

# MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

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.

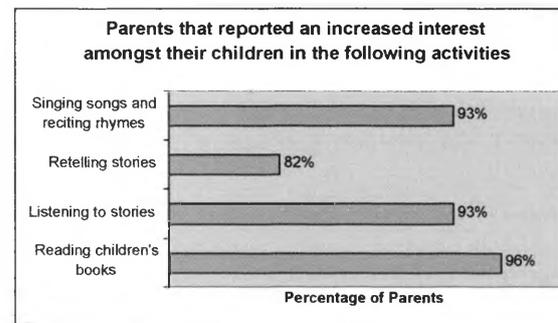
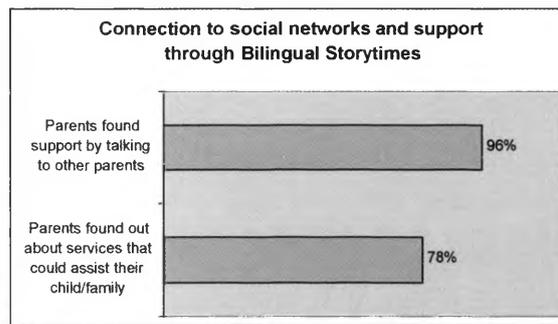
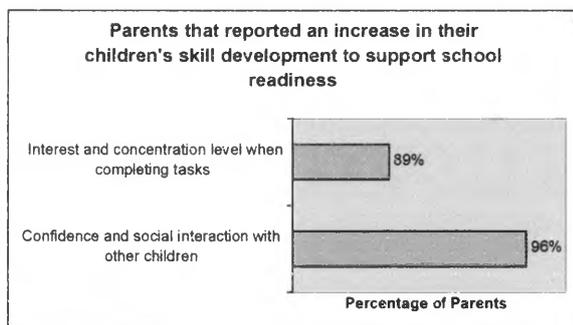
## Strengthening bilingual capacity

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

than mine. They not only have to learn a new language but the customs of a different society as well. Some are here without their family, having left them behind. Many have suffered trauma, sadness, the loss of family members, and even torture. Yet these students not only work through all these barriers and obstacles, they continually demonstrate how adaptable and resilient they are. If they have their family with them, they become teachers themselves, teaching their family things they have learned.



I was fortunate to have been brought up going to school, being a member of a local library, having stories read to me as a child, and having books



of my own. Computers weren't around then but my friends and I were still exposed to the changing world of technology. Many of the

students who come through our gates haven't had the opportunity or same advantages many of us take for granted. At Milpera many use a computer for the first time, and learn to read and write, in a

language other than their own. They learn all kinds of information literacy skills and eagerly soak up everything they can learn. New technology and learning to use the resources that we all take for granted opens up a whole new world to them.

We have on average over thirty nationalities at any one time each speaking a different language. For many students who come through our gates, it may be their first learning experience in a western world classroom, as many students have had little or no previous schooling.

Students stay with us for as little as a couple of months up to 18 months. It is very sad to see them go, but it brightens my day to remember how they have changed and grown from their first nervous shy days into the confident, self assured young people Milpera has helped them become. When they leave us and go into mainstream high school or TAFE, they are ready to face the world and take on new challenges and to fit into the ever-changing face of Australian society. Australia is truly a multicultural place that we all call home.

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