

people used the library. Traditional languages are very strong in the region and many children under school age have little or no English.



To find ways of making the library relevant to Yolngu people, I consulted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network [ATSILIRN] Protocols<sup>1</sup>. They provide advice on accessibility and use

and make the point that library staff first need to go out into the community and become known and trusted there. As early literacy is a high priority in public library services, story time seemed a logical place to start.

The largest Aboriginal community close to Nhulunbuy is Yirrkala, about 12 km away. In August 2006 I arranged with Djapirri, the Manager of the Yirrkala Women's Resource Centre, to hold a story time session for under-5s and went out there with bags of books and some colouring-in. A Yolngu woman, Djanambi, came with me in the car and we drove around the community to find some young children.

We set up on a mat under a shady tree at the front of the Women's Centre and I started to read. A couple of pages into the story one of the women said "Yapa, these kids don't know what you're saying". The penny dropped for me that the children did not understand English, so I asked Djanambi to translate. So from then on, as I read each page in English, Djanambi would translate. The children loved the stories and the colouring and I promised to be back next week.

I wish I could say that we progressed from strength to strength, but that was not the case. Language and cultural considerations require adult Yolngu participation, but Djanambi has commitments to other programs so is not always there. However, with a lot of perseverance and continued support from the Women's Centre, there is usually someone available.

Yirrkala Storytime slowly became established as a regular weekly event, every Thursday morning. We set up under the tree at the front of the Women's Centre or on their veranda in the wet season. After some quiet reading we have a story, reading first in English then translating into Yolngu Matha.

After the story the children do an activity based on the story and learn skills that will help prepare them for school. Everyone makes something to take home and we finish up with some puzzles and a fruit snack. Storytime has also featured Santa, the Fire Truck, and ALIA National Simultaneous Storytime.

One challenge is finding stories to read aloud that also lend themselves to on-the-spot translation, yet retain the fun and interest in another language. Stories that rely on rhythm and rhyme in English often fall flat in translation.

Books with subject matter that reflects the lifestyle these children have, such as *Big rain coming*<sup>2</sup>, help them make the connection between spoken and written word and the real world around them. Important also are illustrations that include Indigenous faces and characters to help establish a rapport with the story.

For quiet reading I take a mix of board books, picture books, and junior non-fiction, particularly of animals and activities

familiar to the children. This is an important part of story time as it provides an opportunity for the children to simply enjoy the books. It gives them regular access to printed material where they can engage in pre-literacy activities and learn reading behaviours such as turning pages and how to hold a book.<sup>3</sup>

Community and cultural events do sometimes override the weekly story time, however this will always be the case and it needs to remain flexible and accommodating of such disruptions. Library staff have attended cross-cultural education specifically based on Yolngu culture, plus some formal study of Yolngu language and culture. This helps with understanding the conversation at Storytime!

Yirrkala Storytime has developed into a partnership between the East Arnhem Shire, which has responsibility for the Yirrkala Women's Centre, and the Northern Territory Library, through provision of library staffing, books, and other resources. From records kept of books and activities that have been successful, a set of Storytime Kits is being developed with guidelines and templates for each session. These kits will make it easier for story time to be run by a new staff member or introduced into another community.

However, even though there is a basic plan, every week is different! It has been and is still a challenge but with ongoing cooperation and support from all parties it can continue to be a source of wonderful fun and learning for the children, while helping them learn early literacy practices that are so important for when they start school.

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#### References

1. *ATSILIRN 2005, ATSILIRN Protocols*, viewed 11 August 2008, <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/home/index.html>
2. Germein, Katrina, 1999. *Big rain coming*, Puffin, Camberwell, Vic.
3. *Evaluation of the Northern Territory library's libraries & knowledge centres model*, Northern Territory Library, 2006, p.94.

## A fun way to connect with the community

When the first Turkish storytelling session was held at Meadow Fair North Preschool, a Turkish speaking boy ran up to the teacher saying very excitedly, "they're using my words, they're using my words!" The young boy was thrilled to hear someone else talking the way only his mum and dad had. Suddenly, the language he spoke only at home took another dimension, a new direction pointing to his parents' precious homeland, and, not only that, he also discovered that those Bilingual Storytimes sessions at his preschool were a lot of fun too!

Since May 2005, Bilingual Storytimes sessions have been offered at Hume Libraries and community settings, including childcare centres, preschools, playgroups, and schools. The sessions are performed in a variety of community languages, including Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Assyrian, and Sinhalese. Trained storytellers engage children aged 0-8 in a dynamic session of storytelling, songs, rhymes, and craft activities.

Bilingual Storytimes allow children to learn about their culture in a fun and friendly environment. Community Literacy and Engagement Officer Anna Boland said the story times give people a sense that their language and culture is valued by the community and helps children develop their English speaking

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skills at the same time. "Storytimes support the development of emerging literacy and numeracy among young children. They also support cultural inclusion, help maintain the child's first language, and increase the parent's skills and confidence to share songs, rhymes, and books with their children."

In the last financial year, 7194 children and 1983 parents or carers participated in 344 Bilingual Storytimes sessions.

Based on a recent evaluation of the program, many parents shared a similar story about the impact that it has had on their child. "I have always felt that Bilingual Storytimes was a fun way to engage with the community. It is clear from the evaluation findings that the Bilingual Storytimes program positively impacts on parents and carers as well as their children," said Anna Boland.

According to the evaluation findings, all parents interviewed felt that they had learned new skills to help them play with and teach their children. Many parents also reported that they now had the confidence to read in an expressive manner and interact with their children. "I feel I learn something new each session. [This has included] the special way that Roula (a Bilingual Storytimes facilitator) reads: she is like an actress, so I feel it is okay to be more happy or more sad when I read a book", said a parent during an Arabic Bilingual Storytimes session at The Age Library.

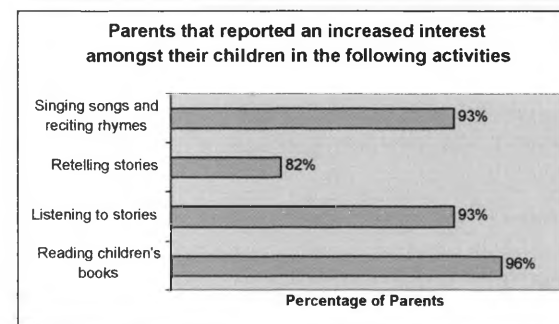
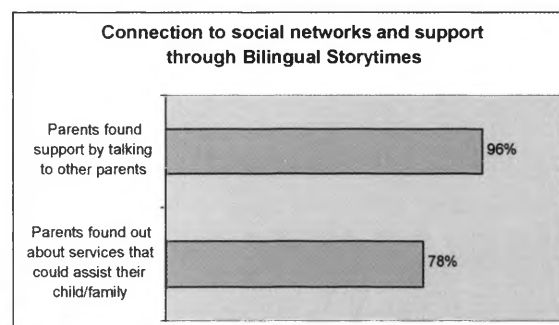
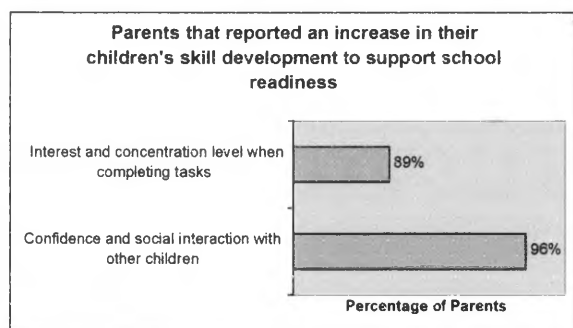
## Strengthening bilingual capacity

The overwhelming success of the Bilingual Storytimes program has led to a range of exciting developments. As Anna explains, "We are creating a comprehensive training package to assist children's services workers, parents, and carers. We hope this package increases the number of local bilingual storytellers and supports parents who want to hone their skills for use in a voluntary capacity or for employment."

The Bilingual Storytimes program is a strong example of an initiative that has the potential to change the life outcomes for children and their families in our community. Hume City Council is currently working with an Arabic and Turkish community choir to produce a CD to accompany the existing Bilingual Storytimes songbook. With increased demand for Bilingual Storytimes in the community, watch out for more story time sessions at Hume Libraries and at a playgroup or pre-school near you!

If you would like more information about the Bilingual Storytimes program, please telephone Anna Boland on 9356 6932. All Storytimes sessions currently held at Hume Libraries are listed at <http://www.humelibraries.vic.gov.au> under 'Bilingual Storytimes'.

Hume City Council contracted 'Project Partnerships' to measure the outcomes generated by the Bilingual Storytimes program. They conducted survey interviews and focus groups with parents, carers, pre-school teachers, and storytellers who were involved in Bilingual Storytimes sessions. Here are some of the findings.



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## Working in a multicultural school library – Milpera State High School's 'Intensive English Language Preparation Centre'

'Milpera' is an Aboriginal word meaning "meeting place of brothers and sisters". Milpera is a Queensland state secondary school which provides intensive English language and settlement services to prepare newly arrived immigrant and refugee students for participation in secondary schools or tertiary education around the Brisbane area. I am very fortunate to be a library technician in this 'world in one school' and to share a small part of the lives of these students.

We have created a specialised library for our school community of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. A significant part of our collection could quite easily fit into Dewey 420, being made up of graded readers, catering for different reading abilities. Due to the age of our students (12–19 years of age) we are careful to offer resources that will not appear childish, despite the beginner language level. Our resource centre also has to cater for diverse language needs; for example, our dictionary collection covers over 35 different languages plus sets of English dictionaries. We also focus on developing the students' visual literacy through multimedia and computer programs. Students enjoy creating photo-stories of their camps and excursions. As staff working there, we have to be aware of and respect different cultures and customs, but at the same time introduce ours.

Working at Milpera has been an eye opening experience; I also share the immigrant journey, having arrived in Australia from England when I was a teenager. When I had to start a new school, I was fortunate that I had the support of my family and that I came from a country with similar school rules. The journey of the young people who come to Milpera is far more difficult