

staff members – the coordinator of the Indigenous language program and myself, as

director. A submission for funding the development of a locally owned program which

viewed parent participation as home-based was submitted to the Rio Tinto Aboriginal

Foundation and met with a positive response. It is doubtful that anything further would

have developed without such generous support being forthcoming.

PaL as a Community Process

The PaL program was not conceptualised as a research project that began with set

theories about learning, literacy and home-school relationships, but it did begin with

some notions about culture, families, literacy learning and schooling which played an

important role in how the program developed. Notions of access and equity, supporting

parents and children in gaining knowledge of the culture of schooling and knowledge of

text based learning were based on the collective experiences of Napranum Preschool staff

and community members. Such notions have since been substantiated by research which

clearly documents that the "habitus" of schooling is one which many families are

generally not familiar with (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 1998) and that

equal access does not necessarily mean equity of outcomes (McGinty, 2002). The

requests from parents of preschoolers indicated that parents wanted to know about how

children learned things at school and what they could do to support this learning.

Families had a right to know and a right to receive the assistance they were asking for.

To not deliver the information to parents when requested would have been supporting

their continued exclusion from accessing the dominant discourse of schooling (Luke,

1994).

Although the responsibility for developing the program was placed upon me and my colleague, we understood that ownership of the program belonged to the Napranum preschool and parents. At the time, we were both employees of the Napranum Preschool and it was our responsibility as professional educators to respond to the needs of the preschool community. We were entrusted with the task of using our expertise to make a program for Napranum parents and their children become a reality. It has been suggested that some parent participation programs have a covert objective of modifying home educational environments so that they more closely resemble preferred school culture (Ashton & Cairney, 2001, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). While demystifying school learning for parents and children was one of notions guiding the development of the program, modifying the home environment was not an objective of PaL. The underpinning philosophy of the program was to support and build on parents' strengths as parents who cared about their children's future. Parents wanted to learn what they needed to know in order to help their children succeed at school; they wanted to know about "school learning" – "alphabets, colours, shapes, and numbers".

The knowledge and advice of the Indigenous preschool staff as parents, extended family members and early childhood educators was critical in developing PaL. They provided the barometer and guidance for the structure of the program, the recruitment of staff as well as direction on how the program would best work to fit the rhythm of community life. Their knowledge and advice regarding issues of timing, family mobility, relationships, family obligation and language was crucial in achieving the "best fit" of the program.

Developing the Tools

When the decision was made to develop a Napranum based program late in the year 2000, parents expressed a desire that it happen as soon as possible, preferably beginning in 2001. In order to be able to respond while enthusiasm was high, another early childhood educator, also resident in Weipa, was engaged to write the first level of the curriculum in consultation with preschool staff and community members. She had worked with us before, was familiar with the preschool and staff and had past as well as current experience teaching in Indigenous schools. In addition, the staff and parents felt comfortable entrusting the initial curriculum writing to her.

As the HIPPY model was considered valuable (but not entirely appropriate for the Napranum community context) it was used as the basis for design of the curriculum. Some HIPPY materials (weekly activity packs and children's storybooks) had been viewed at the HIPPY conference but were available only to groups who purchased the franchise and undertook the training. Napranum preschool staff and parents believed the concept of weekly activity packs was valuable, but they wanted control over choice of materials.

The decision to use books as the foundation of the program material and to include a book in each weekly activity pack was based on the knowledge that books were seen as "education" in the community and that while books were recognised as important, they were not always part of the home. The decision to make the program "book based" has also since been substantiated by research which shows parents sharing books with and reading to their children rates not only as the oldest and most widespread preschool

literacy intervention, but as one with very strong evidence that it benefits children's early attainment in reading (Brooks, 2002).

While the optimum number of families the program could be delivered to determined the quantities of materials required, choice of materials was often influenced by other issues. These included whether multiple copies of selected materials were available, whether materials could be easily accessed in a remote community, and how quickly materials could be prepared. Financial constraints and manageability also dominated this decision making.

Selecting materials

Level 1 - Good quality picture storybooks that had universal appeal and were appropriate for preschool aged children provided the foundation for Level 1 of the PaL materials. The main criteria used in selection of Level 1 books were that books should be attractive, easy to read, and reflect a multicultural community. Indigenous staff and parents reviewed the final selection of proposed books for this level of the curriculum before the process of ordering multiple copies began. Activities were designed to relate to the books and covered a number of different focus areas relating to:

- Language development and verbal expression

- Eye/Hand co-ordination

- Auditory, tactile and visual discrimination

- Logical thinking and pre-maths concepts

- Conceptual development

- Self concept

- Creativity   (Napranum Preschool, 2000)

The curriculum writer designed games and instruction cards covering these focus areas to accompany the selected books. The games and instructions as single versions were reviewed, adjusted and modified by preschool staff and PaL personnel before being produced in multiple copies to be sent out to families for further trial. Feedback received from families was incorporated into further revisions of the kits and instructions.

Level 2

Development of Level 2 of the curriculum materials reflects a response to the lessons learned during the trial of Level 1 and due to a number of factors, involved far greater collaboration with Indigenous parents who were now more experienced critics and knew what they and their children responded positively to. The process of selecting books for Level 2 began in 2001. Having learned which books worked well with families in Level 1, my colleague (as a program developer) arranged for a selection of books that might work for Level 2 to be sent from two bookstores; one specializing in early childhood, and one specialising in Indigenous literature. Parents and home tutors reviewed books from a broad selection to decide on the final 15 to be included in the Level 2 curriculum. They indicated that although Indigenous content in the books was important, they wanted books that were visually attractive and had an appealing storyline. They also felt their children should be exposed to books with concepts outside the domains of their own culture. This view is confirmed in parents' and children's responses to the selected books.

> …the cultural ones, she said, "Mum, there's brown kids, black kids, so she relates to that… I like it like this, because we can't have all black stuff on it because then they wouldn't know what a circus is or something like that.
> (PaL parent 7)

The final selection of books for Level 2 reflected parents' choices, with seven out of 15 having Indigenous content.

As Level 2 of the PaL program is undertaken during children's first year of formal schooling we felt it was important for PaL activities to be very different to what children encountered in school work or school homework. As parents ourselves, we knew that if the materials were going to be used after a long day at school, they would need to be fun for parents and children alike. The idea of commercial quality games was identified and raised with home tutors (as representatives of parents) at a weekly meeting and met with approval. Consultation with the local Head of Junior School identified the following focus areas to consider for inclusion:

- Visual and Aural memory

- Following instructions

- Problem solving and comprehension

- Maths concepts of space, number and measurement

- Letter knowledge, rhyming and left to right progression

- Storytelling/writing

Where possible, games complementing children's skills development were sought, but more importantly, games that were considered parent and child friendly were chosen for trial. As activities to accompany Level 2 books were being developed while Level 1 was already in progress, wider collaboration with home tutors and parents was possible. As home tutors were obtaining feedback from their own children as well as other parents on books and materials, they were well placed to individually trial games and activities before multiple copies were ordered.

Language

One aspect of the HIPPY program that parents and Indigenous staff thought valuable was the very specific instructions for using materials. In the PaL program, it was decided that the specific instructions would be provided on a specially designed instruction card. The inclusion of an instruction card also provided an opportunity to introduce some educational jargon to increase parents' familiarity with "school talk" and hopefully demystify the language sometimes used by children's teachers.   The instruction card included in the weekly activity kits was to have clear, step-by-step instructions and was written in "plain English"; standard English in a form that community members were comfortable with. The language on each instruction card was reviewed and revised by the Indigenous coordinator and the home tutors to ensure that written instructions reflected the ways in which Napranum parents might use Standard English with their children.

Indigenous families in Napranum speak different forms of Aboriginal English, Torres Strait Islander Creole and Standard Australian English (Census, 2001). When the issue of the language of instruction for the activity cards was raised with parents, it was made very clear to the developers that parents did not want local languages used on instruction cards, but that they wanted plain English. This did not mean that parents would necessarily use that language with their children, but that a model for Standard English was provided, should they choose to use it.

> English is important, but I kinda like switch…if they don't understand it then I'll
> say it in home language and then say it again in Standard English.
> (Home tutor/parent 5)

Personnel

Recruitment of personnel for the program is obviously a critical issue. As the essential elements and roles have previously been discussed (see chapter one), this section reports on the processes involved in matching home tutors and families.

When parents first nominated to participate in the PaL program, they were also able to nominate to become a home tutor. Encouraged by preschool staff who were sometimes friends or family, three parents nominated themselves for the role in 2001 and a further two joined the team in 2002. Being an Indigenous parent and also a member of the Napranum community was an essential pre-requisite for home tutors.

It was expected and accepted that community knowledge and existing relationships might also determine who could deliver to whom. From the list of parents who had nominated to participate in the program, home tutors were able to say which families they had comfortable relationships with and which families would be easy to visit. Sometimes simple issues such as whether a family owned a "cheeky" dog might influence the comfort level of the home tutors. The coordinator of the program also visited families to discuss their choice of home tutor and in this way averted any potential difficulties in delivery. This is not to say that there were never any difficulties or that there would never be any changes, but both families and home tutors were involved in the matching and were also made aware of the need to raise any issues that might develop, with the coordinator, so they could be resolved.

A Learning Network

Once personnel for the PaL program were recruited, final preparations for implementation in the community in 2001 began. The home tutors and coordinator were involved in weekly training sessions on how to deliver the activity kits. They were also involved in the preparation of resources and materials. Single games produced as a sample had to be replicated 15 times to meet delivery needs. The tasks were at times tedious, and the coordinator, when later asked about her response to possible changes in the materials suggested "not so much fiddly cutting, laminating and stuff like that". But this was a time when everyone became familiar with the materials, exchanged information, developed new skills and interacted with people outside their own family circle.

> it was good having to do the training together cause you get to work with other parents, people that you don't usually see in the community or don't socialise with for whatever reason.
> (Home tutor/parent 4)

On-going learning

Weekly training sessions were on-going throughout the PaL trial period. Presented by a training support person (my colleague initially), the sessions focused on understanding how to use the books and how to play the games that were included in each weekly kit. Role play was used as a method of instruction, with home tutors taking turns to play the parts of parent and child. Despite an initial negative reaction to the use of role play within the HIPPY program, preschool staff and parents (as home tutors) considered that role play was worth trying because it modelled how to use the kits and was not dependent on parents having written literacy skills.

Training sessions also provided a forum for understanding the reasons why particular books and activities were included and what their relatedness to "school learning" was. As the tutors often worked together cutting, sorting and compiling materials for kits, any other issues they might have were discussed and general gossip was shared. The informal networking that took place was an unanticipated though very positive outcome for home tutors.

Feedback – it's only a trial

A crucial element of the weekly training sessions was reinforcement of the fact that the PaL program was a trial and as such meant that it could and should be altered to improve its appropriateness and effectiveness. The concept of criticising a program written by teachers was at first difficult for some of the parents to come to terms with, but over time as they used materials with their own children and collected and collated feedback from the families they delivered to, it became easier. They realised that only they, as parents and community members, were in a position to know how families responded to the kits and what might improve their effectiveness.

A change in confidence was evident when the development of Level 2 materials began. Books and games for Level 2 had been selected in 2001, but activity cards had not been written, nor had the materials for each activity been collated. The curriculum writer for Level 1 was not available but having learned many lessons from Level 1, we realised that it was a task we should do ourselves. The major difficulty was that neither I nor my colleague (whose role had been training support for PaL) was now living in Weipa.

The coordinator and home tutors of the program rose to the challenge that presented itself by continuing the training and delivery of Level 1 of the program to a new cohort of families with long distance phone support and support from the Napranum preschool staff. The Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation continued their support of the program, enabling the program developers (myself and colleague) to return to Napranum on a regular basis to provide ongoing support and training. This time was also used for collaborative curriculum writing of Level 2. The issues that were discussed included the language to be used, whether to keep the same format as Level 1, and how as parents and home tutors, they thought the materials would or should be used. We read the books, played the games and adjusted instructions according to any difficulties that were experienced. Later, when writing could not be done collaboratively due to geographical distance, drafts were sent, individual families tried games and instructions were again adjusted. Instruction cards were removed one step further from permanency with the decision not to laminate them. This not only saved time and money but also served as a reminder that instructions could and should change if and when they were thought to be inappropriate.

Timing

Time was another element that was considered integral in delivery of the program. The program needed to be delivered at a time when parents would be at home. This was negotiated between the home tutor and families, but mostly took place on Monday mornings, fitting in with the school and working week and allowing plenty of time for parents to use the materials with their children before they were collected again

at the end of the week. The participant uptake data (see chapter 5) indicates that sometimes parents did not receive kits because they were not at home, though the numbers are comparatively small. Delivery times that did not consider parents needs would most likely have resulted in a lower participant uptake rate.

Summary

There were many factors that led to the development of the PaL program in Napranum. Whilst some of the ideas and concepts have been borrowed from the HIPPY program, PaL has developed in its own unique way, adapting to the needs and responses of parents and families in Napranum in order to achieve the best fit. It has been a process of sharing and learning for those involved in the development. The next chapter discusses how the program rolled out in the community and what impact it had for those families who chose to participate.

Chapter 5   Measuring Program Effectiveness

This chapter presents the findings on the impact and effectiveness of the Parents and Learning Program. The findings are drawn from the analysis of interviews conducted with Indigenous parents as participants in the PaL program, interviews with home tutors in their role as both tutors and parents, and interviews with the Indigenous coordinator of the program. The interviews are supplemented with documentation relating to program management and delivery and with data drawn from the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation Evaluation.

Four themes, which emerged from analysis of the data, are represented in the descriptions and discussion that follows. The first theme, "Getting Involved" describes the processes leading up to participation whilst the second theme, "Learning Occurs in Relaxed Environments" describes the particular elements associated with delivery of the program. The third theme, "Relationships, Communication and Understanding" focuses on the significance and expansion of community and family connections, and the fourth theme, "Building Confidence and Competence by Sharing Knowledge" encompasses the participants' perceptions about themselves and their children in relation to the program.

Getting Involved

This first theme reviews the processes involved in the recruitment of participants and answers questions relating to program promotion, eligibility and choice. The

importance of adopting communication strategies appropriate to the context is highlighted within this theme.

The PaL program was a new initiative being trialled in the Napranum community. Napranum Preschool, as the organisation supporting the development and implementation of the program, was also responsible for its promotion to parents and families. There were the two main processes involved in the promotion of the program; meetings and personal visitations. Preschool staff were well aware of the difficulties associated with disseminating information to parents (meetings were not always well attended and notes were not always read) and addressed this issue by conducting personal visits to parents and families. Two Indigenous community members, who had been appointed as coordinators for the Pal program, visited families, showed samples of books and activity kits and gave a brief explanation of how the program would work. Although meetings were also held to disseminate information about the program, only 8 participants found out about the program in this way compared with 14 participants who found out through personal visitations. This indicates that in this context, personal contact was the more effective communication strategy.

Whilst the maximum number of participants in the PaL program considered to be physically and financially manageable was set at 30 (15 for each level), program records indicated that 24 families took up the offer over the 2 year period. Although this number is only slightly more than half the number of eligible families (those with children aged 4 – 6 years residing in Napranum numbered 40,Napranum Preschool Enrolment records, 2002), interviews with six non-participants (as a convenience sample) (Makin, 2003) indicated most eligible parents were aware of the PaL program and the invitation to

participate but chose not to due to family and/or work commitments. Families were not targeted or selected according to a criterion of perceived need as has often been past practice of service deliverers in Indigenous communities (Pearson, 2000a). They were personally informed and equipped with information that enabled them to make their own choice. Parents were invited to participate, but the choice and option of taking up the offer remained a parent and/or family responsibility. Parents had to formally indicate their interest in participating in the program and/or becoming a home tutor, by ticking, signing and returning a printed form to the preschool.

Making the choice

Parents were asked during the course of their interview why they became involved in the PaL program. The answer to this question was unanimous amongst parents and program personnel. They became involved to "help their kids". Starting school is a key time for parents, children and educators, and putting effort into helping children prepare for this important time is considered time well spent (Dockett & Perry, 2003). Napranum parents saw participation in the PaL program as one such opportunity:

> Because its good learning, teach kids how to read and get them learning. When they're ready to go to Grade 1, they'll know what they're looking towards
> (Parent 12)

> I knew it would help her (daughter) when she is going to primary school
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

> I thought it would help them with their reading, oh not reading, but colours and all the simple stuff.
> (Parent 22)

> For the interest of my son, going to pick up things more, especially the alphabets and the numbers
> (Parent 11)

The context in which children start school has a major influence on the nature and success of the experience, (Clancy, Simpson & Howard, 2001) and children whose families reflect a positive attitude have a better chance of succeeding at school (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Napranum parents who were concerned that their children might not experience success at school wanted to do something about it and this was a motivating factor in choosing to participate:

> I was worried that he's not gonna do good at school
> (Home tutor/parent 6)

> I thought it would be good for Kathy, yeh, cause Kathy, I was worried about her –
> I didn't think she was smart enough
> (Parent 7)

> So Brian can be up here instead of down the bottom
> (Parent 19)

Although the coordinator of the program was personally recruited and became involved because she was looking for a workplace opportunity that would be flexible enough to accommodate her own young family's needs, a personal interest in the possibilities of the program influenced her decision to become involved. She had spent some time working as tutor with Napranum children who were experiencing learning difficulties in the early years of primary school:

> They were in the category where they're struggling and I thought maybe this is a
> program that will make them ready
> (PaL coordinator)

Expectations

Linked closely with the reasons for becoming involved in the program are the

expectations parents had of the program. Not surprisingly, most of the expectations

related to their children's learning:

> I thought that it's gonna be good, that she's gonna benefit out of this. Cause she
> at school, she learn there and then come home and she's learning her own stuff
> (Parent 17)

> Brian's the main thing, helping him learn
> (Parent 19)

> I hoped that it was just reading books and doing things
> (Parent 12)

Some parents also included the idea of spending quality time together:

> Well, quality time with him, and to see how he's developing, and to see how good
> he is at the activities
> (Parent 8)

> Spending time together – and for him to learn a lot
> (Parent 9)

The incongruence between teachers and parents understanding of early literacy

development has been discussed in relation to recent research that found that many

parents' views relating to the development of literacy were often strongly linked to a

skills based view of literacy learning (Makin & McNaught, 2001). This view is also

reflected in some of the parents' expectations of the program:

> I was expecting my son to get his words, his alphabets straight
> (Parent 11)

That Kathy would know her colours, learn how to count, and appreciate books
(Parent 7)

I hoped they would learn their colours and learn about reading and writing
(Parent 22)

Two parents, whose actual participation in the program had been very limited, reported

no initial expectations.

Learning Occurs in Relaxed Environments

The actual activities that occurred as a result of the PaL program relate to the

delivery of materials and families responses to both the home visits and the PaL activity

kits. Learning occurs in relaxed environments and the fact that families are more relaxed

at home emerged as a theme that encompassed the differing responses.

Home delivery

A key element of the PaL program is home delivery. PaL views parent

participation in early education as home-based and supports this model by providing

home tutors who deliver PaL activity kits to parents at home. This model was clearly

supported by all participants who felt that home delivery was a good thing:

Sometimes I get overworked and I get tired and you know if it's me to pick it up,
I might feel, "oh, I'm tired, I won't pick it up". It's good if someone drops it
off…I rely on whoever brings it around
(Parent 15)

It's more comfortable when they come and see me at home…the home delivery,
that's better
(Parent 11)

Its good you know, like having someone like Carmen come round. It sort of
makes you feel that you can teach someone too
(Parent 17)

Everyone was happy with the activity kits being delivered to the home and didn't feel

that anything needed to be changed to make this better.   However, the strategy of role-

play during home delivery had clearly not been followed through.

Role play

When delivering the program to parents at home, home tutors were expected to

use role play as the method of instruction. As well as overcoming problems of illiteracy

and English as a Second Language (HIPPY, 1998), role play was considered a way of

promoting a comfortable, friendly, non-threatening learning environment in which there

is plenty of room for having fun and making mistakes (PaL Handbook, 2001). It was

acknowledged that parents might feel uncomfortable with role play initially, but the

interview data showed there was not just discomfort; there was in fact strong resistance to

this aspect of the program. Only one home tutor reported using this method when

delivering to parents at home. Parents and home tutors were clearly uncomfortable with

role play:

> It is working, but not the way she's supposed to do it. Like this role playing stuff
> – we don't do anything like that – I find that really funny and I just don't like it
> anyway
> (Parent 7)

> to me, it just falls on deaf ears…some parents because of their job or probably
> their home situation, they have their own way of doing it and I think having one
> of us to role play would probably feel funny
> (Home tutor/parent 5)

> She asks if I want tutoring but I usually say "no, I'm, fine", "I'll read the activity
> sheet". I feel I don't need her to. It's alright, I prefer to do it myself without any
> tutoring
> (Parent 8)

Instead of role-play, home tutors and parents had developed their own patterns of

interaction. In most cases home tutors used explanation and referral to the activity card

as the main method in home delivery and parents were happy with that:

> Well for me I'm happy with the way it is now. Like I understand. I can just read
> and go through
> (Parent 17)

> She explains to me through the PaL activity sheet and then when she comes back
> at the end of the week, I give her back the folder and feedback on what we did
> and how we went
> (Parent 16)

> Like Mandy (home tutor) explains it slowly and straight out
> (Parent 11)

Using the tools

A feature of the PaL activity kit is the accompanying activity card, which sets out

in plain English exactly how to use the book and games with a child for each week. The

activity card is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the book, the

activity and the purpose. The second section states what materials are needed and what is

included in the kit. The third section describes in precise steps how to use the storybook

and activity materials and the last section is a congratulation and affirmation stating how

the parent has just helped their child.

Parents do not need to be literate to participate in the PaL program with their

child. Home tutors were expected to show parents how to use the materials, thus

enabling parents of all levels of literacy to feel comfortable with using the tools. The

program developers intended the activity card to be a back up for both parents and home

tutors, with role play providing the main training.

Interestingly enough though, most parents used the card for guidance. When parents were asked, "How do you work out what to do with the books and the activities?" the card was referred to in all but one case. Although six participants were home tutors who had been trained with the materials and five parents made a clear reference to their home tutors explanation, many parents worked out what to do by "reading the card":

> Well, yeh, she's got a sheet of paper that tells me step by step what to do.
> (Parent 17)

> No, the card explains most but otherwise if I don't understand then I go back and ask Linda (home tutor)…I don't really go much back on the card
> (Parent)

Not everyone read all parts of the card, but everyone was satisfied with the card and had no suggestions for improvement. When I realised that many parents used the card more than expected, I probed this a little further to find out if parents read the last section of the card – the section that introduces parents to some educational jargon and congratulates parents for helping their child learn. e.g. "Congratulations, you have just helped your child to develop their memory skills" (PaL Activity Sheet). Although this question was not explored with all participants, six parents out of 15 (who were not home tutors) said they read the bottom section of the card. Three of these six referred to the praise for children and three made specific reference to how the section enabled them to understand how the activity actually helped their child's learning:

> Because it helps…you don't know how it will do good (otherwise)
> (Parent 9)

> I read what kind of skill she's going to be learning this activity
> (Parent 7)

When parents joined the PaL program, they signed a simple contract in which they agreed to use the PaL books and activities with their child four times a week for 10 - 15 minutes at a time. No participants mentioned this contract when they were asked how and when they used the books and activities with their children. A wide range of responses indicated that parents and children's use of the kits was individualised within each family and was often influenced by very practical matters. Most parents used the kits in the evenings:

> Before supper, but "dark time"
> (Parent 14)
>
> Mainly nighttime, after supper, 'cause during the day he's running around with his friends
> (Parent 8)

Parents generally chose to use the kits at times when children could focus. There was also wide variation in the number of times parents used the kits with their children, some parents using the kits every day or whenever their children requested it and others when it fitted into their schedule. Factors such as the popularity of the book and/or activity as well as other family disruptions or obligations often determined how often the kit was used in any one week but it was almost always used by either the parent and child or the child independently:

> Well they (the children) like doing it everyday
> (Parent 22)
>
> If it's a good activity, we can do it for about an hour and a half just sitting there mucking around
> (Parent 7)

> …the other time I wasn't giving my time up to him and I sort of got slackened off on it. That was in the beginning but in the middle I got used to it and I was doing it every night, then just a couple of months ago, stopped again because of all the passing (deaths in the family)
> (Parent 11)

Only two participants who received most of the kits had not got around to using them with their child. One parent reported sometimes using it once a week, the other admitting that she had been forgetting about it:

> I find it easy but I was forgetting about it
> (Parent 10)

Participant uptake

Program records enabled me to view how many kits were actually delivered to families in 2002. This is summarised in Table 1. Deliveries and participant uptake numbers show the total number of kits (which include books and games) that were circulated in the community during the 2002 school year. The main reasons given for kits not being delivered were because parents were away (34 instances), because home tutors could not find parents on delivery day (35 instances) or because tutors were sick (22 instances) and were unable to deliver to their assigned families.   Despite these difficulties, a total of 436 kits were delivered, which meant that the same number of children's books were circulated in family homes across the community.

Table 1. PaL Kit Deliveries and Participant Uptake 2002

PaL Level	No. of families	No. of kits deliverable	No. of kits actually delivered	Deliveries as a %
Level 1	12	312	251	76.5%
Level 2	14	242	185	80.5%
TOTAL	**26**	**554**	**436**	**79%**

Participant retention

Aligned closely with participant uptake are the figures of participant retention i.e. how many families/children began the PaL program and remained in it for the two year trial period. During 2001 and 2002, two cohorts of participants began the program. Because of the nature of the program and the time line associated with this research, retention rates cannot be fully explored and retention for the two year period can be viewed for only the first cohort. In 2001, 14 participants began Level 1of the program. In 2002, 11 of the initial cohort moved onto Level 2. The three participants who dropped out of the program did so because their families were moving to another community. One new participant was included in the Level 2 group, one participant chose to repeat Level 1, and one participant dropped out late in the 2002. At the end of the two-year trial period, 10 of the original cohort remained with the program, a retention rate of 71.5%.

Retention for the second cohort can only be viewed for one year of the program (2002). This presents a limited view of retention but nonetheless enables the observer to draw some conclusions about the commitment of the participants. The second cohort began Level 1 at the beginning of 2002 with 13 participants. 12 participants remained

with the program at the end of 2002, a retention rate of 92%. By the end of 2002, 22

children (20 families) out of a total of 27 children (24 families) who had participated in

the PaL program remained. An overall retention rate of 81.5%. These figures are

summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Child Participants in PaL 2001 - 2002

PaL Level	Beginning 2001	Beginning 2002	End 2002	Retention as %
Level 1	14	11	10	71.5%
Level 2	Curriculum N/A	13	12	92%

Having fun

Home tutors sought child and parent response to each weekly kit when the used

kit was picked up and the new kit delivered. This feedback enabled activities and

instructions to be reviewed and revised where necessary and also provided tutors with

some sense of satisfaction:

> I feel good when I go back and ask them what their child did, if the kit was a
> success and how they went
> (Home Tutor/parent 5)

Specific feedback on materials was also sought as part of the evaluative process. A four-

point scale was used to rate books and materials. Using language suggested by program

personnel, home tutors and participants were asked to rate books as either Boring, Okay,

Interesting, or Really Good, and activities as Boring, Okay, Fun and Too Hard. Reaction

to both levels of the materials was positive, with most books rated as either Interesting or

Really Good and most activities as Fun (Makin, 2003). Level 2 of the PaL program had a

strong emphasis on games and fun activities (as different from school homework) and

parents viewed these very positively. Some parents used the Level 2 PaL materials as a

reward for children completing school homework:

> She wants to do PaL first and I tell her she has to do her other homework first
> (Parent 7)

Some used it as a tool which enabled children to focus before beginning schoolwork

while others used it however their children directed.

> Oh, he'll have to choose which one he wants to do, so it's his choice.
> (Parent 16)

The main criticism about the program materials related to Level 2 books. Parents

felt that some of the books were "too long" and it was hard to keep the children

interested. There were also some comments that the books were "too long" for the

children to read. The PaL program intended that parents and children would share books,

but did not intend that children should be able to read the books independently.

However, parents of Level 2 children (those in Yr. 1 at primary school) encouraged their

children to read the books and consequently responded more positively to books that

were not too long and had large text:

> Like some of the books that are given to us are too long…might be a bit too hard
> for the kids to read too…if the book is too long she gets tired, bored
> (Parent 17)

> Well, when there's long books he doesn't like it…he tries to read the longer
> books too but then again he finds it boring
> (Parent 14)

This criticism was not present with Level 1 books.

Child interviews (Makin, 2003) confirm parents' positive view of the materials.

22 children were interviewed and they all said that they did their PaL "homework" and

that they enjoyed it:

I play with them lots of times

Every games are fun
 (Child participants) (Makin, 2003)

Relationships, Communication and Understanding

The third theme that emerged, Relationships, Communication and Understanding,

shows how already existent systems of obligation and support within families and

between community members were built upon and further developed through

participation in the PaL program.

Community connections

Smith (1999) names "Connecting" (making connections and affirming connectedness) as

one of the many Indigenous research projects pursuing the social justice agenda;

"Connectedness positions individuals in sets of relationships with other people and the

environment…to be connected is to be whole" (Smith, 1999, p.148). The importance of

connections between home tutors and parents was something that was carefully

considered in the implementation of the PaL program. The appropriate matching of

home tutors to families based on community knowledge and existing community

relationships resulted in parents who were happy with their home tutor visits. Other than

the issue of role play, parents didn't feel that anything needed to be changed.

Relationships between home tutors and families were generally comfortable:

> I was comfortable with them, so I had no problem going into their homes and they were comfortable with me
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

I had anticipated that the level of interaction between home tutors and parents might extend beyond discussion of the weekly activity kit but this did not appear to be the case:

> We just talk about the PaL, and how Daniel went, she's always on the go to the next person
> (Parent 16)

Home Tutors for the PaL program are all Indigenous community members, who also had a child participating in the program. Knowing that home tutors understood what it was like to be a parent in the community obviously contributed to parents' sense of ease and comfort in their interactions;

> …and I told her just recently…she came and see me. She said "how you getting on with it?" "I'm slackin off again, y'know, all the passing (deaths) and home." But she said, "that's alright, we understand what youse going through"
> (Parent 11)

> I would reinforce that they could talk to me about anything and its okay if you make mistakes, its okay if you miss a day, its okay, sort of reminding them we are all parents and we're all humans, its not like I'm a qualified teacher here telling them
> (Home tutor/parent 2)

Home tutors' interactions with parents were not threatening; they connected with parents in very humanising ways and in doing so affirmed their own connectedness in the community. The coordinator of the program, who also acted as a home tutor for some parents, was explicit about how her involvement in the program had re-established her community connections.

> I feel much more of a connection with the Napranum community – because I was working away from there…I sort of lost touch with what was happening. I felt as if I missed out on something, not exactly left out, but I missed out on things (Coordinator)

She felt good that her role had provided an opportunity to regain and reaffirm her connections.

Belonging

An important part of both the home tutors and coordinators role was attendance at weekly training sessions. These sessions involved sharing feedback from families on the previous week's activities and role-play and preparation for the current week's activities. Although these training sessions were not mentioned by home tutors in their reasons for becoming involved in the program, the relationships and sense of belonging gained from these sessions early in the implementation period were clearly valued:

> When we're all in the meeting room, that weekly session we all sort of come down to that one level, we're all comfortable with one another (Co-ordinator)

> the tutors that I worked with, we shared the experiences of all the outcomes, positives and negatives through the PaL program (Home tutor/parent 1)

> I just liked being part of the group (Home tutor/parent 4)

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm for getting together for training sessions was not sustained throughout the two year period. The reasons why attendance at training sessions dropped off was not investigated in my research, though notice given to the coordinator indicated that home tutors had other priorities to attend to.   In 2001, individual home tutor's attendance rate at training sessions varied between 67% and 100%. This dropped significantly in 2002, and although some home tutors' attendance rates remained high

(92%), one was as low as 20%. This was a source of frustration and disappointment for

the coordinator and other reliable tutors:

> Even tutors, you know when we have a get together; even some tutors aren't
> showing up sometimes
>
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

The coordinator felt that it was good to have parents as home tutors but being parents of

young children as well as children doing PaL, created some dilemmas:

> Things will come up and you'll be stuck without tutors…I mean if they get sick (the
> young children) and family problems and so forth, you know you have to put family
> in front of stuff like that (PaL)

Networking

When the PaL program began, it was intended that group meetings or "get

togethers" for parents and home tutors would be held on a regular basis. This was

attempted on two occasions but failed to attract participants. This research did not

investigate possible reasons for this lack of interest but noted that the home-based nature

of the PaL program was where it began and ended for parents who were not home tutors.

Parents were able to articulate what impact the program and materials had on their own

families but were unable to comment on how the PaL program was going generally:

> I think it's having an effect, but it's hard to say. I never sat with anyone else
> who's doing it except for Mandy
>
> (Parent 22)

Everyone gets involved

Culture, community and family, influence the types of experiences and

knowledge children acquire during the early years (Reid & Comber, 2002). The

importance of family, obligations and interdependence is reflected in family responses to the PaL program.

Responses from parents about what they and their children had gained from participation in the PaL program varied considerably although all responses were positive. While some parents felt that they and their children had "learned a great deal", others found it more difficult to articulate. The parents who were not sure about what they may have "learned", were very clear about one thing – that PaL had provided a focus for parent/child interaction and an opportunity to consolidate family bond:

> Oh, he loves me doing it with him
> (Parent 12)

> When I do the kit with them, they actually sit and listen to me
> (Parent 22)

> Oh, after I finish doing it, he'll just give me a hug then…every time I do it, I get a big hug from him
> (Parent 11)

> It's now given me more time with Kathy
> (Parent 7)

There is an unspoken obligation within Indigenous families that everyone can help raise a child (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002). The role of siblings and the wider family in children's learning has been the subject of various research studies which are beginning to highlight the various roles which may be played (Kelly, Gregory & Williams, 2002). In particular, the research suggests older siblings play a very important role in providing models and supporting their younger brothers and sisters in

understanding school literacy (Kelly et al., 2002). Sharing the responsibility of caring for

younger children is an integral part of family life in Napranum and in many instances

family members other than the nominated parent took responsibility for using the PaL

materials with the child. This occurred in more than half the families participating in the

program. Older siblings (four instances), aunts (three instances), partners (three

instances) and grandparents (two instances) all assisted children with their PaL

"homework":

> Everyone's got sort of interested in it…if I haven't sort of got time to read and
> that and you know Maurice say "oh Mum, I'll read, I'll read the book" and
> Rhonda will say "I'll play the game with her".
>
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

In Level 2, where activities were mostly commercial quality games such as Bingo or

Snakes and Ladders requiring two or more players, the whole family sometimes became

involved:

> If it's a group activity, we all get involved…it's good fun with families, with both
> parents involved
>
> (Parent 16)

> We all get to do it. We all sit and do it and then he does it with his brother and
> like there's always a communication there when we do it
>
> (Parent 14)

> He's been yarning to his cousins over there telling them what he does at night
> with the PaL. Sometimes they come over and look what he's doing and want to
> do it too. So we do it with all the other kids
>
> (Home tutor/parent 3)

Children were very proud of their "homework" and, encouraged by their parents'

expectations happily shared with their brothers and sisters. There were instances though,

where children enjoyed being the recipients of special "homework" so much, they were

quite possessive of it:

> Tony, he look forward to it, he ask me 'Nana, you got my homework?'… You
> know he won't do it if his brothers and sisters are sitting with him, he say 'go
> away, go and do your own homework, this is my homework' and he won't do it
> until they move
> (Home tutor/parent 4)

Parents reported that younger siblings were particularly interested in the PaL kits and

parents often included the younger child, or used the materials with the younger child

after the main participant had finished:

> She joins in (younger sister) and when I finish with him, she asks me to do the
> activities with her and it makes her feel good because I praise them both when
> they do it
> (Parent 8)

> Well Dylan (younger brother) loves it. He likes to sit in and listen and guess the
> answers
> (Parent 9)

Building Confidence and Competence by Sharing Knowledge

This last theme encompasses the parents' perspectives and their ways of thinking

about themselves, their children and the program in general. The data shows that the

reservoir of skills and knowledge that already existed within Napranum families have

been built upon and further enhanced by their participation in the PaL program.

Confident competent children

Parents of Indigenous children want their children to get a good education. They want them to have the same range of choices and opportunities that are available to other Australian children and understand that gaining Western education is a key factor to accessing broader life pathways (Tripcony, 2002, Williams, 2002). Indeed, helping their children succeed in the Western education system was the main reason Napranum parents became involved in the PaL program. Parents were concerned about their children's educational future and had recognised that "being a parent is totally different to experiencing school".

Whether PaL children were succeeding according to Western education terms of assessment is not covered in the scope of this thesis. I have chosen only to portray the Indigenous parents' perspective with regard to their own children. Napranum parents felt that their children had learned a lot from participating in the PaL program, particularly with regard to books, colours and shapes:

> He never used to sit and read books like this before…he learns to read and sit,
> now he wants to write his name
> (Parent 12)

> (He learns)…Everything. Colours, writing, counting, things I never expected
> (Parent 19)

> …it has helped her a great deal…I was talking to the teachers at school and they
> can see the difference
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

As was discussed earlier, many children, encouraged by their parents, independently took control of the reading of the stories and the playing of the games, especially if their parents were busy or tired. Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, (2000) believe that

motivation and learning are strengthened when learners have ownership and control of

situations. It appears that in Napranum homes, children often had control of the situation.

Children also feel valued and gain a feeling of perceived competence when given

opportunities to share their knowledge and skills which enables them to develop in

confidence and self-esteem (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002, Dockett & Perry, 2002).

Parents reported many incidents of confident competent children:

> I was surprised that he was fitting that thing up because I wanted to do it but he
> said, "no mum I can do it"… and sometimes he corrects me if I say something out
> of place in the story… he surprise me like, y'know sometimes I wish that I can
> have a video camera and take video of him
> (Parent 18)

> …she'll say "oh Mum I know" – not to explain what the book says, just read it
> straight out. When I talk about it she seems to give me good answers and you
> know, that's good
> (Parent 15)

> …and they can tell me, "Mum, you s'posed to y'know follow the lines when you
> read that book"
> (Parent 22)

The coordinator of the program reported that she was encouraged when parents talked

about how the PaL kits were helping their child. She felt that children had gained a lot of

confidence in their own ability:

> Before, at the beginning of the year, they were shy and watching me come round
> and deliver kits but now they just come up to me and have a yarn and wonder
> where their homework is, which is encouraging
> (Program coordinator)

The delivery of the kits to homes had an impact on children and was something they all

looked forward to:

> …for the kids its giving them something extra to look forward to and something they look at as their own…they feel as if they're a big child, y'know, a big kid themselves… "I got my homework too"
> (Program coordinator)

Home tutors reported being asked by children "when are you bringing my homework?". The individualised delivery of the PaL kits appears to have built on children's self-esteem by promoting the idea that they (the children) are ready (and able) for learning. Children who are eager to explore new learning reflect a positive self-concept (Department for Education and Children's Services, 1996). The data suggest that children's self-esteem was enhanced through engagement in the PaL program and families and home tutors played a central role in the engagement.

Taking responsibility

Noel Pearson (2000a) has criticised government and community "service deliverers" on Cape York, for too often taking responsibility for things that would better be taken by individuals and families. The PaL program values the skills and knowledge Indigenous families have. It recognises that with regard to educating children, there are certain responsibilities that only families can fulfil. It was not established as an intervention program and has as its primary aim the support and promotion of parents' belief in themselves as their child's first and most important teacher (Napranum Preschool, 2000). When reporting how the PaL program had impacted on them, many parent participants felt that they weren't doing anything particularly different, that they were "just a mum", but they felt good about the time that they were spending with their children, and that they were able to help them:

> …having fun…just a mum trying to teach their children something different
> (Parent 22)

I feel good. I reckon it's more help for me to help her you know, to teach her, and to benefit her more
(Parent 15)

When it comes to the PaL program when we do it at home, I really enjoy it and doing it with him because I know I don't spend much time with him
(Parent 9)

Some parents reported feeling like a teacher, and felt their children regarded them as a teacher:

When I'm doing it with Jimmy, I feel like a teacher…it makes me feel good to know that I'm actually doing something for him
(Parent 8)

…sometimes when we sit together he says "Miss Mum" and I say you can just call me Mum, and he reckon "when we do this I call you Miss Mum"…that doesn't bother me, that's okay, it makes me feel good
(Parent 18)

Two parents, who reported infrequent use of the kits, felt that they hadn't really got anything out of participating in the PaL program. One reported that she hadn't really done enough for her child to have learned anything or for her to be able to comment on how she felt about it. The second parent, who reported that she kept forgetting to use the kits, told of her initial negative experience of using the materials with her child:

…he said "Mum, you're not the teacher" and he'll start laughing and laughing…I feel embarrassed…then I started doing it again for him – probably really nice what I was doing – he'd sit there and he'd start helping me…I feel good inside a bit from that
(Parent 10)

Building knowledge and confidence in oneself

As well as feeling good that they were helping their children, some parents were able to report on their own specific learning experiences:

I felt good because I've gotta be patient. I wasn't being patient, but now I'm doing the patient work with him, its clicking on and catching up on it. Now realising that I've gotta be more patient
(Parent 11)

Now I know that I can do other things, I can make my own games up…just playing a game, that's a learning experience…like before I'd just read a book and "that's the end of the story"…now I know I can ask questions and talk about things. Now I know they're learning when they give me feedback…they learn and I learn from that too
(Parent 7)

I thought with him going to them (primary school in Weipa), I knew he was gonna come home with homeworks, its gonna be hard for him, how am I gonna help him?…I know that I can help him now
(Home tutor/parent 3)

Education and schooling has not always been a positive experience for Indigenous children and families (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002). The PaL tools were designed with the intention of de-mystifying some of the processes of Western education for children and parents. By building on parents own knowledge, we might have expected that parents would feel more comfortable with dealing with their children's schools and there would be increased involvement of these parents at the school level. There was no data to support this notion from parent participants. On the other hand, it was evident that parents who were home tutors, as well as the coordinator, who had attended training sessions had experienced the PaL program differently.

There was general agreement amongst home tutors that they had been part of a learning process, though individual gains in knowledge and understanding varied. The language of schools and "school talk" was one area that had been demystified for home tutors confirming Spreadbury's (2002, p.172) view that "families of all educational and socio-economic levels want to be informed of the meaning of educational jargon". Two

home tutors spoke specifically about the knowledge and confidence they had gained

which enabled them to engage in more meaningful ways with their children's schools:

> I think most importantly it helped me to get more involved with education and how I can support my kids
>
> (Home tutor/parent 2)

> I talk to their (her children's) teachers, ask them questions and get more involved with their school work…I never used to do that before…I didn't feel confident
>
> (Home tutor/parent 1)

The coordinator spoke about her initial perceptions of her job:

> Having the name "coordinator" thrown at me and I thought oh geez this is something like a big responsible job…but after doing the thing for a few weeks, it didn't seem as big a deal as what I first thought about it

After speaking about the satisfaction she gets from parents who tell her positive things

about their children's learning, she also spoke of her own growth:

> I believe in myself a lot more of being capable of doing things
> (Coordinator)

The response of a home tutor who began her association with the program as a shy parent

wanting to help her son, supports this view:

> I feel like I am learning and that makes me feel good - very good. I'm very proud of what I'm doing - to help other parents with their children
>
> (Home tutor/parent 6)

Building knowledge, based on the principles of relationships and connections, also builds

networks and understandings (Smith, 1999). For these participants, building knowledge

also developed their confidence, pride, and sense of self.

Summary

The prospect of helping Napranum children achieve success at school was the primary motivating factor for parents becoming involved in the PaL program. However, measuring child outcomes in terms of performance at school for PaL children was not the objective of this research. Instead it focuses on the Indigenous parents' perspective and the benefits they believed the program had for their children, themselves and their families. It is clear from the data that the home tutors and coordinator believed in the value of the program and transmitted that belief to the children and families they visit. "The talk, the training, the tools, the connections" gave some of them the confidence to become more involved in their own children's education and to believe in themselves as contributing to families and the community. The parents and children enjoyed using the PaL materials as tools which provided a focus for family interaction and an opportunity for confirming parents' belief in their own children's abilities and themselves as responsible, capable parents.

Chapter 6   Strengthening Families

We need to develop capacity and responsibility in our community structures, and through our own community mechanisms.
Pearson (2000a), p. 80

I use this quote to introduce the final chapter of this thesis and to set the scene for the discussion that follows. The importance of community context has been at the forefront of the development and implementation of the PaL program in Napranum. My analysis of the impact of the program on participants is also embedded in the community context, and this is where the measures of effectiveness derive from. In an attempt to determine the effectiveness of the PaL program, it is important to understand that effectiveness is not a definition, but a perception (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2000). For the purpose of this research, I chose to explore the perceptions of the Indigenous parent participants and personnel as the main stakeholders and key informants in determining the effectiveness of the PaL program. This final chapter reviews the core elements and processes identified as critical to the program's effectiveness and discusses their implications within the broader socio-political context of Indigenous education. Recommendations arising out of this evaluation, both general and specific to PaL, are listed in Appendix C.

Tapping Hopes and Aspirations

The long history of talking, researching, and writing about how education has failed to deliver equitable outcomes for Indigenous students (Williams, 2002, Munns,

1996, Tripcony, 2002) has over time, resulted in policy changes at both a national and state level (The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, 1989, National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the 21st century,1999, National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2000-2004, Partners for Success, 2000). But what did these policy changes mean for parents of children in the Napranum community?

While parents were not asked if they were aware of such education policies and what they meant, the data made very clear that Napranum parents were concerned about their children's chances of achieving educational success. Their concerns are substantiated by the literacy, numeracy and school attendance and completion data which shows that education in Cape York communities has failed to yield satisfactory results (Fitzgerald, 2001). While it is doubtful that Napranum parents had knowledge of the poor statistics concerning Indigenous education in Cape communities, most chose to participate in the PaL program because they hoped it would "help their kids".

Indigenous parents want their children to have access to a range of life choices and see Western education as providing the main pathway (Tripcony, 2002, Williams, 2002). The Cape York Justice Study (2001), goes so far as to suggest that Indigenous culture will not survive unless children in communities are provided with opportunities and support which enable them to become bi-cultural. That means providing effective access to Western education. The question is, what constitutes effective access and how can it be achieved in an environment where the community landscape has been described as "one of social and economic privation" and "children's futures are bleak" (Fitzgerald, 2001, p. 50)?

Amidst the picture of negativity and despair, there are good grounds for hope. Napranum parents did not discuss their knowledge of the implications of educational success or failure on their children's futures, but were clearly concerned about their own children's success and chose to do something about it. They saw the PaL program as offering an opportunity that they "as kids didn't get to have" and as something that might give them "a better chance of helping along the success".

Success and Parent Participation

It is generally accepted that educational success is enhanced when parents are involved in their children's education (Cairney, 1997, Delgado-Gaitin, 2001). While some researchers believe this is an allegation that is seldom proved (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999), the enthusiasm for greater parent involvement in schools continues and has given rise to strong rhetoric supporting the notion of "partnerships". Partnerships in education are recognised as promoting a sense of shared responsibility in children's education (Education Queensland, 2000, Delgato-Gaitin 2001).

Unfortunately, the rhetoric does not always match practice and research shows that many schools hold a limited conception of what constitutes partnership (Ashton & Cairney, 2001). Research shows the range of programs developed under the umbrella of parent involvement and parent participation to be mostly school initiated, school directed, and address what schools see as important (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995, Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). This hierarchy in school/parent relationships is particularly noticeable in literacy programs (many parent participation programs focus on literacy), which seem to have an underlying assumption that parents are ignorant and that

they need to learn what and how it is appropriate to teach their children (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999). Such programs clearly privilege teachers' knowledge, and as such can hardly be the basis of effective or equitable partnerships.

Is the PaL program any different? The PaL program is not focussed on "partnerships" as such but clearly presents an alternative view and way of approaching parent participation in education. The PaL program begins with parents, not schools and teachers and was driven by what the parents wanted to know. Although an interacting set of circumstances resulted in the inception of the PaL program, the developers stand firm in their belief that parents' requests for assistance in preparing their children for formal schooling provided the main initiative. This is reflected in the mission statement for the program, which aims to promote parents' "… belief in themselves as effective contributors to the early education of their children" (Napranum Preschool, 2001, p. 5). Napranum Preschool, as a community preschool and as the host organization providing the infrastructure and support for the program, did not see the PaL program as an attempt to increase parent involvement at the preschool, but as a way of supporting parents engaging in educational activities with their children at home.

While many parent participation programs focus on parent education or involving parents in schools, other "public awareness" campaigns provide brochures that suggest what parents can do (e.g. read with children, value books and learning, draw attention to the literacy and numeracy that happens in daily life) to enhance their children's learning (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2000). This is all very well if as a parent, one has the time, the confidence and the resources to participate in this way. As discussed earlier, parent education as a means of parent involvement, does not always

have the desired effect. Parents who are dealing with difficult life circumstances (such as poverty, ill health, domestic violence) often experience feelings of vulnerability and fear of judgements of poor parenting when presented with "parent education" options (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 2002). Parents need support. There is no point in distributing "how to" brochures if parents do not have the literacy skills, if the brochure is unlikely to reach home, or if parents do not have resources such as books at home or the means to access resources from elsewhere in order to implement the suggestions. There is also no point in providing workshops for parents in environments that might be intimidating.

The PaL program differs from other programs in the manner in which it puts parents and families first. It provides moral and physical support for parents and children in the form of home delivery, home tutoring and concrete resources, and builds on the skills and knowledge that Indigenous children and families already have.

The home-based nature of the PaL program and the method of home delivery are identified as critical elements in its effectiveness. Home delivery by community people reaches out to families in ways that are both practical and supportive. All participants in the program felt that home delivery was a good thing and some reported that they would not bother with it if it was not home delivered. Home is where parents and families are most comfortable (Hanlen, 2002, Fleer & Willliams Kennedy, 2002). Schools on the other hand, can be uncomfortable and intimidating, especially for Indigenous adults whose experience of schooling may have been negative (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002, Clancy & Simpson, 2002), and it is likely that a school based delivery of the program would have been ineffective. If parents are going to participate, they need to be

able to do so on their own terms; it needs to work for them. In the case of the PaL program, home delivery worked because it was comfortable, non-threatening and non-judgemental. The positive participant uptake and retention figures provide further evidence supporting the effectiveness of home delivery.

Home delivery also ensured that parents and children received a new resource every week, which was something children looked forward to with pleasure. The PaL kits encouraged positive parent-child and family interaction by providing many different resources to use. There was great variety in how often and for how long materials might be used by children and families in any one week but they were almost always used. Parents reported that children were keen to see what was in each week's pack and often initiated their use. Again, participation by parents was on their terms or in some cases, on their children's terms. There were no controls over how materials were used once they reached the home, nor did program personnel want there to be any; that was for parents and families to decide. This is an important point because this flexibility and freedom to make choices reinforced parents' belief in themselves as being capable of supporting their children. There is also an implicit message that individual patterns of family interaction are legitimate and appropriate, which is important in building the self-esteem and confidence of parents and families.

Another key element to effective delivery was the support and guidance provided for parents through the home tutors' weekly visits. During the visits, home tutors explained the contents and use of each new kit and collected feedback on the previous week's kit. In this way tutors reinforced the idea that parents could and should report on children's and families responses to the materials, that their opinions were important and

that there was a definite purpose for giving feedback. The feedback from parents was used to make adjustments and improvements to the materials. For example, if a game was not well received by the majority of families, this was revised and changed according to parents' suggestions, in readiness for the next cohort of participants.   The feedback helped tailor the program to better meet the needs of Napranum children and families. This process helped develop parents' belief in their right to voice their opinions and to feel confident that their opinions mattered and would be acted upon.

Western Literacy and Cultural Literacy

Although the process of acquiring and developing literacy skills in one's own culture begins from the time children are born, many Indigenous children have to learn a different and perhaps relatively new system of literacy when they commence the formal compulsory years of schooling (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002). This is referred to as Western schooling and Western school literacy (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002, Hanlen, 2002). When Napranum parents discussed what they hoped their children might gain from participation in the PaL program, many made reference to the hope that their children would learn about reading, writing, counting and books; Western school literacy. Early requests to the preschool prior to the development of the PaL program also reflected concerns about children becoming literate. Research indicates that these concerns are not exclusive to Napranum parents but are shared by many parents, especially those from disadvantaged and/or culturally different backgrounds (Freebody & Luke, 1998, Cairney et. al, 1995). Marginalised families in general value literacy and see it as "the single most powerful hope for their children" (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland

& Reid, 1998 p. 17). It was the developers' intention that the PaL program should address parents' concerns about children developing skills in Western literacy.

However, developing competence in Western literacy is a complex task.   As schools are the vehicle society uses to teach Western literacy, children must also learn to navigate the school environment.   For many Indigenous children who may be unfamiliar with the culture of schooling, this can be particularly difficult (Clancy & Simpson, 2002, Hohepa & MacNaughton, 2002). Hill and colleagues (1998) refer to the dominant habitus (the habitus of the dominant group) as being the form of cultural capital schools take for granted and discuss how this influences school success. School success, it seems, is strongly influenced by the ways in which children are able to use the cultural capital they bring from home and also by the ways in which teachers are able to build upon different children's resources, (Hill et al., 1998). Children who enter general school classrooms with ways of knowing and ways of acting congruent with teachers' expectations tend to be considered as having the appropriate "cultural capital" and are consequently reinforced with success, while those without are not (Comber & Hill, 2000).

Although many Indigenous children begin school rich in cultural capital, it is generally not the sort valued by the formal education system (Buckskin, cited in Tripcony 2002). While I strongly believe that schools need to change and practitioners need to provide better connections for children based on prior knowledge and experiences, the implication remains that children who acquire the cultural capital favoured by schools are more likely to experience success.

Families have a right to know and a right to receive educational assistance that might improve their children's chances of school success.   The question is, how can families get to know what it is that will better equip their children for the Western schooling experience? Napranum parents indicated in their expressed concerns and in their decision to participate in the PaL program that this is what they wanted to know. The PaL program makes explicit for parents and children elements of the culture of schooling by providing access to different opportunities for literacy learning and play at home. Parents themselves commented that their children learned to "sit and listen", that they were able to follow instructions and that they showed confidence in attempting new tasks, all behaviours that are rewarded in classrooms.

The curriculum materials introduce both parents and children to some of the strategies often employed by teachers in schools and the focus areas relate to areas covered in a Western school curriculum (see chapter 4).   They also raise awareness amongst parents that Western literacy is not just about reading and writing, but about other elements such as problem solving, aural and visual memory and creativity. The instruction card and the knowledge passed on to parents by home tutors offer insight into why some educational strategies are used and help make connections between home and school learning. These connections become the structures upon which bridges can be built between what is known and understood and what needs to be learned and understood for both children and parents to gain facility and confidence in operating in the culture of schooling.

Research suggests that children who quickly catch on how to "do school" are those who have found ways of connecting to text based forms of pleasure, learning and

work (Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland & Reid, 2002). That books are appropriate as the foundation of the curriculum materials in the PaL Program is supported by research literature that clearly shows the role of book centred adult/child interactions in literacy development (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000) and the role of the adult in mediating literacy learning through joint attention during book reading (Hill et al., 1998). Scaffolding in book-oriented contexts has also been shown to be important for the development of Western literacy (Fleer & Williams Kennedy, 2002). A sociocultural view of literacy suggests that children learn about literacies and how to "do" literacy through participating in a range of activities in their families and communities (Barratt-Pugh, 2000, Jones Diaz & Makin, 2002). This is particularly relevant to the PaL program.

While Raban (2000) reports that increasing children's experience of literacy through the provision of resources and supportive interactions with more knowledgeable others impacts on later reading achievement, there is insufficient evidence at this stage to conclude that participation in the PaL program has had a similar impact (Makin, 2003). Whether participation in the PaL program provided any advantage for children at school was not within the scope of this research, however, parents' reports on children's schooling experiences were positive and this contrasts with their initial concerns that their children might not "do well" at school.

Building Knowledge and Raising Expectations

Raising the expectations of parents, teachers and the community about the levels of literacy and numeracy that Indigenous students can achieve has been identified as crucial to the success of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

(2000). NIELNS aims to ensure that students learn in an environment of positive expectation. Students need to know that their families and communities expect them to succeed. While it is generally assumed that parents have an understanding of what is needed to maximise their children's chances of success in schooling, the Cape York Justice Study reported an absence of explicit conversation about these mostly tacit assumptions and the role of teacher and parent expectations. Such tacit assumptions include understandings about the role of attendance, encouragement, praise and interest in children's progress, and understanding what happens in schools and why.

While it was not the objective of the PaL program to address the above issues, knowledge of some of these tacit assumptions is shared and made explicit in the PaL materials. The PaL materials make explicit the need to share literacy experiences through joint book reading, to play games that develop a range of early literacy and numeracy skills and to encourage and praise children in all their efforts. They also make explicit how and why particular games and activities help their children's learning, therefore building parents knowledge and understanding of types of experiences children may have at school. Perhaps more important though, is the emphasis on having fun and enjoying the activities with children. The data strongly supports this aspect of the program and showed that "PaL homework" was a time of positive interaction as well as learning.

In spending time using the PaL materials, parents conveyed a sense of confidence and an implicit message to their children that they are important enough to receive their parents' attention. Children responded positively to the interaction and to the materials in ways that often surprised their parents. Parents reported that their children displayed skills and competencies that exceeded parents' expectations. Using the program

materials at home with their families enabled children to observe, listen, play, talk and make connections. Parents observed their children as competent, successful learners, rewarded them and instilled confidence in them during their interactions. It seems reasonable to assume that parents might now have higher expectations of their children's capabilities.

Recent research by Sampson (2002) shows the role of the family and the home environment as being more significant in the educational process than parent involvement at school. His study of family influences in black student achievement found that it was not getting parents involved at school that helped students perform better. It was the home environment, how parents developed and supported their children's learning and activities and what they expected of them that played a significant role. The study also showed that parents who expected their children to do well in school were more likely to take steps to encourage this outcome.

I believe that parents' participation in the PaL program led to a change in expectations. We saw from the data that many parents' expectations of their children before beginning the PaL program were negative, and that they felt their children might not succeed in schooling. We also saw that many parents were surprised and proud of how capable their children proved themselves to be. These parents experienced a change in expectations. If what parents expect of their children plays a significant role as Sampson and the NIELNS suggests, then the PaL program's role in raising expectations is also significant. We can hope that these parents will have a better understanding of what is needed to improve their children's school success, that they will expect their

children to succeed and that they may take other steps (such as helping with homework) that improve their children's chances.

Strongly aligned with raising parents' expectations of children are parents' expectations of themselves. Key element 1 of NIELNS highlights the importance of "ensuring parents have the skills and confidence to support their children's learning" (DETYA, 2000 p.20) and this is something I believe the PaL program has made a significant contribution to. We saw that some parents began the program worrying about how they were going to help their children but reflecting later, reported confidence in their own knowledge and ability to assist and support their children's learning. This was especially so for those parents who were home tutors. During the training and feedback sessions tutors actively participated in educational discussions and for some this gave them the confidence to interact differently with their own children's schoolteachers. In general, home tutors developed greater confidence in their roles as parents, as well as confidence in their knowledge and capacity to make a difference in the lives of children and families in the community.

Strengthening Families/Developing capacity

'Community capacity building' and 'social capital' are terms that governments now use freely in areas of social policy and human services provision. Human and social capital is becoming more highly valued as a key resource in creating alternative solutions to societal problems (Williams, 2002, Education Queensland, 2000) and governments of all persuasions are now seeking to deliver "stronger communities" and to build social capital (Hughes, 2003). Strategies such as the *Stronger Families and Communities*

Strategy (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services), which are about building family and community capacity, are based on the concept that strong families contribute to strong communities and strong communities can provide more support, opportunities and services that contribute to strengthening individuals and families.   Noel Pearson's (2000b) discussions around families and communities in Cape York are based on a similar premise.

The Cape York Justice Study (2001) highlights the need for community rebuilding and claims that progress in education cannot be achieved without addressing social dysfunction on one level, while on another developing strategies that promote social renewal.   Education Queensland's, *Partners for Success* (2000) strategy also acknowledges that improvements in educational outcomes will not occur unless accompanied by initiatives that build the capacity of individuals and families. However, governments and government bodies cannot create community and cannot build social capital.   At best, they can review their methods of service delivery and they can create policy environments that will assist individuals, families and communities to develop their own capacity.

Programs like PaL that are small, innovative and firmly grounded in the community context can build social capital. From inception through to implementation and evaluation, the PaL program has remained focused on parents, children and the community.   The processes that families and personnel engaged in as participants developed both individual and family capacity by building confidence and competence and by reinforcing relationships at both a family and community level.

A critical element in the program's effectiveness is the recognition and utilization of the reservoir of skills and knowledge that exist within the Napranum community. Local Indigenous community members who are employed as key program personnel provide a vital resource. Their expert knowledge of their community as well as their knowledge as parents is recognised as their most important qualifications. Having a personal, professional and cultural background similar to or the same as parents is critical to the success of home delivery of the program. Home tutors were not considered authority figures by parents; they were seen as "friends sharing their information", who were supportive of parents and understood what it was like to be a parent of young children in the community. Parents' sense of value and competence was enhanced by this support and led to some parents feeling that they "could teach someone too". Parents were also encouraged by home tutors to persevere with the program through difficult times at home or in parents' personal lives. Delivery of the program involved more than simply dropping off resources. It enhanced relationships and built social capital.

Trust, support and reciprocity, which are considered the currency of social capital (Cox, 2000) are often most visible in families, both immediate and extended. This supports Putnam's (1995, cited in Winter, 2000) view of family being the most fundamental form of social capital and links well with Noel Pearson's view about families and family responsibilities. Pearson believes the social breakdown in Indigenous communities is in part due to government service delivery modes eroding the responsibility of families. In his book "Our Right to Take Responsibility" (2000a), Pearson suggests that the first and most important responsibility of an individual is to

take care of oneself and the second is to be responsible for one's family. He argues a strong case for returning responsibility to parents for ensuring their children's participation in education and suggests that new ideas for returning responsibility to families are needed. He also suggests that the role of the state and the community should be to maintain the community's social expectations of community members to fulfil their responsibilities to their families.

I believe the PaL program's system of delivery is based on a shared responsibility. Community members deliver the kits to family homes but once delivered, control over how and when they are used is left to parents and the family. Families at home own the context. In this way, the PaL program acknowledges and respects the learning that takes place at home. At the same time though, the home tutors' weekly visits provide a reminder to parents about their responsibilities to their children. The home tutors believe in the value of the program and transmit this belief to parents and children. By appearing every week to deliver a new resource and collect the previous week's resource, home tutors appear to act as a conscience, supporting parents but also maintaining the expectation that parents will continue to participate with their children.

Extension of the Program

The parental concerns that triggered the development of the PaL program are concerns shared by parents in many different communities. For change to occur, parents' desire to address these concerns must be matched through the provision of appropriate opportunities for themselves and their children. Pal provided this opportunity for Napranum parents.

Dissemination of knowledge about the PaL program through conference presentations and through the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Foundation networks has generated interest in other communities and has led to the program being implemented in an Aboriginal community in rural Victoria. The core elements and processes identified as critical to PaL's effectiveness have been retained. The initiative to take up the program came from parents and the community (not schools or teachers) who have been involved from the beginning and at every stage of the roll out process. The lessons learnt during the implementation phase in Napranum are also being applied and in some ways further testing the program to ensure that the program "fits" the new community and enables a sense of ownership to develop. This is vital to maintaining program integrity.

Conclusion

There is currently an increasing international awareness of the importance of the early childhood years in determining longer-term outcomes for children. While the many and varied causes of poor educational outcomes are complex, a growing body of evidence suggests that early childhood education does make a significant positive difference to children's cognitive attainment and subsequent social outcomes (Fleer, 2000, McLoughlin & Nagorcka, 2000). As parents are the primary educators of children in the early years, they have a significant role to play.

Parents know that education for their children is important, but not all parents know how to translate that sense of importance into practice in the home environment. By providing practical, structured support and concrete, fun activities, the PaL program has begun to unlock some of the mysteries of schooling for parents and children in

Napranum. Children and parents are actively engaging in Western literacy and numeracy experiences in their own environment, using their own frameworks of interaction and being supported by people they know and trust to build bridges for their children between the culture of home and the culture of school.   Although there is little evidence as yet to suggest that this is translating into improved outcomes at school, there is enough indication of a possible positive influence (Makin, 2003). More importantly though, parents feel they are doing something for their child; they are acting responsibly, having fun, consolidating bond and discovering how skilled and competent their children are.

The PaL program was effective in translating concern into action. While it is true that it has only helped those families and children who chose to take advantage of the opportunity, parents and families cannot act to improve outcomes for their children if the opportunities do not exist. Supporting children at home in ways that enable them to take advantage of the Western schooling experience might provide one piece of the puzzle, enabling parents to feel that they are effective contributors to their children's education. Identifying the core elements of programs and processes that work for families may eventually lead to outcomes that not only support children in the schooling process by building bridges between the cultures of home and school, but support and strengthen families. Community renewal is dependent on strong families.

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Appendix A

Initial Schedule for PaL Participants Who are not Home Tutors

1.   How did you find out about the PaL program?

2.   Why did you become involved?

3.   What do you think about the PaL program?

- How do you work out what to do with the books and activities?
- Tell me about how you and your child use the books and activities/
- How do you feel about having a home tutor?

4.   What things do you like about the program?

5.   What things don't you like about the program?

6.   Before you started, what did you hope or expect to get out taking part in the PaL program?

7.   What do you feel you have gained?

8.   What did you feel you knew about how children learn at school/preschool before joining the PaL program? How do you feel about school/preschool and   the things your children are doing now?

9.   Home Visiting –

- Can you tell me what usually happens when the home tutor visits you?
- Are you happy with it?

- What would make it better for you?

- How do you feel about your role when the home tutor is there?

- What sorts of things do you talk about with the home tutor?

- How do you think your child sees you?

- How do you see yourself?

10.   Will you be in the program next year? Why/why not?

11.   What are you doing differently at home now than before you joined the PaL program?

12.   Has the PaL program made a difference to anyone else in your family besides your child? (If yes, who and how)

13.   What do you think your child has learned through PaL?

14.   How do you see your own role in your child's learning?

15.   What do you see as the aims of PaL?

16.   How well do you think they are currently being achieved?

17.   Is there anything else you'd like to say about PaL or your participation in the program?

Appendix B

Initial Interview Schedule for PaL Home Tutors

1. How did you find out about the PaL program?

2. Why did you become involved?

3. What do you think about the PaL program?

4. What things do you like about the program?

5. What things don't you like about the program?

6. Before you started, what did you hope or expect to get out of becoming a home tutor?

7. What do you feel you have gained?

8. What did you feel you knew about how children learn at school/preschool before joining the PaL program?
    *   How do you feel about school and the things your children are doing now?

9. Home Visiting – Can you tell me about what you do and when you do it?

    *   How do you feel about your role with the parents you visit?
    *   What sort of things do you talk about with parents when you visit?

- How do you think other parents see you?

- How do you think the children see you?

- How do you see yourself?

Appendix C

Recommendations Specific to PaL:

- Continue the operation of the PaL program in Napranum for as long as there is interest amongst parents and extended families to participate even if the numbers of interested participants decreases.

- Develop strategies which do not involve role-play but that further strengthen the home delivery of the program to enable parents to gain greater confidence and knowledge of educational processes.

- Continue to revise materials based on feedback from families and home tutors.

- Implement the PaL program in a new community with a view to testing its adaptability whilst at the same time maintaining program integrity.

- Establish mechanisms for evaluation of both child and adult outcomes in the new PaL program community in the early stages of implementation.

- Establish mechanisms for tracking PaL children and families at later stages of schooling and life.

General Recommendations for Partnerships with Parents:

- Always begin from the premise that parents have values, skills, and knowledge that can be built upon.

- Support parents by providing more than information – practical help, tools to use, a purpose to relate to.

- Explore options that develop the natural helping networks around families.

- Re-conceptualise partnerships in education by beginning from the parents'

  perspective and finding out what they want/need – listen.