



Author Jackie French



Oxford University's Professor Edward Melhuish



Early Childhood Australia CEO Samantha Page



Exhibition stalls



Senator Bridget McKenzie with MC Jennifer Byrne



Panel discussion

REPORT BACK ON THE EARLY LITERACY SUMMIT 2016

More than 130 participants from government, not-for-profits, charities, libraries, early childhood, health, education, Indigenous literacy, publishers, booksellers, social enterprise and other stakeholder groups gathered in Canberra on 7 and 8 March 2016 for the two-day National Early Literacy Summit. KIRRIN SAMPSON reports.

Organised by the Australian Library and Information Association, in partnership with the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, National and State Libraries Australasia, Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, this was the first gathering of its type in more than a decade, and the program of 14 speakers and 12 expert panellists prompted intense debate and discussions.

Coincidentally, the results of the Australian Early Development Census 2015 were announced on the first

day of the summit, and they showed an improvement in early literacy since the introduction of the survey in 2009. In that year, 23 percent of five-year-olds were at risk of not developing the literacy skills they need to succeed later in life. In 2015, the figure had fallen to 15 percent. This was a welcome improvement, but it showed that there was still a need for early literacy to become a national priority.

ALIA CEO, Sue McKerracher, said, 'The National Early Literacy Summit was even more successful than we had hoped. We expected a high level of interest, but we didn't anticipate the immediate call to action and heartfelt agreement from a diverse range of organisations and peak bodies to join with us to make early literacy a national agenda item.'

In summary, the participants agreed to form a coalition with the purpose of developing a national conversation around early language and literacy.

The coalition would be supported by the broad scope of stakeholders in this area and would take into account their diverse perspectives. Its focus would be on the scoping and development of a National Early Language and Literacy Strategy for Australia. A core group would be identified to lead the initiative and manage the mechanics into the future.

The national conversation would be both a political call for concerted action at a federal, state, territory and local level, and a public education campaign targeting parents, caregivers, early childhood agencies and the community.

Sue McKerracher said: 'We have formed a small

Dr Cate Taylor, Principal Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute & the University of Western Australia Faculty of Education

Panel discussion

ALIA CEO Sue McKerracher and Professor Melhuish chat with Senator Bridget McKenzie

ARACY CEO Dr Dianne Jackson

ALIA CEO Sue McKerracher television interview

University of Canberra's Professor Misty Adoniou

action group with Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth to progress the coalition idea and scope the other activities. It's very exciting for libraries to be one of the lead agencies in this early-years initiative, especially as we have often been overlooked by government and other stakeholders in the past, despite the hard work of public libraries in this area.' 🌟

What do we mean by 'early'?

The focus of the summit was 0–5 years, although some speakers referred to 0–8 as 'early years'. The discussion was about factors affecting children before they started school.

Definition of literacy

The Early Years Framework definition was felt to encompass a breadth of meanings:

Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing.

ev-o-lu-tion

(noun) Transformation into something greater

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