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## Factors in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia

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**FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
EARLY CHILDHOOD DISTANCE EDUCATION CURRICULUM  
MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA.**

**by**

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Dip. Applied Linguistics**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Award of**

**Master of Education (Language and Literacy)**

**In the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University**

**Date of submission:**

**September 2001**

## Abstract

Many factors influence the changing nature of education: family structures, cultural diversity, rapid technological change, social conditions. In response to these changes the *Curriculum Framework* for Western Australian schools has been developed to establish the learning outcomes expected of all students from K-12. Students in isolated and distance education settings are supplied curriculum materials designed to meet their diverse educational needs. This study presents one snapshot of an ongoing research project in which new language and literacy curriculum materials for early childhood distance education learners were developed, trialled and further developed. Some factors that appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia were identified through the use of grounded theory and explored through the development of draft and final curriculum materials for K-3 students in distance education. These factors include; state government mandated *Curriculum Framework* and *Outcomes and Standards Framework*, federal government initiatives, the impact of information and communication technologies, the needs of home tutors, the diversity of students enrolled in distance education and factors related to early childhood language and literacy needs identified through the literature review. The implications highlight the need to continue to seek feedback from all stakeholders, especially home tutors and the need for frequent reviews and rewriting of curriculum materials, taking into account current literature, technologies and pedagogical change.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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Date:

03 . 10 . 02

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **The context of distance education**

Across Australia distance education centres and Schools of the Air have been established to provide schooling for primary and secondary students living in remote and isolated locations away from regular schools. A distance education 'classroom' offers perhaps the most diverse range of students. Families range across a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds. Some families employ a governess to tutor their children, while others juggle the tutoring of one or more children with household and employment chores such as bookkeeping, cooking for workers, feeding farm animals or working as missionaries. Families also range in their cultural and linguistic diversity: many students in distance education in Western Australia live in remote and isolated Aboriginal communities where English is a second language or dialect. Others come from multi-lingual and monolingual backgrounds and are fluent speakers of Standard Australian English (SAE). Distance education students are provided with curriculum materials that assume they will be supervised by home tutors, who are usually, but not always, their parents.

### **Families**

Families and their children enrolled in distance education are an extremely diverse group. Some are settled on stations and farms; others are travellers, itinerant workers or missionaries. Families also include expatriate Western Australians in over 40 countries, again in extremely diverse situations, from those in cities who are unable to access

English speaking schools to those in isolated remote communities. Some home tutors are tertiary educated, while others may not have completed secondary schooling. Louden and Rivalland (1995) identified the diversity of roles that the home tutor in distance education settings must assume: these are supervisors, teachers, mentors, co-learners and parents. While most home tutors are parents with many responsibilities beyond the classroom, the role of the home tutor requires many tasks beyond the immediate day-to-day supervision and teaching of their children. Home tutors are required to ensure not only that student work is returned on a regular basis and that their children maintain regular contact with the school via radio or phone but that they must also monitor timetables for one or more students, mark their children's work and complete regular set reports.

## **Teachers**

Teachers from the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education play a different role to mainstream classroom teachers. Distance education teachers generally have responsibilities for one or more year levels of children, or in some schools students are from within family groups to allow the family to maintain a relationship with the one teacher. The role of the teacher is to oversee the supply of curriculum materials and ensure that individual students' needs are met through modifications or development of new or alternate materials. Teachers collect the 'set work' that is designed around a two-week cycle, they mark the materials and provide feedback to their student and the home tutor or parent. Schools of the Air provide additional Very High Frequency (VHF) radio contact for students while all teachers use the most appropriate mode of communication for their own families; this includes Email, phone or post. At times teachers may not receive student work for up to six to eight weeks after its completion. It is for this

reason that teachers rely on the home tutors to provide invaluable feedback to them regarding students' progress in reading, speaking, listening and the many skills and understandings that cannot be observed or monitored through both distance and time. Teachers must assist home tutors in recognising the needs of their children and planning to meet their needs with the teacher. In addition, school budgets allow for students within Western Australia to be visited by either their own teacher or a schools' itinerant teacher three to four times in a year. Such visits allow teachers to become familiar with the learning environments of their children and families and plan accordingly for the needs of their students.

### **Curriculum Design**

Curriculum design centres in each state of Australia employ writers to design and develop curriculum materials that meet the specific needs of their students and schools. As most distance education materials (but not ECE in Western Australia) are regularly re-written or edited to stay in line with changing pedagogy and rapid changes in technologies, curriculum developers need to be aware of curriculum issues central to the needs of distance education learners. They also need to be aware of the varying conditions that distance education learners work within.

While identifying factors central to the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials, it is necessary to pre-determine 'curriculum' and the external factors beyond the reach of distance education providers. 'Curriculum' refers to all of the opportunities, resources (human and material), school ethos, systems of assessment, learning environment and teaching methods that contribute to the learning

process. In a distance education setting the learning environment, which includes the values or ethos of the home and the relationships between parents and students or home tutors and students, are beyond the influence of the school. Recent changes in pedagogy in Western Australia stress the value of curriculum materials that foster shared values and promote positive learning environments.

These changes in pedagogy have come about through the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* for Western Australian schools, which mandates, from 2004, the learning outcomes expected of all students from K-12. Changes to early childhood starting ages have also impacted on curriculum development in distance education. Materials for Kindergarten children (4-year-olds) had not been developed at the beginning of this project although changes in the Kindergarten starting ages within the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) have been made, such that children turning four by June 30, 2001 are entitled to attend four half days a week from 2001. Pre-primary requirements are also changing as the Education Department of Western Australia phases in a five full day for 5-year-olds, in 2002. At the beginning of the project existing distance education materials for Pre-primary children had been written in 1980 for a part time 5-year-old program. Existing Years One and Two materials were ten years old. Existing Year Three materials were supplied from interstate but were no longer in use in the state of origin. Thus, the early childhood materials, still being used in 2000 at the time of this study were deemed to no longer meet the needs of early childhood students in Western Australia. The materials still in use in 2000 will be referred to in this thesis as the “existing materials”.

Very little research has centred on an outcomes focused approach to early childhood language and literacy through the mode of distance education. This study was designed to investigate the needs of early childhood learners in distance education and to identify important factors in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials.

## **My professional background**

In examining issues related to early childhood distance education for this research it is important to describe my professional history. A naturalistic inquiry such as is used in this research uses a human as instrument. As the human as instrument I bring to the study my own tacit knowledge that I have been able to build. Lincon and Guba (1985, p. 198) point out that "tacit knowledge must be converted to propositional knowledge so that the inquirer can both think about it explicitly and communicate it to others".

I began work in isolated and distance education in 1993 as a writer of Homeland curriculum materials in a School of the Air. This school-based project aimed to develop curriculum materials specific to the needs of Aboriginal NESB students from K-10. These students lived in isolated and remote homeland communities in the North of Western Australia that were too small to access government schooling. In 1994 I became the full time Homelands teacher, responsible for the education of up to 30 children at any one time. These children were itinerant, largely due to seasonal isolation

from their Homeland communities. As I began to visit these communities I became increasingly aware of many factors that impacted on their learning.

One factor was that these small and very isolated communities had no speakers of Standard Australian English (SAE) and the children generally spoke a range of languages and dialects, including traditional Aboriginal languages, heavy to light Kriols and Aboriginal English, depending on the location of each community. The question arose as to how successfully students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) could learn English with no speakers of SAE within their own communities. A lack of a home tutor with SAE, and lack of basic English education among those guardians (mostly grandparents) who were willing to tutor the children, also impacted on the implementation of the educational programs that focused on English language and literacy development. The Very High Frequency radio provided to these students was their only access to speakers of SAE.

The community elders saw the learning of English as a valuable for the students' later success in leading their communities. Many resources were lacking within the communities. On many occasions buildings or rooms were not available or suitable (largely due to weather conditions) for schoolrooms. Most communities did not have any forms of environmental print and the sorts of texts that are found in Western Australian rural towns or cities. The communities were small and isolated and had no government or non-government services beyond the closest Aboriginal resource centre,

several hundred kilometres away. As a result, there were not only no speakers of English but also no language experiences or purposes for English language and literacy.

In 1995 and 1996 I continued as the Homelands teacher and also as an itinerant teacher responsible for visiting all of the families enrolled in the School of the Air. As a visiting teacher I became aware of the many factors important to learning, teaching and assessment through distance education. Issues that were apparent to me at the time included:

- The structured nature of the materials that didn't allow for the developmental needs of learners;
- The lack of strategies among home tutors to deal with the developmental learning needs of their children while completing the set work;
- The difficulties experienced by home tutors when working with large numbers of print based materials that crowded the curriculum with Maths, English, Art, Music, Science and other discipline related content;
- Additional difficulties experienced by home tutors who had two or more children, with each child working on separate theme based topics and multi-disciplinary sets of work; and
- The frustrations of home tutors trying to keep up with information and communication technologies.

In my work with home tutors I experienced a whole range of social and cultural diversity. For many years I worked, visited and stayed with the families and have had frequent and regular opportunities to listen to parents' and/or home tutors' ideas, concerns and issues related to their children's learning and their own needs relevant to learning, teaching and assessment processes. I observed that parents and home tutors of early childhood students were unsure of where their children's progress should be and where it should be headed. They had no comparisons and sought frequent assurances that the materials were supplying their children with the opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge, values and understandings needed to function in today's society. Most importantly, parents wanted to ensure opportunities provided were equal to those provided in 'mainstream' city schools. While parents wanted to ensure their children were not disadvantaged compared to children with access to mainstream schools, teachers too expressed concerns. Teachers' concerns were generally about the rigid structure and age of the existing curriculum materials and their inability to meet the needs of a diverse range of students.

In 1997, as acting principal in a School of the Air, I worked closely with other distance education principals to initiate the development of new curriculum materials for the early childhood years (K-3). Administrators at the time had some general concerns about the age of the materials. They felt the need for review and research into the needs of the early childhood years. This needed to include the trends and changes in education in Western Australian government school systems, including changes in starting ages and school times for Kindergarten and Pre-primary in addition to the requirements of the *Curriculum Framework*, mandated for Western Australian Schools from 2004 and

the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*. Finally, the immense changes in information and communication technologies over the twenty years since some of the existing materials had been written, needed to be acknowledged and used.

In July 1997 I was appointed project leader for an early childhood integrated curriculum project with the School of Isolated and Distance Education. My initial role was to analyse existing materials, liaise with the client group (schools and their communities/families) and develop a framework for new curriculum materials for the early childhood years. In 1998 another full time curriculum writer was employed and together we developed a draft model of two months work from K-3 for trial in late 1998. Following the trial and review period two more full time writers were employed in 1999 - 2000 to write the ECE curriculum materials.

As a teacher and administrator in distance education I found the curriculum materials to be very discipline based and rigid in their approach to learning and teaching. The literacy materials take children through a lock-step or age/grade related approach where children learn expected skills and then move onto the next skill, regardless of their own individual and developmental needs. While it seems necessary for the materials to be prescriptive in meeting the needs of mostly non-professional home tutors, materials also require a degree of flexibility to cater for the needs of children who learn at different rates and in different ways.

A search of the literature indicated that no studies exist in the field of early childhood distance education. It is for this reason that I proposed to undertake the current study in order to investigate the needs of early childhood learners in distance education and to identify important factors in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials. A grounded theory approach allowed the research findings to be driven by the participants and resulted in the development of a curriculum based on their experiences, needs and commitment to maximise the educational opportunities of their children. The research used a naturalistic inquiry that jointly constructs the claims, concerns and issues of all stakeholders through recurring dialogue. It was anticipated that the results of this study would inform future distance education curriculum writers in producing materials that provide children with opportunities to achieve the mandated outcomes of the *Curriculum Framework*.

The literature review can be found in Chapter 2. In this chapter I examine theoretical models of language and literacy acquisition and pedagogy in early childhood. I also explain the national literacy goals and the state mandated outcomes-focused approach to education for K-12 students through the implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998). In addition I investigate issues concerning distance education in particular, as they relate to the development of curriculum for early childhood learners. The analysis of the literature led to the following research question: What factors appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia?

In Chapter 3 I describe the methodology of the study, including the design of the grounded theory research, the participants and methods of data collection. In the audit trail I outline how the data was collected and analysed including the existing curriculum materials, seminars and meetings with stakeholders, use of archival data, anecdotal records and document analysis. Finally, I describe how the use of interviews allowed participants to further contribute to the ongoing-grounded theory that was developing.

In Chapter 4 I describe the phases of continuous data analysis and the ongoing emergent design. This includes an outline of the initial stages of the development of the trial materials with understandings gained through discussions with participants. I continue to describe the development and trial of draft curriculum materials, questionnaire findings and discussions with families visited who were involved in the trial. In the chapter I continue to describe how I took into account and iterated findings with stakeholders. I also provide a summary of the participant interviews and dialogue.

In Chapter 5 I describe the development of the final draft curriculum materials, including their structure. I further analyse some of the factors that were considered important to their development by stakeholder groups that included parents, home tutors, teachers, administrators and writers in addition to government directives and initiatives.

In Chapter 6 I conclude with a general discussion in which I highlight the factors important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia. These factors I describe in

relation to external factors including factors resulting from the literature review and finally factors that developed from the development of new draft curriculum materials. I conclude by outlining issues that arose from this research, areas of future research and the ongoing implications for educational practice.

### **Research Question**

The research question addressed in this study: What factors appear to be important in the development of early childhood, distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy for Western Australian schools?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I look at research that relates to outcomes focused education, distance education and early childhood language and literacy education in order to best determine those factors central to the needs of early childhood learners in distance education. Firstly, an outcomes focused approach to education is explored, together with the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998) for Western Australian schools. Secondly, the nature of distance education is described and related to some key recommendations and directions being taken by Federal and State governments. Finally, the area of early childhood language and literacy development is discussed and related to the nature of distance education and an outcomes-focused approach to learning. This review of the literature foregrounds the data collection and the grounded theory that develops and determines the factors central to the development of a language and literacy curriculum for early childhood learners enrolled in distance education.

### **Curriculum Framework**

The Temby Report (1995) recommended the development of a curriculum framework that sets out the outcomes expected for all students from K-12 in Western Australian schools. Through five years of development and consultation with almost 10 000 educators and community members the *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia* (Curriculum Council, 1998) was developed. The *Curriculum Framework* claims that it provides the knowledge, values, skills and understandings expected for all students in Western Australian schools to participate

fully in a changing world. It contains 13 Overarching Outcomes and 66 Learning Area outcomes grouped under eight learning areas. Explicit within these outcomes are 32 Core Shared Values, that include the pursuit of knowledge, self acceptance and respecting of others, social and civic responsibilities and environmental sustainability such as use of resources, diversity of species, cultural heritage and conservation of the environment. These outcomes are mandated from 2004 for all educational systems and sectors from K-12 in Western Australia. The knowledge, values and skills described within the outcomes expected for Western Australian students have been agreed upon through an extensive community consultation process, as the minimum needs of students. Some educational sectors have additional values and outcomes such as religious values.

In an outcomes-focused approach to education, the focus is on what students learn. It encompasses a developmental approach to learning and teaching, catering for individual needs and learning styles. It is expected that students will be actively involved in the learning process through involvement in planning, goal setting, evaluating, reflecting and collaborative assessment. Meeting the needs of the *Curriculum Framework* using an outcomes-focused approach to education brings about a particular challenge to writers of distance education materials. By their very nature these materials must be prepared without knowledge of individual students, but with the knowledge that this is perhaps the most diverse classroom in the world. The shift to an outcomes focus means a shift in emphasis from what is being taught to what is learnt by students (Curriculum Council 1998:14). To make this shift, teachers are required to develop an understanding of the needs of their students and to focus on these as starting points for planning.

However, distance education does not allow for such understandings of students as the core of the curriculum materials are pre-prepared by curriculum writers who, in developing curriculum materials for many years to come, are not familiar with the individual students who will be using the materials.

Curriculum developed in line with an outcomes focus is expected to provide flexibility for the student, home tutor and teacher to cater for the diverse developmental needs of individual students. At the same time, these materials need to be structured enough to allow mostly unqualified and untrained home tutors, the majority of whom are parents, to use the materials in a way that provides their students with the opportunities to demonstrate the outcomes and to be 'user friendly' for the home tutors. The ways in which home tutors interpret a task or an outcome may be different to that which the writer of the materials had in mind. In developing materials the writer must find a medium for the user that provides an explicit understanding of the intended learning, whilst at the same time maintaining a text that is clear and precise.

## **The nature of distance education in Western Australia**

Distance education in Western Australia began in 1918 and very High Frequency radio broadcasts started in 1940 through courtesy of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, 2000). In 1949 'itinerant' teachers were employed to travel around remote locations visiting families three times a year. By the 1960s five Schools of the Air serviced students throughout remote areas of Western Australia. While new trends in information and communication technologies are now changing the face of distance education to deliver a more effective and interactive

service, research and development in distance education remain focused on technologies related to the delivery of education in middle childhood and early and late adolescence/adulthood. The area of early childhood distance education has received little attention.

Enrolment figures from the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education show that approximately 2500 students in Western Australia rely on distance education for their schooling. While many secondary students study distance education in district high school environments, for approximately 500 full-time students from K-7 this schooling takes place in the home. My own experience has allowed me to see that in most instances parents, predominantly mothers, take on the role of home tutor (see also Rivalland, Rohl and Smith, 2001). Occasionally the services of a governess may be employed. These home tutors are rarely qualified teachers and have many roles beyond the classroom. A class of students in distance education may span the state and extend into any of over 40 countries throughout the world. Within the home environment the schooling takes place in a range of places from dedicated schoolrooms with adjoining governess quarters to corners of verandas, kitchens or bedrooms. Often the radio is in a separate room or area to minimise disturbance if more than one child is in the schooling environment.

Curriculum materials are written and prepared in Perth and dispatched through the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, of which the Schools of the Air are a part. Currently the primary method of curriculum delivery is print-based, with some support from audio and video media. Materials, referred to as 'sets', are written for a two-week

period and include Home Tutor Lesson Notes and Student Workbooks. Postal services provide the exchange of set materials between the school and the student. My own experience allowed me to see that the turn-around rate of materials from schools to students and back often extended into months, especially for overseas families, travellers and families affected by wet seasons. This delay in being able to provide immediate and regular feedback to students and home tutors emphasises the importance of maintaining regular contact between teachers and families through means additional to the slower postal responses. It also emphasises the need for materials to be self-explanatory for home tutors to use with their children. Despite global increases in the use of technologies, telephone and Very High Frequency radio continue to provide the most common forms of communication between remote Western Australian families and teachers in the base schools. Email is the most effective communication form used with travellers and overseas families. Distance education schools are committed to recognising the diversity and needs of students and provide a number of camps, home tutor seminars, activity days, home visits and additional resources to assist in meeting the needs of their students in remote parts of Western Australia.

A number of studies in recent years have identified several issues concerning provision of distance education. The terms of reference of the Tomlinson Report (1994), *Schooling in Rural Western Australia* included analysing areas of disadvantage for all rural students in Western Australia. The report was largely concerned with the 'existing and potential future use of alternate delivery systems, using educational technology in the provision of schooling for rural students' (Tomlinson, 1990:1). It indicated possible

approaches to flexibility for various modes of delivery in distance education.

Recommendations relating to distance education included:

- That teachers for distance education and School of the Air be selected on criteria which recognise their commitment to, and their suitability for, distance teaching;
- That special provision for the social development of isolated students continues to be given high priority through the funding of school camps and musters;
- That training in all aspects of current and proposed future technologies be offered to home tutors.

(Tomlinson pp. 1994: 92-95)

While seven years on many of the recommendations of the report have been implemented, some have not. Upgrades to the transmission equipment in the Schools of the Air recommended in the report have been implemented. However, through my experience and from my conversations with other Schools of the Air staff, parents and students, it appears that the new equipment has not resulted in clearer or improved radio frequencies between teachers and students. Only a complete change in the type of telecommunication methods or technologies can create this improvement.

The recommendations relating to distance education have been implemented with varying degrees of success. Some Schools of the Air in remote locations are identified as 'hard to staff' schools and high turnover of staff (see Rivalland, Rohl & Smith, 2001) must be taken into account as a factor which affects student outcomes. Home tutor training remains limited, due to the geographic isolation of the families and continuing

limitations of access to technologies and power supplies: many families continue to have power for only two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening as they run their own generators (Louden & Rivalland 1995). The Tomlinson report focuses mainly on broad needs of the schools and the impact of new technologies and does not address the curriculum needs of students.

Louden and Rivalland (1995) also recognised the flexibility of technologies to enhance the distance education learning process. They found that telephones and Very High Frequency radios were the most common forms of communication in 1995. In 2001 this was still the situation for the early childhood years and research and development into the broader use of multi-media delivery in Western Australia was concerned mostly with the curriculum of middle school and post-compulsory schooling. Reports such as that by Tomlinson (1994) continue to highlight low academic performance by rural students. Nevertheless, current Commonwealth literacy policy documents such as *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DETYA, 1999) have recognised that it is in the first years of school that all children can be helped to acquire foundation skills in reading and writing. It is, therefore, most important to investigate the needs of early childhood learners and their home tutors in distance education.

The Tomlinson Report's (1994) recommendation to provide training to home tutors in the use of learning technologies may in fact be inappropriate when many of the remote and isolated locations of distance education families remain with limited and poor power and telecommunications lines or access. Further, there is no mention in the report of the needs of home tutors to be provided with training to support the language and

literacy development of their children. It seems that as children develop their emergent language and literacy skills, home tutors need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and understandings to support the learning of their children. As discussed in *Literacy for All* (DETYA, 1999), home tutors play an important role in their children's education through scaffolding, modelling and interacting with their children.

Distance education materials are developed to be used by home tutors from diverse demographic, geographic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Louden and Rivalland (1995) and Rivalland, Rohl and Smith (2001) have pointed out that some children within the middle childhood/early adolescent age group may work with very little supervision by a home tutor. It is particularly important that in the early childhood years students in distance education have one-on-one supervision and support, particularly as the early years have been identified as the most crucial in young children's acquisition of language and literacy (DETYA, 1999; Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).

## **National Literacy needs**

The Commonwealth National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (DETYA 1999) is directed towards strengthening the literacy and numeracy achievements of all children. The plan describes the nature of literacy "as intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing" (DEET, 1991:5). Section 4.2 of the Plan recognises 'a number of factors known to be critical in the acquisition of literacy. These include the:

- Central importance of literacy in the early years of schooling;

- Recognition that children who fail to learn basic skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening by the end of Year Three can be disadvantaged for life;
- Importance of home literacy practices;
- Significance of parent involvement;
- Need for adequate school time to be devoted to literacy teaching.

(DETYA, 1999)

Geeke and Raban (1993) recognises that the early childhood years from birth to 8 years of age are the fastest growth periods in a lifespan. The DETYA document *Literacy for All* (DETYA, 1999) draws on research into family literacy practices, identifying the time spent in reading to children as an influential factor in increasing literacy learning. It also highlights the need to identify children at risk as early as possible (see also Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998; Rohl, House, Loudon, Milton & Rivalland, 2000). It therefore seems important to identify how curriculum materials can be developed to enable home tutors to meet the literacy needs of their children and this includes the early identification of students at educational risk.

### **The non-compulsory years in early childhood education**

In response to the Scott report (1993) on *Voluntary Full-time Pre-primary Education in Western Australia*, changes to the starting age of the Kindergarten and Pre-primary years of schooling are currently taking place in Western Australia. These changes include a change in age of entering kindergarten from 2001, whereby students must have turned four by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2001. (The previous cut off date was the 31<sup>st</sup> of

December). Kindergarten in 2001 has also moved from two half-day sessions to four half-day sessions and in 2002 five-year-old Pre-primary programs shift from four to five full days of schooling. The Scott report discusses many issues that impact on the education of K-2 schooling across Australia, many of which are relevant to this study. The impact of educational programs on four-year-olds, implementation of full time five-year-old programs and the consideration of multi-age grouping are important to the development of curriculum for early childhood distance education.

Changes in starting age and the increase to four half-days for Kindergarten and five full days for Pre-primary impact on the development of new curriculum materials. Existing pre-school distance education materials are designed for a part-time five-year-old program only. The consideration of multi-age grouping in the Scott report was influenced by key findings of the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), which was that:

The view of the Schools Council is that if fundamental reform rather than cosmetic change is to occur, then the familiar, comfortable structural patterns can no longer remain the norm. A much richer and more diverse pattern of organisational arrangements will be necessary to ensure that every child's experience in the early years of schooling is as productive and rewarding as possible (NBEET, 1992:5).

As a result of these findings and recommendations, the Education Department of Western Australia held a trial of multi-age grouping in schools.

## **Multi-age grouping**

In Western Australia multi-age refers to mixed ability, vertically grouped children who are from two or three year groups. In describing their case for a pilot project into multi-

age grouping the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA, 2000) likened multi-age grouping to family and neighbourhood groupings. They also felt this structure enhanced social development, cognitive development and collaborative learning that would allow for a shift away from a lock-step structured curriculum (EDWA, 1995:3-4). Many of the benefits of multi-age grouping outlined by the Education Department of Western Australia are relevant to and already apparent in the family groups enrolled in distance education. Students have the benefit of a consistent teacher in their home tutor and are already schooled in a family unit, described as an asset of a multi-age classroom (EDWA, 2000). Common programs with common outcomes have the potential to meet the needs of different children if they are provided with developmentally appropriate learning practices that allow them to learn at different rates. Catering to the needs of a variety of children in the home or in the classroom has always been an issue for both distance education and mainstream education.

In discussing 'best practice' in early childhood education, the Education Department of Western Australia (1995) describes how collaborative experiences affect the social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development of young children. They explain that experiences that provide for a combination of inclusive groupings can play an important role in a developmental learning program. These issues of collaboration, developmental learning and inclusivity are among the key principles of the *Curriculum Framework*, so must be considered in the development of curriculum in Western Australia. The understanding that 'on-going success for young children depends on sound approaches to continuity and transition across the early years' (EDWA 1995:32) is a key factor for early childhood learners in the home environment.

## **Theories of literacy development in young children**

Many researchers have pointed out the need for increasingly high literacy standards if children are to function in society (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 1997). The *Curriculum Framework* (1998) emphasises present day literacy requirements, stating that students need high levels of literacy to meet the challenges brought about through technology and new forms of communication. The International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) have released a joint position statement, the basis of which is that a child's competence and ability to participate in school and society depend on their level of literacy development. They state, ' ... The early childhood years – from birth to eight – are the most important period for literacy development' (International Reading Association/National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998:7).

The authors of this position paper describe how, in the early years of school, the acquisition and development of literacy come through a variety of experiences that include both formal and informal learning and immersion in language and literacy. Children are developing language and literacy knowledge and skills from birth and the pre-school years play an important role in this development. They discuss how a play-based environment provides children with opportunities to mimic and experiment with the higher-level language they have been immersed in through adult modelling and company. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) point to the importance of socio-dramatic play for young children in helping to prevent reading difficulties, and Hall and

Robinson (2000) describe how play-based activities may facilitate the language and literacy development of young children.

There are a number of perspectives on early literacy development and how children learn literacy. Luke and Freebody state that history demonstrates that literacy is a flexible set of cultural practices shaped by competing social factors (1999). They believe that the teaching of literacy needs to reflect the social, cultural, political and moral needs of life's directions. Luke and Freebody suggest that literacy instruction is about building on socio-cultural identities and communities and that teachers constructing literacy instruction depend on their own ability to read and interpret their students' existing linguistic, cultural and textual practices. Curriculum writers developing curriculum in advance for distance education learners must write a curriculum that takes into account a huge diversity of possible students.

Barratt-Pugh (2000) describes various theories of early literacy that are interrelated, all of them adding to our current understandings of literacy development in the early years. She describes how maturational theorists such as Gesell (1950), believed that children could only learn literacy skills at a particular mental age and that parents had little influence on the process of children's learning. She explains that schools used reading readiness tests to determine whether children were ready for formal instruction in reading. In addition she describes how developmental theorists (such as Durkin 1966), thought that although children would learn when they were developmentally ready, their literacy learning could be enhanced through pre-reading skills, drilled and taught in isolation. The role of parents was again seen as limited.

Many researchers since the 1970s, have challenged the maturational and developmental views of how and when young children learn about literacy (Teale & Yokota, 2000). Further many researchers and teachers have taken on an emergent literacy perspective that fosters the belief that children's literacy development is ongoing from birth and that the child is an active participant, whose literacy develops through immersion in everyday literacy practices. Teale and Yokota (2000: 5) explain the main tenets of the emergent literacy theorists and practitioners as being that:

- Literacy learning begins early in life before formal school instruction;
- Emergent literacy better describes the acquisition of reading, writing and oral language development than reading readiness, as they are all interrelated;
- Literacy develops through purposeful, real life experiences that must be a part of a meaningful curriculum;
- Children learn through immersion in and use of literate experiences;
- Children's different knowledge and backgrounds influence literacy development;
- The road to literacy has many paths and directions, with children developing at different rates.

This view of emergent literacy that allows for children to become literate at different rates is also a focus of the outcomes focused approach to language and literacy development that is described in the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998).

In the 1980's, as part of the emergent literacy perspective, whole language programs emerged (Teale & Yokota, 2000; Barratt-Pugh, 2000). Teale and Yokota (2000) believe that an emergent literacy approach will provide for the needs of children who come to school with a wide range of language and literacy experiences. Galda, Cullinan and Strickland (1993) explain how children in a literate society are immersed from birth in a print rich, literate culture and how they develop, from an early age, many concepts of print, including its importance and functions for contemporary society. Taking an emergent literacy perspective they point out the interrelated nature of oral language, reading and writing. Sulzby and Teale (1989) also point out that reading, writing and oral language are interrelated and develop concurrently. An emergent literacy curriculum builds on children's real life experiences through play, exploration, experimentation and immersion in print. Genisio (1996) believes that young children set the pace of progress and develop at a rate that is comfortable to them.

Sulzby and Teale (1990:728) describe emergent literacy as "the earliest phase in literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally". They believe the term 'emergent literacy' identifies that, in a literate society, children are beginning the process of becoming literate from their very first years. An emergent literacy perspective supports the belief that children's development of language and literacy is begun through their immersion in print, regular reading experiences, seeing adults write for a variety of purposes, viewing, listening and speaking in their environments and having opportunities to experiment with writing and drawing (Weinberger, 1996). Children who recognise familiar logos or symbols in environmental print and in television commercials become able to demonstrate that

print, or symbolic visual representations, have meanings. Weinberger (1996) believes that teachers who take an emergent literacy perspective foster the acquisition of literacy by building on a child's own knowledge of literacy, with the understanding that most young children in a literate society will have some knowledge and understanding of literacy. As children encounter texts in their daily lives they will seek to understand and interpret print, signs and symbols as a natural step in making sense of their world (Weinberger 1996).

However, some children in isolated distance education environments may not have access to a print rich environment. Many families in remote communities and isolated stations may be exposed to little environmental print, signs or even television and broadband radio. Often, Very High Frequency radios may be their only form of communication. It seems that there is a need for distance education personnel to develop strategies for helping home tutors provide access to print for young children in such environments in Australia.

Over the years there have been many modifications to and developments in the emergent literacy perspective of literacy learning. In 1989 the International Reading Association (IRA) published a book *Emergent Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write* (edited by Strickland and Morrow), that 'represented the work of top researchers and scholars' in the field of early literacy (Teale & Yokota, 2000:ix). In 2000, the IRA published another text on beginning reading and writing with the same editors, that claimed to extend and refine knowledge of emergent literacy research, policy and practice (Strickland & Morrow, 2000). In the new text there is a strong

emphasis on the diversity of early literacy learners and their experiences that supports home-school links and the role of play.

Barratt-Pugh (2000) also discusses how literacy perspectives continued to emerge throughout the 1990's. She has proposed a socio-cultural theory of literacy that builds on understandings of emergent literacy and how knowledge of how to 'do' literacy differs among early learners, depending on their cultural and social backgrounds. For many children the cultural understandings and values of the home environment are different to the formal learning programs of their schools. These children may therefore be disadvantaged by the school system, as it may not allow them to build on their own skills and understandings. Barratt-Pugh states that Luke (1993) has argued that literacy programs which do not take into account children's experiences and backgrounds result in children not making sense of the literacy demands of their formal schooling.

Thus, curriculum providers need to take children's experiences and backgrounds into account. Barratt-Pugh (2000: 4) states that "a socio-cultural perspective enables early childhood professionals to examine the way patterns of inequality are constructed and maintained, and explores ways of teaching literacy which expose and challenge this inequality, as part of children's development of literacy". Barratt-Pugh (2000: 5) describes six elements of a socio-cultural view of literacy:

1. Children learn and practise literacy in everyday literacy experiences;
2. Literacy practices are specific to and build on cultural backgrounds and identity;
3. Children's understandings of literacy differ;
4. Literacy practices meet specific and different purposes;

5. Children's knowledge and skills in literacy differ as they develop; and
6. Different values of literacy depend on their social and cultural contexts.

We have seen that curriculum in distance education is developed in advance, without knowledge of individual students and that these programs then remain in place for many years. There is a need for a distance education curriculum that recognises diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and allows home tutors and children to build on their own experiences, literate practices and values.

## **Literacy and Play**

Hall and Robinson (2000) claim that a program that integrates and is structured around direct experiences most effectively supports children's early literacy learning. They explain how a constructivist model of learning provides children with experiences that allow them, through play and experimentation, to observe, manipulate and construct through active hands on learning. Woolfolk (1993:485) describes this constructivist paradigm as follows:

Whatever the name, the key idea is that students actively construct their own knowledge; the mind of the student mediates input from the outside world to determine what the student will learn. Learning is active mental work, not passive reception of teaching. In this work other people play an important role by providing support, challenging thinking, and serving as coaches or models, but the student is the key to learning.

For early childhood learners a play-based curriculum may provide this model.

Children's play is described by Wardle (1999), Bruce (1996) and Fler (1996) as the foundation for all future learning. Through play, children have opportunities to express themselves using and demonstrating the knowledge and skills they already possess in their language experiences at school and at home. Play experiences enable young children to be involved in active experimentation, cooperating with adults and peers to develop at their own pace across the cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, creative and aesthetic domains. A play-based curriculum provides children opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge, understanding and values through meaningful experiences. Kopke, a mother and home tutor, in her anecdotal stories of education in the bush says of the pre-school years, 'Learning should be a matter of creating an atmosphere, providing materials and then allowing a child to choose freely what he [sic] wants to do and experience' (Kopke, 1983. p15).

Vygotsky (1978) has described the 'zone of proximal development' as the region in which learning and development take place. Vygotsky believed that in play, children are engaged in behaviour beyond their age (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Fler (1996), building on the work of Vygotsky, believes that play provides children with the opportunities to act out the rules of society that they are trying to understand. She explains how children involved in play are able to use language in context, make corrections and guess meanings from concrete cues. During play children often take on adult roles, correcting speech and modelling appropriate language conventions. Children enhance their vocabulary by introducing new words they have recently heard. This type of active experimentation enables children to increase their understanding of language, its

conventions, processes and strategies and their own attitudes and beliefs about language in their world. Communication through play allows young children the opportunities to learn about themselves, other people and the world around them.

Hall and Robinson (2000) discuss the gradual shift away from play in early childhood institutions as society views the value of the work ethic as being in opposition to play:

Schooling and schooling-related institutions are, inevitably, seen as a place for work thus, by definition, play becomes excluded. Politicians have made skilful use of this dichotomy, supported by parents who feel uncomfortable when their children arrive with reports of playing all day at nursery or in school (p. 111).

In my experience many home tutors in distance education also see play as something removed from the classroom, or more specifically the learning process. Yet it seems that researchers in the areas of early childhood and play agree on the enormous benefits of play for growth and development.

The *Curriculum Framework* (1998) stresses language as a social and collaborative process, with play providing children the opportunities to use and practise the skills and understandings they are developing. It explains that, through play, children use language to interact, communicate, achieve purposes and explore. Further, play may provide children with opportunities to put into practice the teaching and learning strategies they have experienced, through activities such as shared reading, reading independently, using picture clues, retelling stories, making meaning from print, writing for different purposes and inventing spelling. Through observing play in a variety of environments adults are able to understand the knowledge of literacy that children

possess. Pellegrini and Galda (1993) state that play provides opportunities for children to use explicit language, metalanguage and narratives.

Hall and Robinson (2000) claim that environments that foster literacy through play often need to be planned to enable rich literacy experiences associated with a theme or topic that engages children and builds on their own knowledge and experiences. They state that children will need immersion in the topic to be explored and the chosen topic should allow for visits to the world outside the classroom. In a mainstream rural or metropolitan classroom children may have access to visitors coming into the school and excursions where children have opportunities to visualise, explore, ask questions and build on their own knowledge and understandings which may stimulate the children's role-playing of adult language and behaviours. Hall and Robinson also stress the importance of allowing children to be involved in developing play environments, collecting resources and reflecting on the value of the environment developed: children can be encouraged to copy signs and environmental print related to the theme being developed and themes can be developed to allow children to use language and literacy for different purposes. Hall and Robinson also discuss the possibility of the play theme having a range of participant roles. The implication for children in distance education settings is that they may be the only child in an isolated setting, making both visits and social interaction limited. It is therefore important to discuss with home tutors their role in enhancing language and literacy through children's play.

Hall and Robinson describe how children's play can be enhanced and directed by adult intervention or participation. Adults are able to play a role in everyday play themes.

Adults can help maintain a theme by role-playing a character suitable to the situation, such as a shopper or shop assistant in a shopping theme. In setting up play environments the adult needs to involve the children in making decisions, choosing resources and building, constructing or setting up appropriate environments. Everyday events such as shopping, the post office or service stations all relate to most children's everyday life experiences. Hall and Robinson show how, in a shopping theme, children will not only be using language and literacy, but will also be involved in the language and processes of mathematics, economics, goods and services. They stress that "everyday living does not compartmentalise life into neat academic segments, but integrates them into more complex, seamless and holistic experiences" (p. 129). It seems that extending a play theme across curriculum areas provides children with greater opportunities and additional knowledge from which to extend their language and literacy. This integration of curriculum areas through play should have the potential to maximise learning outcomes.

## **The learning environment**

In order to exploit the potential of play themes and children's immersion in everyday literacy practices the value of the learning environment itself needs to be recognised. As noted earlier, some children in isolated settings may have little access to print rich environments. In many parts of the world children are exposed to print through billboards, signs, labels, books, brochures, packaging, advertisements, newspapers, computers, mass media, television and video. Most children living in urban and rural settings see print in shops, homes, hospitals and streets. However, as I have discussed, this exposure varies according to the social and cultural contexts in which the children

live and some children in distance education contexts may not have this wide exposure to print.

Weinberger (1996) has pointed out that, as children try to make sense of the signs, symbols and messages in the world around them, they are already developing their literacy knowledge, although much of this learning can go on unnoticed by adults. However, she explains that adults can build on children's understanding of literacy by talking about print in the environment, pointing out what signs say and reinforcing the child's growing understandings of the purpose and audience of print. Home tutors who do not have this knowledge of early literacy may not make these connections for children without appropriate training and materials. Further, for those children who do not have access to a print rich environment, curriculum materials may be needed that assist home tutors to focus on setting up learning environments that provide opportunities for children to benefit from exposure to environmental print.

## **Literacy and phonological awareness**

Phonological awareness is an important component of metalinguistics awareness. Metalinguistic awareness refers to the ability to reflect on and manipulate spoken language, such as sentences, words and phonemes (Tunmer, Herriman & Nesdale 1988). Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognise and manipulate the sound units in spoken language. Much research into early literacy development has shown the critical importance of children's phonological awareness (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998; International Reading Association 1998). Children demonstrating phonological awareness are able to break words into some or all of the

following units: syllables (di-no-saur), onset and rime (f-ish), and phonemes (f-i-sh). The teaching of phonological awareness in the early years is ideally carried out through the use of songs, poems, rhymes and repetitive books that use rhyme and alliteration (Ericson and Juliebo, 1998). In existing Pre-primary distance education materials there is little use of songs, poems and rhymes. Books intended for home tutors to read to children are few, in 2000 only three to four books per term. There seems to be a need to address the issue of the limited availability of books for young distance education learners.

Phonological awareness, while not a new phenomenon, has gained increasing popularity among researchers of early literacy development and reading difficulties (Adams 1990; International Reading Association, 1998). Research from the United States of America suggests that 20 – 25% of mainstream children may experience difficulty in developing phonological awareness (International Reading Association, 1998; Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler 1998). Adams et al. (1998) and Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) point to research demonstrating that children who do not develop phonological awareness may experience serious reading and writing difficulties. The California Department of Education (1996) describes phonological awareness as the most powerful predictor in learning to read. If children are phonologically aware and can recognise the alphabet letters they are equipped with skills that have the potential to help them understand and use the alphabetic principle in which sounds and letters are linked.

Ericson and Juliebo (1998) also point to research that shows those children who lack phonological awareness are likely to be at risk for reading difficulties. In order to read and spell words children need to understand that spoken words are made up of a series of sounds (phonemes) and that these are represented by letters of the alphabet. Some children find phonological awareness difficult because of the way in which 'phonemes in the speech stream are coarticulated with adjacent phonemes and typically are represented in the acoustic signal as syllables' (Ericson & Juliebo, 1998: 6). This makes phonemes difficult for children to hear or identify individually (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1998; Rohl 2000).

Untrained home tutors taking on the responsibility of teaching their young children, have told me that without current knowledge of early literacy learning they often rely on the methods they experienced in their own schooling. As society changes and pedagogy is re-evaluated it is important for curriculum materials to reflect current developments and provide children with opportunities to learn in a variety of ways through a range of learning experiences. There appears to be a need for home tutors to have access to training in the knowledge and practice of early literacy learning with particular reference to phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness can be facilitated in a variety of ways. Ericson and Juliebo, (1998) believe that children need rich exposure to poems, finger plays, jingles, rhymes, nursery rhymes, repetitive texts, rhyming texts and songs that have rhyme, alliteration or repetition. Such exposure has the potential to facilitate young children's awareness of the sounds within the words. As Ericson and Juliebo point out, for some children

immersion in informal language and literacy events may not be enough and they may require more explicit teaching to develop phonological awareness. Ericson and Juliebo suggest that language games, listening games and activities that encourage children to identify words that rhyme and words that have the same sound at the start are helpful. They also believe that it is important to talk with children about these phonological features. Ericson and Juliebo describe many other learning experiences that may enhance children's phonological awareness. They describe a sequence for phonological awareness development; some features of their program include:

- Listening games that help children identify and distinguish different sounds;
- Listening to songs, rhymes, stories and jingles that contain rhyme and alliteration;
- Clapping syllables of children's names, common words or nursery rhymes;
- Marching to songs and rhymes and reading stories;
- Using books with repetition, alliteration, rhyme and predictability;
- Games and activities that isolate and categorise sounds;
- Having children retell or mime stories, rhyme or jingles, guessing the final rhyming words and extending the stories.

As children develop confidence and expertise in these experiences they should be able to identify the rhyme, alliteration and phonemic components in words. From here more explicit teaching of blending and segmenting syllables and phonemes can take place.

While young children are exposed to language experiences that allow for the development of phonological awareness they also need to begin to understand letter-sound relationships (National Reading Panel, 2000). This may involve learning the

alphabet song, looking at letters in different ways, shapes or sounds, looking for words that have the same letter or listening for words that have the same sound. From my own experience with home tutors in distance education such tasks often appear complex and daunting. They are regularly the subject of debate at home tutor seminars that I have attended at the Schools of the Air. Curriculum writers need to identify effective strategies for literacy learning so that home tutors may feel confident in teaching important literacy concepts to their children.

## **Literacy Assessment**

Taylor (2000:198 in Barratt-Pugh and Rohl) states that as young children's literacy develops adults play an important role through the way in which they support and respond to children's literacy behaviours. She describes the social and cultural contexts in which children interact with others and engage with different forms of print within their environments as 'significant dimensions of a literacy landscape' (2000:199). Adults involved in young children's literacy events have an influence on the children's development through the ways in which they interact with children. Teachers in the classroom monitor, assess and evaluate their children's early literacy development in different ways, but much of this development takes place in the home environment. For distance education this literacy development takes place entirely in the home environment with home tutors left to mediate the outcomes for the learner. Taylor also believes that young children's literacy development is dependent on sensitive monitoring of children's understandings and interpretations of visual and written texts. Taylor believes that without effective monitoring that is sensitive to children's social and cultural contexts, children may be at risk in literacy development from the early

years. She sees assessment, the process of gathering information and evidence of children's knowledge and skills, as ongoing and a process that is undertaken by all participants in a child's development, other children, parents, carers, child care workers, teachers and specialists. In distance education it is the siblings and parents or a governess as tutor who have this responsibility. Tayler also believes that effective monitoring through decision-making and value judgements about the type of support that children need ensures they have the opportunities that allow them to continue in their literacy growth and development. Children's learning styles need to be accommodated and teachers and parents must strive towards common goals and outcomes. For distance education learners, parents need to be supported by curriculum materials and teachers in order to employ tools and methods to effectively monitor and respond to their children's literacy ideas and understandings.

## **Summary**

The development of curriculum materials for early childhood distance education needs to provide the flexibility to cater to a diversity of language and literacy needs. This may require home tutors or teachers to modify and adapt materials to suit individual student needs and family literacy practices and values.

The *Curriculum Framework* fosters an outcomes focused approach to education that builds on the interests and needs of students, taking into account the diverse socio-cultural experiences that children bring with them to school. National and state education providers (Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1999; Curriculum Council 1998; & Education Department of Western Australia, 2000) all

stress the central importance of the literacy development that takes place in the early childhood years. They point out the importance of children's language and literacy development from birth and the valuable role the pre-school years play. The Education Department of Western Australia suggests the value of multi-age environments in enhancing social and cognitive development and collaborative learning. Family settings in distance education support these values.

Theorists of early literacy development in young children agree that the early years curriculum should provide children with a depth and breadth of experience that allows them to develop skills and understandings related to reading, viewing, writing, listening and speaking and the macro skills of phonological awareness, word study and the grammatical aspects and conventions of English. As I have shown, play is recognised as a central role in providing young children with the opportunities to express themselves and demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

The development of an early childhood curriculum for the distance education learner poses many challenges; some have been highlighted through the views expressed in the literature review, including the need to:

- Address national and state expectations and directions;
- Build research into early childhood language and literacy learning;
- Recognise the diversity of distance education students; and
- Cater for the needs of home tutors most of whom are not qualified teachers.

Each of the issues I have raised in this chapter will assist in determining those factors that need to be considered when developing early childhood distance education

curriculum materials for language and literacy to be used by home tutors in the context of the Western Australian *Curriculum Framework*.

From the literature review and the issues that have arisen from my reading of the literature and my own experience and professional role, I have formulated the following research question for the study: What factors appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy for Western Australian schools?

## CHAPTER 3

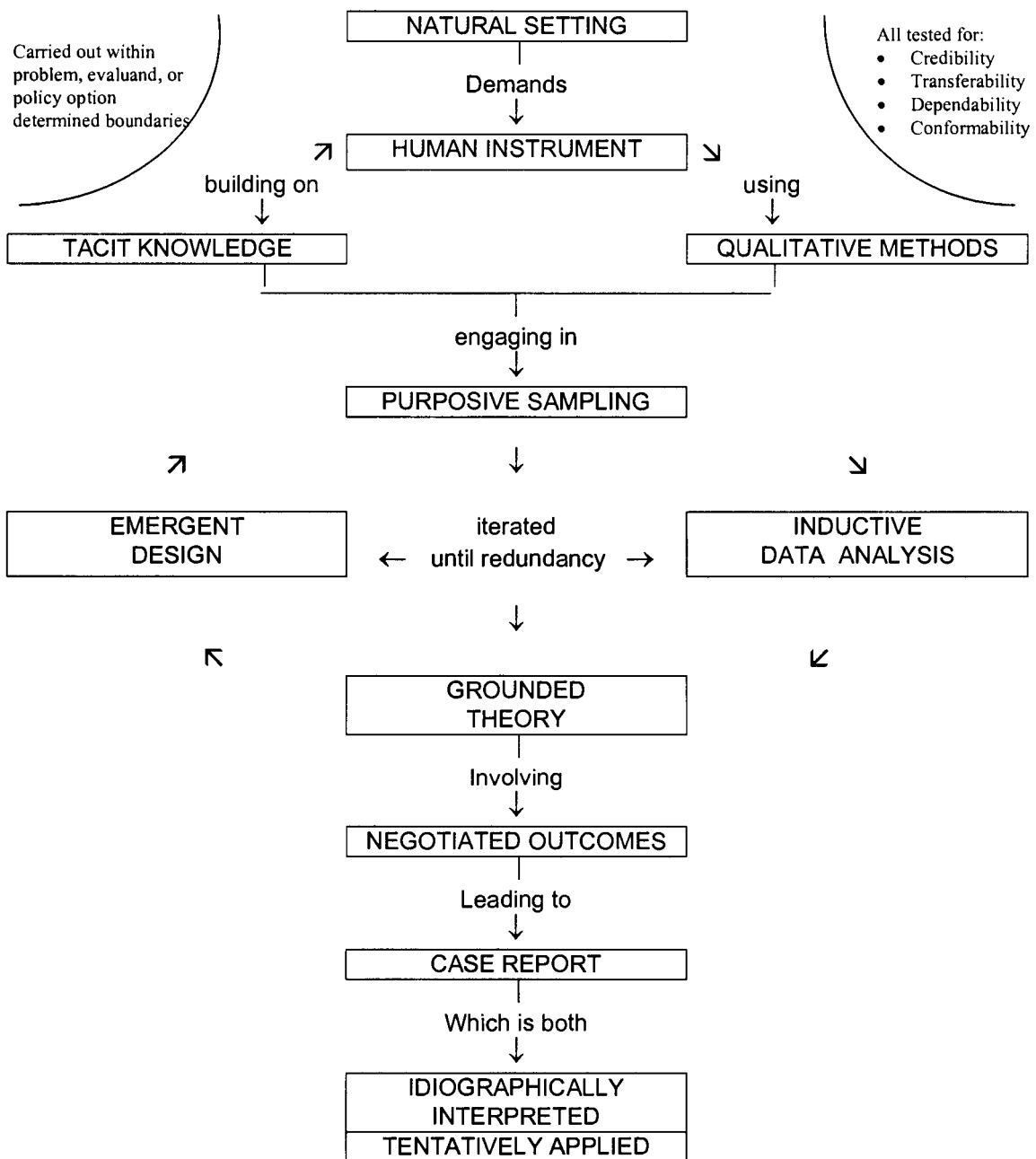
### METHODOLOGY

#### **Design**

In developing curriculum materials it is important to take into account the unique needs of students within a given school to cater effectively for their needs. This research investigates:

1. The specific curriculum needs of early childhood learners as jointly constructed by parents, home tutors, teachers, administrators and writers involved in distance education;
2. The factors that are important to the development of early childhood curriculum materials for distance education learners; and
3. The relationship between these factors and the *Curriculum Framework* for Western Australian Schools.

The methodology thought best suited to this study was naturalistic inquiry in a natural setting. Glaser and Straus (1973) describe a grounded theory as a theory that will "fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use". This "participatory research" has also been described by Elden (1981, p. 261) as a local theory that is "facilitated [by] the gathering together and systematising of isolated, individualised understanding into what [he has] called local theory." The characteristic flow of naturalistic inquiry taken from Lincon and Guba (p.188, 1985) is detailed in Figure 3.1.



(Lincoln and Guba, p.188, 1985)

Figure 3.1 Characteristic flow of naturalistic inquiry

Naturalistic Inquiry allows researchers to develop a theory from field-based observations and reflections on those observations and extant literature. This study took place in a natural setting, using myself as the human-as-instrument. As the human-as-instrument I built on my tacit knowledge of distance education, early childhood education, language and literacy education and the Western Australian *Curriculum Framework*, using methods appropriate to qualitative research, such as questionnaires,

interviews, observations and document analysis. During this data collection and analysis I used an iterative model to collect samples with the specific purpose of describing the factors central to the curriculum language and literacy needs of early childhood distance education learners. Thus, I collected and analysed data in the field and developed a theory using an ever-changing emergent design. This process was continuous and formed the basis for identifying the factors central to curriculum development for early childhood learners in distance education. The interpretations of the data presented here were then checked with participants. It was anticipated that the study would provide a 'snapshot' of the factors important to the language and literacy needs of early childhood, distance education learners. The thesis developed for this study has two major purposes:

1. To provide a description of some of the factors and complexities apparent and important to the teaching and learning of language and literacy for early childhood learners in distance education;
2. To provide support for curriculum writers to develop their understanding of the needs and factors important to early childhood distance education learners and their home tutors.

As the 'human instrument' I was able to draw on the knowledge of available and willing participants in a variety of ways, being responsive to needs or issues as they arose. My own understandings have been acquired through experience as an itinerant teacher, administrator and curriculum writer of distance education materials for early childhood students. It is through these experiences that I have developed an awareness of the many concerns of parents and teachers regarding the development and use of materials.

Drawing on my tacit knowledge and making explicit my understandings has allowed me to recognise new ideas, new meanings and new understandings during the study.

Research data collection methods included note taking, record keeping, informal interviews with parents, home tutors and teachers. In addition, feedback from participants relating to existing curriculum materials in use in both Western Australia and other states were used as data, along with the analysis of related literature.

The review of the literature was also a data source. The literature in the specific field of early childhood distance education appeared to be minimal. Nevertheless, much literature was available in the field of early childhood education, and language and literacy development. My role in analysing the literature as data was to find the factors that appeared to be important to the language and literacy needs of early childhood learners and their use in distance education settings.

## **Participants**

The participant population included 56 families and 30 staff from the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Distance education teachers across the SIDE primary schools monitor, over time and distance, student learning through the marking of set work and regular communication with tutors and their students. Details of the participant families, including a cross section of travellers, overseas families and isolated families living in rural and remote Western Australia are summarised in Table 3.1. Eight schools exist within the School of Isolated and Distance Education, five Schools of the Air and three schools based in Perth that consist of the Preparatory

School with students from K - 5, the Middle School and the Post Compulsory school. In addition a Curriculum Design Centre and an Education Technology Unit are part of the SIDE Perth campus. The six schools involved in this study are the five Schools of the Air and the Perth based Preparatory School. SIDE Staff involved in this study included early childhood teachers, school administrators, project managers and curriculum writers.

Table 3.1 Details of participants

Participant type	Location	Interviewed participants
56 Families involved in distance education	Rural and isolated families	Cattle station owners 2 families
		Community workers 1 family
		Dairy farm owners 1 family
	Travelling families	Travelling on a yacht 1 family
	Overseas families	Living in Russia 1 family
30 Schools staff	Schools of the Air	2 ECE teachers
		1 Administrator
		1 Support Officer
		Learning Difficulties
4 Curriculum Writers	School of Isolated and Distance Education	2 ECE teachers
		1 Administrator
	School of Isolated and Distance Education	1 curriculum writer

All participants were involved in initial meetings and the development and trial of draft curriculum materials. Participants in the study were availability samples who indicated in the initial questionnaire that they were willing to further share their views and concerns in order to develop a common understanding of the issues and factors important to the development of new early childhood language and literacy curriculum materials.

The families varied in their degree of isolation and eligibility to access distance education and included families who were:

- Living in remote communities, isolated stations, fishing villages, tourism centres or pearl farms more than 20 kilometres from a mainstream school or bus route;
- Travelling for more than 6 months around Australia or overseas, usually in confined spaces such as caravans or buses;
- Expatriate Australians living and working overseas as diplomats or missionaries where no English speaking or ‘suitable’ schooling is available to their children; and
- Exceptional cases where children or families have exemptions from school attendance on medical, behavioural, religious or other grounds.

It is common for a distance education teacher to have a collection of students from each of these diverse situations, each student having very different and complex needs. Families also differed in the number of children in the family and their access to electric power and technologies. General features of this availability sampling are identified in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 General features of the availability sample population

Family feature		%
Children	1 child	25
Children	2 children	41
Children	3 or more children	34
Power access	24 hours a day	65
Power access	limited	35
Access to a computer		91
Modem access and use		34
Access to video		91
Access to audio		100
Remote living		65
Travellers		15
Overseas families		20

## Data collection

Literature, participant interviews and observations, tacit knowledge of the researcher, teachers' observations and experiences all influenced the emergent curriculum design and negotiated outcomes for this study. The data types collected are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Data types and evidence collected for this study

<i>Audit trail Classification</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>File types</i>	<i>Evidence</i>
<b>Existing curriculum analysis</b>	1997 - 2000	Observations and analysis of existing materials	Existing materials were identified in light of changes to pedagogy, policy, technologies and curriculum issues within State and National directives.
<b>Seminars and meetings</b>	March - October 1998	Observations and notes taken at Home Tutor Seminars	At Home Tutor Seminars I provided workshops for parents to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss feelings about existing early childhood materials</li> <li>▪ Be introduced to the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> and new areas related to language and literacy development</li> </ul>
<b>Archival data</b>	Term 3 1998	Questionnaires provided to families involved in the trial curriculum materials. (See Appendix D)	Questionnaires include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quantitative data relating to family locations, access to technologies, numbers of children involved in distance education and time spent in classroom</li> <li>▪ Qualitative data including use of materials, level of support needed, preferences for modes of delivery, structure of lesson notes and priorities for parents</li> </ul>
<b>Anecdotal records</b>	Term 3 1998	Parent/home tutor feedback from 8 wk trial of curriculum materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involvement in a trial allowed parent opportunities to provide daily written feedback regarding their students' progress and reflect on the materials they were using</li> </ul>
	1997 - 1998	Field notes from meetings.	Meetings include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dialogue with writers and parents</li> <li>▪ Writers and teachers</li> <li>▪ Writers and administrators</li> </ul>
	1998	Notes from visits to isolated families using trial curriculum materials.	Looking at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parents' concerns</li> <li>▪ School room environments</li> <li>▪ Issues impacting on the classroom and school day</li> <li>▪ Access to technologies</li> <li>▪ Experience of home tutor</li> <li>▪ Use of materials</li> </ul>
<b>Document analysis</b>	1998-2000	Current ECE distance education materials	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Existing materials still in use by families</li> <li>▪ Trial materials developed to gain feedback from tutors</li> <li>▪ Distance education materials from other Australian states</li> </ul>
	1999 - 2000	Current ECE literature with reference to language and literacy  Current Distance Education literature	These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Phonological awareness</li> <li>▪ Language and literacy acquisition</li> <li>▪ Literacy and play</li> <li>▪ Emergent literacy</li> <li>▪ The <i>Curriculum Framework</i></li> <li>▪ Methods of delivery and alternate technologies</li> <li>▪ Research into rural and isolated education</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews</b>	1999 - 2000	Interviews with stakeholders	These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Curriculum Writers/developers</li> <li>▪ Teachers and administrators</li> <li>▪ Home tutors and parents</li> </ul>

The methodology used to analyse the data types and evidence collected for this study summarised in Table 3.3 is described in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter.

## **Existing curriculum analysis**

In 1997 research began towards the development of new curriculum materials that would be designed, trialed and developed over three years to be in the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education in 2001. Having identified the need to determine factors important to the development of new materials I began with an analysis of the existing materials that were in use in 1997 and were still in general use at the end of 2000 when this study was being completed. These materials will be referred to through the study as 'existing materials'.

Initially, these existing materials were analysed to determine strengths and weaknesses in terms of curriculum development and change towards an outcomes focused approach to education. To determine the strengths and weaknesses I liaised with parents and schools to collect data related to their own experiences. Strengths were determined as those materials that were seen as successful by a majority of stakeholders in enhancing student outcomes in language and literacy development. This information from the analysis also allowed for the mapping of how existing materials were meeting the needs of policy changes, such as the *Curriculum Framework* and an outcomes-focused approach to education, as well as technological and social changes of society. Mapping took place through identification of new curriculum directions and changes in state and federal policy. Analysis of the curriculum was further developed through feedback from

major stakeholders who attended a series of seminars, teleconferences and meetings throughout the state. These stakeholders included home tutors, teachers, administrators and curriculum writers, all involved in providing education at a distance.

## **Seminars and meetings**

Curriculum materials are constantly being revised or developed for K-12 distance education students. Before the process of developing new materials for early childhood began, I attended six Home Tutor Seminars across regional Western Australia. Each distance education school holds an annual Home Tutor Seminar. The aim of these seminars was to provide training and support to new and existing home tutors. Each seminar runs for one week and a full timetable is developed for students and parents/tutors. The tutor seminars provide up-to-date training in areas such as learning technologies, developmental learning, language and literacy, numeracy and catering to individual needs. The topics to be delivered by staff and specialists vary, depending on the needs of the individual schools. In 1997 it was my role to inform parents of changes in education relating to the *Curriculum Framework*, school starting ages and the general age of the existing materials. At the same time, it was a valuable opportunity for parents to provide feedback on the existing materials.

During these trips to the seminars I discussed with each of the school's communities their ideas, concerns and issues related to the existing early childhood curriculum materials and asked what should be changed, what should be kept and what new elements might be needed in the current climate of social and technological change. Parents and teachers welcomed the opportunity to be involved in this process.

Information from these meetings was used to identify the factors that need to be considered when developing early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy to be used by home tutors in the context of the Western Australian *Curriculum Framework*. These meetings were also the first time parents had been introduced to the Western Australian *Curriculum Framework*.

During this time I attended many meetings that provided opportunities to begin analysing the administrative concerns and issues related to curriculum development. All discussions were open to all stakeholders. Teachers, principals and parents had opportunities to listen to and comment on the issues viewed as important by different stakeholder groups.

These analyses of curriculum materials, seminars and meetings allowed a grounded theory to be used to develop new trial curriculum materials. As I investigated, the research design became more and more articulated. Through listening to discussions between each of the stakeholder groups and allowing each of them to have a voice, I was able to collect and analyse data to develop an iterative-grounded approach of a theory. This initially localised theory facilitated the development of an emergent design for new curriculum materials, which in turn led to the development of trial curriculum materials and also final materials for early childhood learners and provided opportunities for further iterative sampling, data collection and inductive analysis.

## **Archival data:**

### **Questionnaires**

Data I collected from families trialling new draft materials was in the form of a questionnaire (see Appendix E) in which home tutors and teachers expressed their concerns and issues relating to the distance education materials. The questionnaire provided:

- Quantitative data related to family locations, access to technologies, telecommunications and other environmental factors, shown in table 3.2.;
- Qualitative data relating to home tutor use and observations of new draft materials that were trialled, including timing, structure of lesson notes, learning and teaching strategies, use of multimedia, audiovisual material and videos as alternative delivery methods, assessment strategies and structural aspects relating to the materials.

The questionnaire data provided a broad sample population for this study. Respondents included parents and teachers of students with learning difficulties, with physical or intellectual disabilities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (ESL/EFL/ESD) and talented and gifted students in need of extension. Fifty-six families from five different distance education centres participated in an 8-week trial of new materials that had been developed. These are referred to throughout the study as the 'new draft curriculum materials'. Only one family withdrew during the trial. Eighty percent of families completed the questionnaire. Ninety percent of these participants indicated that they were interested in being contacted further to provide more feedback

and input into the needs and factors they thought important for their children's language and literacy needs.

The high return rate of the surveys indicated a number of issues. Firstly, it was the first time parents, responsible as home tutors for their children's learning, had been provided with an opportunity to have direct input to the writers who were developing curriculum materials. Secondly, the parents' participation in the trial and survey of existing and developing materials displayed a deep understanding of learning and teaching needs related to their children's language and literacy development. Finally, the surveys and anecdotal notes provided information about parents' own diverse educational experiences and learning needs.

### **Archival data: feedback**

Over the 8 weeks of the new draft curriculum materials being trialled, parents were encouraged to respond and put forward their views in a variety of ways:

1. Most parents completed daily reflections and feedback pages, which they used for two purposes:
  - a) giving descriptive feedback to teachers about their children's progress;
  - b) presenting their feelings about the learning activities, the children's attitudes towards the activities, the ease or difficulty of activities and those activities seen as valuable for their children's language development;
2. Many parents wrote letters regarding their views of materials;

3. Several parents used the Lesson Notes to document feedback directly onto the curriculum materials, commenting on each activity or series of activities and their children's responses.
4. Home tutors were invited to respond, using the questionnaire I developed for the trial materials.

### **Anecdotal records**

Field notes from meetings held between teachers and writers, parents and writers, administration and writers, all related to the different needs and parameters of the curriculum project's development as follows:

- Administrators were concerned about producing a curriculum that met the financial and human resource allocations of the project within a given timeline, while meeting the mandated requirements of government schooling;
- Teachers wanted greater flexibility to adapt materials to meet individual needs. They also wanted parents to be more aware of the assessment needs peculiar to distance education; and
- Parents wanted materials that were descriptive, yet met the needs of their own children, did not consume too much of their time and were easy to follow. They wanted to know that the materials provided a curriculum equivalent to that provided for children in mainstream schooling.

During the trial I visited four isolated families involved in early childhood distance learning, the Walker, Jones, Mullins and Andrew families. (Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.) Here I was able to observe students and home tutor daily

routines and problems encountered in different settings. I also discussed with parents the aspects of existing materials that they found positive, negative or unnecessary. I recorded observations of how children were using the materials, student/teacher relationships, their self-esteem in using a variety of delivery methods and learning strategies. I now describe the contexts of four of the families I visited.

The Walker family, consisting of three children, lived on a cattle station in the North of Western Australia. The mother, Helen, was a confident and committed home tutor. Her additional duties beyond the running of the house were involvement on a daily basis in supporting the muster, vegetable garden, station renovations and cooking for all employees. The children were in Pre-primary, Year 2 and Year 4. The Pre-primary child was 4 years of age and did not turn 5 until December, yet it was clear her development was advanced. The station homestead was vast with living quarters, guest and workers' quarters. A separate room served as the schoolroom where the children each had a desk, while another desk held the Very High Frequency (VHF) radio and school computer (provided to families attached to Schools of the Air). The room was rich in environmental print and resources, including posters providing examples of different genres, spelling patterns, digraphs, blends, grammar rules, numbers, a high frequency words chart, in addition to children's work. Resources such as a variety of texts, mathematical aids, recycled materials, art supplies and other consumables were carefully stacked on shelves and boxes throughout the room.

In the Jones family the father made a living from hunting kangaroos. Mrs Jones was the tutor of her two young girls who were 5 and 6 years of age. They were from a low

socio-economic background and lived in a small demountable building not far from the highway. The girls completed their school work in the lounge room. Mrs Jones was keen to ask questions about the set work during my visit and indicated to me a commitment to her children, but a lack of confidence to understand fully the learning activities described for them. There was no environmental print around the room where the children did their lessons, which was also the lounge room, as space was at a premium.

The Mullins family ran a cattle station in the north of the state. The mother was a committed tutor with a postgraduate degree in law. They had two daughters, one in Year Three, the other in Year Five. The girls had a dedicated schoolroom with a desk each and a separate desk with a computer. The learning environment was rich in texts and the girls had ample access to CD ROM encyclopaedias and other texts, posters, charts, and other resources, such as mathematical equipment and world globes. They had their HF radio in another room in order to reduce disruption and maximise the girls' concentration during school time. The girls were capable independent learners who called on their mother when needed. Their father helped them with practical activities.

The Andrews family were dairy and wheat farmers located several hours from Perth. Margaret was the home tutor. At the time of my first visit three of the children were school age (a toddler was in the school room and Margaret was expecting their fifth child, who is now two Years of age). Two boys who were the eldest children both experienced learning difficulties and had no role model or peers to provide them with appropriate modelling. Margaret had no experience with tutoring prior to teaching her

sons. She felt the need for a great deal of support from the teachers. When the third child Amelia started school, she was a very confident learner who had experience growing up in the classroom. Margaret found that the materials were not providing the challenge Amelia required and again needed support from the teachers. I found this occurred in many instances, where younger children grew confident in the schoolroom situation of their siblings, learning to read and write without any formal instruction at all.

## **Document analysis**

Lincon and Guba (1985) describe documents as rich sources of information to be analysed. The existing curriculum materials and extant literature analysed in this study contributed to the emergent design of early childhood distance education materials. Existing materials needed to be mapped to the outcomes and principles of the *Curriculum Framework*. In addition, a brief analysis of materials provided to early childhood distance education learners in other states provided a summary of the issues seen as important in the development of new materials. The literature review also played a role in the development of the emergent design of the materials as teachers and writers were influenced by recognised changes in early childhood pedagogy, mandated frameworks for education and changes to distance education brought about by technological change and research findings in the area of language and literacy learning in the early years. This literature was used to identify additional factors important to the development of curriculum for early childhood learners.

# Interviews

Anecdotal records were made of informal interviews with parents' experiences with the existing distance education materials, new draft curriculum materials for trial and the final draft materials. I contacted six willing and interested families to provide additional feedback through interviews. Sampling a cross section of the original 56 participant families, through interviews and ongoing correspondence allowed the emergent design of the curriculum to be reflective of the diversity of stakeholders and to be inclusive of the needs of all students. Accordingly, these families and their teachers were interviewed to help determine the important factors for inclusive curriculum development, with specific reference to language and literacy needs. The interviews with teachers and administrators provided an overview of the diversity of home tutors and students from a complex range of social, cultural, linguistic and geographic backgrounds and influences. A summary of the relevant demographics of the families interviewed is provided in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Families interviewed

Family	Children's ages	Family occupation	Tutor	Additional information
Walker	5, 7, 9	Station owners	Mother	
Andrews	2, 5, 7, 9,11	Dairy farm workers	Mother	
Murphy	6, 8, 11	Professionals living in Russia	Mother	
Barker	6	Travelling on a yacht	Mother	
Mullins	8, 11	Station owners	Mother	Mother qualified Barrister
Macarthy	3, 5, 7, 9, 12	Workers in Aboriginal community	Mother	Mother qualified Nurse

Interviews did not take place according to a given schedule as the mode of communication and availability was varied. Two overseas families were travelling at the time and were only able to be contacted intermittently via email. Communication between both the Murphy and Barker families and myself was maintained through email for several months. The Barker family could only respond to an email at each port of call. During these informal interviews parents were asked what factors they thought were important to the teaching and learning of their children through distance education, with specific reference to their children's needs in language and literacy development.

The inquiry process provided the means by which a curriculum theory developed from analysing the data collected through ongoing liaison with all stakeholders who participated in recurring discussions. As participants became more aware of issues and more informed, issues were addressed and new issues appeared. These emerged as the data were collected and analysed inductively. A 'grounded theory' emerged as a result of this ongoing discussion between the researcher and participants and continued analysis of data. Through engaging in ongoing data analysis with all stakeholders' insights, elements of theory, questions, gaps and issues were identified and refined. These insights and issues then became the starting points for further analysis. A consistent pattern occurred that allowed me to determine some factors that needed to be taken into account in the development of curriculum materials that would meet the language and literacy needs of early childhood distance education learners and the home tutors responsible for the learners' education.

## **Limitations of the study**

As Burns (1997) has shown there are many limitations in interpreting results of qualitative research. The limitations of this study and ways in which I have attempted to minimise them are outlined below.

### **1. Subjective Bias**

As the human instrument my own subjectivity and personal views will have influenced the direction of the findings and conclusions. However, in order to minimise subjective bias in this study I have taken into consideration the views of a range of participants and many factors that affect distance education curriculum. Various factors are identified, such as the need for materials to cater for a wide diversity of clientele living on stations and farms or travelling or living and/or working overseas.

During the development phases of the curriculum design I developed a reference group whose membership represented the six schools involved in the project's development. Each school elected a parent and teaching representative and one principal was elected to represent the six schools. In addition the two initial writers allocated to the project (including myself) were members. Through these processes I was able to provide continuing feedback and viewpoints to many participants. This provided opportunities for all stakeholders to have input into the direction of the early childhood curriculum design.

The trial process was initiated through this reference group and provided feedback that significantly changed the initial directions outlined and taken by myself and the other

members of the curriculum writing team. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that there is bound to be some subjective bias in a study of this kind

## 2. Generalisation

In qualitative research that focuses on specific populations, generalisation to other populations is always a limitation. This study takes into account the historical, social, political, geographical and cultural aspects of early childhood distance education. Taking into account the entire Western Australian distance education early childhood population rather than only one School of the Air, or the Perth based Distance Education school allowed me to examine several distance education populations.

Thus, readers of this study in Western Australia and other parts of Australia may be able to make use of the findings on curriculum development for early childhood distance education.

## 3. Time and Information Overload

In order to identify the factors important to the development of early childhood distance education materials the study took place over the period of instigation, consultation, design, development, trial, feedback and redesigning of materials. To minimise an overload of information, the method of data collection has followed the collection and analysis of specific data, including existing materials, evidence from seminars and meetings, archival data, anecdotal records from participants, document analysis and interviews. While many peripheral issues have arisen that might be related to this study

they are mentioned as areas for possible future research and are not the focus of this study.

#### 4. Reliability

As the human participant and observer responsible for analysing data I have attempted to increase reliability through the reporting of my own position in relation to the study as teacher, administrator and curriculum writer of the curriculum materials. Throughout the study, as data was collected and analysed, the nature of the methodology allowed for triangulation of evidence that contributed to the emergent design. The use of a reference group, trial of materials, feedback, meetings and interviews at various and regular stages of the design development allowed the issues and directions of the factors important to the development of early childhood curriculum design to be triangulated and agreed upon by all concerned.

#### 5. Validity

I attempted to maximise internal validity through the iteration of sampling, data analysis and the emergent design, each time taking new evidence or factors back to sample participants in order for them to provide further comment and feedback on new factors. External validity was also attempted through the opportunity of stakeholders to participate, interpret and have input into continuing changes to the emergent design.

#### 6. Participants

Whilst this study built on the knowledge, experiences and perceptions of a wide variety of stakeholders it did not include the views of the students who worked on the

materials. In some cases children were very young and other children were new to distance education giving them little previous knowledge to draw upon. Reflections of the stakeholders took into account the children's engagement in the new curriculum materials and their level of involvement and demonstrated achievements throughout the trial process.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION 1: ANALYSIS OF EXISTING MATERIALS

In this chapter the analysis of data collected throughout the study is presented and discussed. I have also provided an overview of the existing curriculum materials in use until 2001. The existing distance education materials are analysed in terms of: the learning environment; learning, teaching and assessment; the curriculum materials in terms of an overview, English language and literacy, Years PP-3 and their structure. The need for change is established through observations and discussions with schools and home tutors during regional home tutor seminars. Individual families are profiled to provide a deeper understanding of the diversity of the children and their family situations and factors that impact on their learning and teaching. Each of these families represents characteristics peculiar to distance education settings.

The data collated and analysed enabled the development of a curriculum theory through joint negotiation that resulted in the development of trial draft materials used for an 8-week trial. With an understanding of the new directions being shaped through this research a number of involved teachers, writers, and parents from a variety of settings in early childhood distance education, were interviewed and their issues, concerns and claims are further described and analysed. Finally, the trial curriculum materials were analysed and a curriculum theory was further developed which resulted in the final draft materials written for distribution and use in the school year of 2001.

## **Existing distance education materials in use until 2001**

Following a broad definition of curriculum the analysis of the existing curriculum encompasses:

- The learning environment;
- Learning, teaching and assessment;
- The materials and their structure;

Each of these areas is explored to determine the potential factors for curriculum change in early childhood distance education.

### **The learning environment**

The learning environment for distance education is largely the responsibility of the parent and/or home tutor. Analysis of the existing distance education curriculum materials shows that they provide little or no direction in describing the educational importance of the learning environment to the untrained home tutor. Without this direction home tutors may be unaware of the importance of environmental print or other resources that may enhance learning. While the existing curriculum materials have not focused on this area, the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education involved in this study have developed school-based strategies for supporting parents including:

- Visits;
- Discussions;
- Additional resources to enhance environmental print; and
- Manipulative resources for development across the early childhood domains.

In my role as an itinerant teacher with rural families I experienced a wide diversity of learning environments. I found that many families had dedicated schoolrooms,

governesses or confident parents as tutors and large varieties of texts, consumable and non-consumable resources. Other families had limited space and resources while some families few had little or no texts in the home. It seems important that schools and teachers identify the needs of individual families at the time of enrolment, regardless of ages or year levels, to provide for early intervention and strategies when and where needed.

### **Learning, teaching and assessment**

It is important to remember that home tutors are responsible for the teaching and much of the assessment data in distance education. Approximately 95% of home tutors in distance education are parents; 98% of these are mothers. The majority of these tutors are largely untrained in education. Some parents working as tutors are qualified professionals; some are travelling; and the majority of them share the responsibilities of managing and working in the family business. Regardless of their responsibilities and background, these tutors are expected to provide a comprehensive education for their children and most rely entirely on the curriculum materials and support provided through their schools to do so. Existing materials provide for the needs of the home tutors in teaching their children, with lessons written to provide a high degree of structure. Feedback from parents indicated that while structure is needed for inexperienced home tutors, greater flexibility was required to allow for students learning in different ways at different rates.

While Schools of Isolated and Distance Education teachers monitor and assess student needs as best they can, they rely heavily on the home tutor to provide additional

feedback on the student's level of independence in work samples. Many developing language and literacy skills and understandings need frequent and immediate monitoring and feedback. It is expected that the 'Set work' will be completed in two weeks. It often takes four to six weeks to reach the teacher at the base school, much longer for overseas families. At times students and parents may not receive the benefit of the teacher's feedback for up to a term; this is far too long for early childhood learners acquiring early language and literacy conventions, skills, understandings and processes. It thus follows that home tutors must be prepared or equipped with the understandings to provide young learners with advice and support on an immediate basis.

As learning takes place in the home, parents and home tutors are also responsible for developing and maintaining the multiple roles of the home tutor defined by Loudon and Rivalland (1995) as: supervisors; teachers; mentors; co-learners; and parents. In my experience as an itinerant teacher many parents requested support in meeting these needs. With behaviours and relationships a key component of the *Curriculum Framework* through the overarching outcomes and core shared values these issues cannot be ignored in the development of curriculum for distance education children.

### **Curriculum materials: an overview**

The existing materials were provided until 2001 for children Pre-primary to Year Three. Pre-primary materials are written for part-time education and are rudimentary. In the Years One to Three existing materials, each lesson is laid out in a simple format that provides for tutors a step-by-step procedure in Lesson Notes books. These are

accompanied by Activity Books with student worksheets relating to the activities where needed. Figure 4.1 provides an example of a Year One lesson notes page and the accompanying activity page from the student workbook.

## A Rhyme

15 mins

### You will need:

- ### 1. Activity book page 7

Nursery Rhymes are an important tool for teaching reading. They provide an opportunity for your child to hear the sounds and patterns of language. Where possible display all rhymes, poems and songs or place in a file, a scrap book or a box, readily accessible to your child.

### Step 1

Detach activity book page 7.

- Show and discuss with your child.
- Read the rhyme, running your finger along the top of each word.
- Read again, encouraging your child to join in.

## Step 2

Spend some time disussing the rhyme.

- You might like to talk with your child about pies; the different pies your child has eaten, the child's favourite pie.
- Say rhyme together.
- Display rhyme in your schoolroom.

**Sing a song of sixpence,  
A pocket full of rye.  
Four and twenty blackbirds,  
Baked in a pie.  
When the pie was opened,  
The birds began to sing.  
Wasn't that a dainty dish,  
To set before a king.**

Figure 4.1 Sample structure of lesson notes and accompanying activity page

Each Year level is accompanied by a general dispatch that contains home tutor notes, 'Have-a-Go' pads (for students to try out spellings of unfamiliar words), student dictionaries and general charts and posters needed throughout the year. Lesson Notes and Activity Books are provided in a fortnightly 'set' which also contain between four and ten commercial texts. Each Lesson Notes book has a fortnightly overview or timetable with a list of materials that are needed for the fortnight. At the end of each Activity Book are assessment forms for parents to complete. For the English learning area these relate only to Reading and Writing outcomes, with some activities in handwriting and oral language. An example is shown in figure 4.2. Parents are required to complete the progress report each fortnight. However the feedback provided is limited in the evidence and information provided to the teacher. It is not specific to the language and literacy aims of individual sets.

Progress Report	
<div><b>READING</b></div> <div>Is reading with confidence: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Instantly recognises sight words: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Attempts to solve unknown words independently using varied strategies: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Confidently answers questions related to texts: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Reads, comprehends and follow directions: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><b>Oral language</b></div> <div>Confidently recites poems and songs: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Is answering questions in sentences: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Can follow simple instructions: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Can retell and sequence events in stories: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div>	<div><b>GRAPHOPHONICS</b></div> <div>Identifies and can name letters of the alphabet: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Recognises sounds which letters make: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Recognises initial and final sounds: Identifies rhyming words: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><b>WRITING</b></div> <div>Writes own stories confidently and independently: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Confidently attempts invented spelling: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Uses logographs and environmental print: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Develops and sequences ideas: Always <input type="checkbox"/> Usually <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div><i>Comments:</i> <div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>

Figure 4.2 Sample home tutor progress report assessment sheet

The materials are packaged in separate learning areas and the majority of schools use only the English and Mathematics materials, due to the volume of work to be completed by students. As the English materials have been developed thematically it was generally assumed that the different contexts for learning literacy would provide the children with scientific, social, artistic or technological understandings, skills and knowledge deemed to be required at the time of writing. Feedback from teachers and analysis of the materials identify gaps in opportunities for children to learn and this has resulted in the call from teachers and home tutors alike for planned and developed integrated materials. Schools of the Air often provide for different curriculum areas such as Music, Art, or Science during radio lessons, depending on the needs of students and the availability of specialist teachers.

### **Curriculum materials: English language and literacy**

Existing distance education curriculum materials for the English learning area do not include Viewing and have little emphasis on Speaking and Listening. As lessons have been developed around objectives the need exists now to provide opportunities for students to develop all English outcomes of the *Curriculum Framework*. Further, existing Pre-primary, Year One and Year Two materials were developed by individual writers for each year level. Year Three existing materials were developed in Queensland. Thus there is no consistency during the early childhood years and no guarantee of a balanced curriculum that allows students the opportunities to develop skills and understandings across all of the learning areas beyond mathematics and

English, such as society and environment, the arts, science, technology and enterprise and Health and Physical education.

As I have identified, the materials need to provide opportunities for children to develop the skills, knowledge, understandings and values that relate to the outcomes in different learning areas. At the same time the materials need to be supportive of the learning environment, containing strategies for not only different learning styles but also the different teaching and assessment skills, knowledge and understandings of the home tutors. They also need to enhance a safe, comfortable and enriched learning environment that reflects the outcomes and values of the *Curriculum Framework*. Changes in technologies and school starting ages also show the need for curriculum change and development in these years.

As stated earlier the existing curriculum does not provide for Kindergarten children who are now enrolled in Western Australian schools. Existing Pre-primary curriculum materials cater for children attending school for only two hours a day for four days a week.

### **Curriculum materials: Pre-primary**

The existing Pre-primary materials produced in 1980 provide instruction for 20 craft-based activities for home tutors to complete with their children each month. The activities are closed in nature, providing templates of pictures and structures that do not allow children to attempt to problem solve, create or explore. Play is not evident in the learning materials from Pre-primary to Year Three. It appears the materials foster some

structured development in linguistic and creative domains, but do not provide adequate opportunities for children to grow in the cognitive, social/emotional and physical domains. There is little language and literacy as such and it is implicit in the materials in the form of rhymes, songs and texts. The texts provided in existing materials number no more than ten over the year. Simple booklets are provided that contain nursery rhymes and folk tales as part of the craft activities relating to these tales or rhymes. No instruction is provided for parents to build their children's phonological awareness, including onset and rime although onset and rime activities could be incorporated into materials such as books, songs, rhymes and poems.

## Activity 21      Elephant Printing

### Skills for teacher evaluation

Listening and thinking

### What you need

Activity card (provided in folder)

Sponge

Paint

Tissue

Glue

### What to do

- Sponge print the elephant with paint.
- Read the following rhyme to the child:  
“Atishoo”, said the elephant  
“Do you suppose  
I could use your tissue  
To wipe my runny nose?”  
Ask:  
“*What do you need to do when you have a runny nose?*”  
“*Can you smell when you have a cold? Why not?*”
- Glue the tissue to the end of the elephants trunk.
- Home Tutor writes the rhyme underneath the elephant painting.

### Variation

- Discuss the uses of a variety of animal noses e.g. smelling for food, friends, enemies.

Figure 4.3 Sample Pre-Primary activity

The accompanying activity page is an A4 page with a simply drawn, cartoon style, black outline of an elephant already drawn for the child to colour in. The child has no opportunity to draw their own elephant or other animal. This is an example of the structure provided in the materials.

## **Curriculum materials: Years One and Two**

The existing Years One and Two English curriculum materials were developed in 1991 and 1993 respectively. The writers of the materials used their understandings of developmental learning through the use of strategies outlined in the *First Steps* developmental learning materials, originally developed by EDWA in 1990 and revised in 1994. While many of the teaching strategies emphasised in *First Steps* are evident, as shown in Figure 4.4, the developmental philosophy that underpins *First Steps* is not evident in the materials as they do not provide open strategies for students to demonstrate achievements at their own level. In the Years One and Two materials there is a degree of structure and routine for the children that has been welcomed by many tutors. This reflects the fact that the materials were developed consecutively, with the Year Two writers being able to draw on the structure of the Year One materials written two years earlier. Writers have, however, commented that tight timelines for writing often precluded the effective analysis of past materials.

**You will need ...**

1. Book, 'The Yuckadoos'.

**Step 1**

Show the book, 'The Yuckadoos' to your child.

- Read the title and the names of the Author and Illustrator.
- Discuss the illustrations on the cover and title page.

For example:

Who are these creatures?

Where did they come from?

What type of creatures do they look like? (Mischievous, Naughty, good, Helpful, funny, etc.)

**Step 2**

Read the book to your child. (Allow child to read if confident.)

- Discuss the content of the book and the illustrations. (Allow child to look carefully at each illustration, encouraging comments.)
- Reread the story, encouraging your child to join in where possible, using picture clues, rhyme and rhythm to help.

Figure 4.4 Sample lesson reflecting a First Steps approach

**Curriculum materials: Year Three**

The existing Year Three materials were developed in Queensland and their structure is very different to that in the Years One and Two materials. Two different student workbooks provide different contexts for learning and also have a different subject or focus theme to each other. One workbook has a language and literacy focus, while the other has a humanities and science focus. Again, many aspects of the curriculum as defined through the *Curriculum Framework* are not present, including opportunities for collaboration, developmental learning, student participation and direction. In addition, a curriculum-mapping audit of the materials revealed that some aspects of learning areas are not adequately addressed in terms of learning opportunities.

There is no indication that the writers researched possible links, such as learning strategies, skills, understandings or content in the learning programs they developed over the four years from P-3. The only visible sequence is in the phonics development from Years 1 to 2. The following samples in Figure 4.5 provide examples of the types of phonics instruction evident during Years Two and Three. The structure for the tutors to follow is different but in both instances the children are provided with word lists. No opportunities are provided for words to be taken from the children's own writing and therefore meet their own developmental needs in addition to the core spelling words provided. While the opportunities are provided for the children to be tested by the tutor, the materials in both instance lack a variety of spelling strategies the children can use to further enhance their awareness of the features and orthography, such as 'word snakes', 'cloze', acrostic poems', 'little word finds' and crosswords.

## You will need ...

1. Spelling Word Book (sets 1-5)
2. Pencil
3. Activity book page 28
4. Scrap paper

## Step 1

Open Spelling Word Book to page 9.

- Ask child to read the first word (been), close eyes, spell word to self and open eyes and check.
- Repeat for each word on the page.

## Step 2

- Detach Activity book page 28
- Read instructions with child.
- Leave child to complete alone.
- Check and mark work. Praise efforts.

## Step 3

- Say: *I am going to test your spelling and check the chart.*
- Turn to Record of Spelling Results on page 17.
- Ask child to write on scrap paper, each list word as it is called out.
- Record results in 'Home Tutors check' column.
- Continue to test on other occasions words which don't yet have three ticks.
- Words need to be spelt correctly on at least three different occasions.
- Show child results and praise efforts.

## Spelling (about 10 minutes)

For todays spelling you will need your child's book and the sheets 'Spelling List A' and 'Spelling List B'.

### Choose Spelling words to learn.

**Page**  
**5**

Choose half of the words your child

Needs to learn from the sheets 'Spelling List A' and 'Spelling List B'. These should be chosen from the words your child did not tick on Day 1. Ask your child to list these spelling words on the left of his/her page 'Spelling 2'.

**Note:** If your child has no words to learn, go to the activity on the page 'Spelling 2' in your child's book.

Figure 4.5 Sample phonics lessons from Years Two and Three.

## **Curriculum resources and their structure: text resources**

To accompany the lesson notes and activity books commercial texts related to the themes developed are provided. As has been shown, texts in the Pre-primary materials are very limited, with ten texts per year, all fiction, being supplied to students (families do have access to the school library). Years One and Two materials have up to 12 texts per two week set, of which 90% are fiction. Year Three materials also have up to 10 texts per set, 90% of which are fiction.

It is common for the same or similar themes to be addressed in consecutive years, the frequency of which is noted in Table 4.1. However, none of these common themes occurs at the same time during the year and children in the same family often cover the same topic or theme not only year after year, but also at different times to their siblings. Many parents would say to me on visits, "Oh no not 'Me' again," "I am so sick of doing the same theme each year" referring to the fact that children did 'Me' in every early childhood year. Often the same topics continue into the middle childhood years. Common themes are not planned for or developed in a way that would provide for particular skills, understandings and knowledge to be further developed, through connection and challenge, in each school year.

Table 4.1 Themes repeated in Pre-primary, Years 1, 2 & 3 distance education curriculum

Pre-primary	Year One	Year 2	Year Three
Seeds	Seeds/growth		
Fairy tales	Fairy tales	Princesses	Rhymes/tales
		Country	Landscape
	Insects	Insects	Spiders
	Fiction	Bears	Dragons
			Mystery
Colour	Colour		
Transport	Transport	Transport	Flight/space
Space			
Food	Food	Food	
Circus	Circus		
	Eggs/chickens		Eggs/crocodiles
	Aust animals	Australia Possums	Australia
Me	Me	Me	Me
Dinosaurs	Dinosaurs		Dinosaurs
		Weather	Weather
Medical workers		Community workers	
		Music	Music
		Sports	Bike safety
		Fables	Fables
		Authors	Authors
Christmas	Christmas	Christmas	Christmas
Sea	Sea		Sea/water
			Change

Other resources accompanying the materials are occasional audio tapes and/or video tapes. These are not frequent in the Years One and Two materials, but audio tapes accompany each Year Three set. While teachers, students and tutors indicated dissatisfaction with some aspects of the Year Three materials, the high use of audio, including instructions and talking books was a popular aspect of the materials for busy tutors and children wanting a change from written texts.

## **The need for change: Initial stages of development of the trial**

### **materials**

It will be seen that the existing distance education materials for early childhood learners are outdated, not cohesive and do not reflect the philosophy and related practice of the Curriculum Framework mandated for all Western Australian schools. Data from the initial stages of the development of the new draft curriculum materials for early childhood distance education are now analysed to determine the factors that influenced this development.

During my initial investigation I was able to listen to the views of the parents/home tutors and teachers in relation to the research question in this study: 'What factors appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia? This investigation took place over six months, through home tutor seminars, visits to families, meeting with principals and informal discussions with teachers.

Comments relating to materials across the individual year levels varied according to the developmental needs of the children. Teachers felt the Pre-primary materials did not provide the scope needed to promote language and literacy development as there was no focus on developmental learning, a play based curriculum or emergent language and literacy acquisition. No training was provided to parents to emphasise the value of open tasks, student-centred learning and encouraging children to take risks, experiment, explore, observe and construct. End results, in the form of completed worksheets, were the focus of activities and a primary means of assessment for teachers. The end product

was sent to the teacher and no feedback was requested about how the child produced the assessment sheet. Home tutors were not provided with a scaffold for providing support, challenging thinking and facilitating the learning of their children. Home tutors, concerned for the development of their children, assisted by trying to ensure the end results met the expectations of their children's teachers. Data from all schools involved in distance education, showed that few, if any, of the K-3 teachers were early childhood trained (or experienced) before taking on the role of early childhood teachers at the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education.

Home tutors whose children had already moved beyond Pre-primary were concerned that the gap between Pre-primary and Year One materials did not reflect continuity of learning and that Pre-primary materials did not prepare their children for the learning program that lay ahead. In my observations of different SIDE schools, this led to an increased development of school-based curriculum for Pre-primary students, that focused on basic phonics instruction, with one-to-one letter-sound correspondences being developed. Many individual and school-based initiatives allowed for individual needs to be met and allowed schools to cater to their own unique client group. At the same time, many of these teaching methods and individualised programs continued to foster lock-step approaches to language and literacy acquisition. Not only did there seem a need for a seamless transition between all of the school years of learning, but also a need for support to be provided for teachers and tutors in maintaining and developing their own skills and understandings of current pedagogy and educational paradigm shifts.

Most home tutors and teachers favoured the structure of the Years One and Two materials. However, this structure also limited the possibilities for students to develop at their own rates. For instance, spelling lists were directed and taken from theme or high frequency word lists, regardless of whether the children knew the words or not. No opportunities were provided for the home tutors to replace words from lists with words taken from errors in their children's writing, although teachers from the schools involved often encouraged this strategy as I did as a *First Steps* focus teacher at the School of the Air. The disadvantage of additional instruction or strategies coming from the base school meant that feedback was often inconsistent.

General feedback at this stage indicated that the structure of the Year Three materials, which were written in Queensland and differed from those materials produced in Western Australia, provided a set-back for the children in their developing independence. Home tutors commented on the need to re-familiarise children with the different routine and structure of the school day required by these materials. However, these materials contained increased use of information and communication technologies, such as audio and audio-visual materials which were very popular and provided increased motivation for students to learn through different modes of delivery. The different structure also allowed some flexibility in the ways the daily and weekly routines were met. Many families saw this as favourable. Many chose to complete each workbook in a different way to that suggested by the writers.

It was important that the views of each of the schools' communities were represented and that the issues I was hearing were those that represented the viewpoints and

concerns of different stakeholders and their differing views and needs in relation to their children's education. When it was clear that new materials would be resourced and developed it became important that all stakeholders were informed and involved in decisions regarding their child's education.

### **Initial school responses to the development of new early childhood curriculum**

I asked the distance education schools involved to work together with their communities to develop some common goals for the development of a new early childhood curriculum. Schools involved parents in identifying factors related to existing materials and also identified new ideas or possibilities for curriculum development. The factors are identified in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Factors identified by schools for existing and new curriculum directions

Existing factors	New curriculum directions
▪ No kindergarten curriculum	▪ Four half days Kindergarten
▪ Four days part time Pre-primary	▪ Full time Pre-primary
▪ Lock-step	▪ Developmental
▪ Print based materials	▪ A more flexible mode of delivery using information and communication technologies
▪ Mostly closed activities	▪ A balance of open and closed learning experiences
▪ Structured in their directions, no flexibility for student participation and involvement	▪ More student centred, providing opportunities for the children to have input into their learning
▪ Structured in their nature, very little room for change	▪ Greater flexibility with the learning experiences
▪ Content based	▪ Outcomes focused
▪ Materials separated into discrete subjects with no connections between these and real life	▪ Opportunities for students to see the connections between their learning and real life
▪ Large numbers of subjects for parents and students to get through	▪ Integrated curriculum would provide for more holistic learning and teaching
▪ Produced by the year level, with each set developed using a sequence planned for a year	▪ Planning for the ECE years of learning as a whole, sequencing and developing skills and understandings
▪ A large gap between the Pre-primary materials and Year One	▪ A seamless transition from Pre-primary to Year One
▪ Activities enhance individual learning	▪ Provision for collaborative learning experiences building on family structures with more than one child in school
▪ Contexts for learning unmatched across year levels	▪ Contexts for learning and common outcomes across the year levels
▪ Activity-based learning	▪ Provision for play-based learning
▪ Day 10 free in one year level provides some flexibility and catch up time	▪ Day ten to be left free in all full time year levels
▪ No prepared training for home tutors	▪ Home tutor training
▪ Fictional texts at varying levels	▪ Balance of fiction and non-fiction texts, providing the balance for learning to read and reading to learn
▪ Literacy and numeracy focus, not a balance of curriculum areas.	▪ Provide opportunities for children to develop the intended outcomes of the <i>Curriculum Framework</i> providing a balance across all areas of curriculum.

The need to assist families with more than one child at school through collaborative activities, common contexts and/or outcomes, refining and streamlining the large quantities of materials was a major focus for change. Provision for a smooth transition between year levels was also a strong focus for change. Nevertheless, all factors were considered when planning for new curriculum direction.

### **Family groupings**

More than 75% of families in distance education have more than one child. One of the main concerns raised by home tutors was catering for the needs of more than one child in the classroom. Many home tutors were working through set work in two or more subjects for up to four different topics at any one time, while caring for toddlers and/or attending to the workloads of their everyday tasks. They felt that they were not able to address the needs of their children in unison, all working to achieve different outcomes through different contexts at the same time. Children often learnt the same topic that a sibling had previously learnt the term before. Existing materials did not provide opportunities for students to work together to develop their skills and understandings, nor did they provide teachers or tutors with the flexibility to adapt to a more collaborative approach.

Many teachers and parents felt that related learning programs would allow children to work towards common outcomes at different levels of complexity in different ways. Students would be able to build on the prior knowledge, skills and understandings of their siblings. Parents/tutors felt they would be able to concentrate on a common skill or understanding through related contexts or themes with all of their children. Home

tutors felt collaborative strategies would allow greater time for them as they worked with a number of students at similar ages. Teachers felt students needed opportunities to learn the skills and values involved in working collaboratively. School feedback in general suggested that materials include some common topics at different levels - with tasks developmentally appropriate for different children at common times.

### **The need for a balanced and integrated curriculum**

Most tutors felt overloaded by the sheer volume of curriculum materials provided. Not only was each child provided with English materials that focused on different 'themes' at any given time, but also each child was required to complete at least separate English, mathematics and handwriting materials. In addition to this, some Schools of the Air provided additional curricula, depending on their staff expertise and experiences. Staff expertise could include LOTE, Visual Arts, Music, Information Technologies, Science or Creative Writing. Many home tutors chose not to complete subjects that they felt were beyond the core essentials of the curriculum, that is, literacy and numeracy. Teachers, aware of the workloads and stress of teaching in the multi-age home environment had little option but to support this notion of the 'crowded curriculum'.

An integrated learning curriculum would allow learning areas to be blended into one unit of work. Such an integrated curriculum would provide opportunities for students to work with siblings on common content or skills and understandings to achieve outcomes at their own levels of ability.

## **An emergent curriculum**

From the preceding analysis, an initial blueprint was developed that summarised the issues important to the development of a distance education early childhood curriculum. Catering for families with more than one child was a priority. The materials had to provide home tutors with guidance for providing their children with the opportunities to achieve all 79 outcomes from the *Curriculum Framework*. A curriculum blueprint needed to be designed to ensure that children had many learning experiences over the five years of early childhood learning, that is Kindergarten, Pre-primary, Years One, Two and Three and that these learning experiences could be monitored by teachers at the base schools. This led to consideration of the need to develop and provide additional support for home tutors.

## **The trial of the new draft curriculum materials**

Following the outline of the blueprint (see Appendix E) developed through widespread consultation with school communities, new draft curriculum materials were written and trialled across the six schools involved. One school participated in the trial across their entire K-3 population. Another participated with their Year Three population and siblings of those families. Other schools had one or more families use the materials for the eight weeks of the trial. Given the interruption of school camps and timetables, this process effectively took a school term.

The first draft of the trial curriculum and blue print made a radical departure from the traditional structure of distance education materials. The major difference was the removal of Year levels. Three levels of materials were produced for the five ECE Years.

Within a level the materials provided flexibility to break down learning experiences for home tutors. These were highlighted through 'If' boxes, allowing home tutors to break down the activity for their children who were experiencing difficulties with varying concepts within the activity. This allowed tutors to provide children with greater instruction or direction. At the same time many of the activities provided opportunities for extensions, allowing children who were not educationally challenged to take on additional or higher level challenges with the assistance of home tutors. The 'If' boxes and extension activities provided teachers and home tutors with greater flexibility to meet the varying needs of the children completing the same activities, encouraging children to develop at their own rate. *Italic text in the sample activities highlight suggested discussion for home tutors.* A sample of these extensions and support is shown in figure 4.6.

## More jelly beans

In this activity children will develop their problem solving skills. This activity will provide children with opportunities to achieve outcomes in the Mathematics learning area.

### You will need

activity pages

pencil case

1 cm cubes from MAB kit, small blocks, jelly beans or peanuts

### Vocabulary

how many

sharing

counting

### What to do

Your child will need the activity pages and some blocks the a similar size to the jelly beans or a real food, either jelly beans or nuts that can be shared and then eaten afterwards.

### Suggested discussion

- *Can you guess how many jelly beans there might be in the jar? Lets write down what we both think there might be then count them.*
- *Okay let's count them.*

**If** your child needs help counting use 1 cm cubes to cover each one as you count. Then recount your cubes as you take them off to double check (keep them in a pile). Model this for your child.

- *If we shared them between two of us, how many would we have each?*

Encourage your child to think of a strategy to solve the problem.

**If** this concept is difficult for your child to solve independently then model how you would use the 12 cubes and share them between the two jars one at a time. *One in your jar, one in my jar.* Repeat this activity with smaller numbers to reinforce the skills.

*How many would we get each if we only had ten, (eight, six, four) to start with can you help me to work it out?*

Record on your reflection page today the method your child used to solve the problem and how much help they required if any.

### Extension

Assist your child to complete the second activity page. Encourage your child to share the jelly beans among four. Again record on your reflection sheet if your child used the jars, used the blocks or were able to work it out in another method.

**If** your child finds this difficult work through the activity with him/her using the blocks, one in this jar, one in the next, one in the next...

Repeat the activity using only eight to begin or four, but keep the number so that they divide evenly by four.

Any method is great if they were able to find the answer, some children may be past the concrete stage, this is valuable information for the teacher.

If your child finds this easy have him/her divide a higher number that is a multiplication of four – sixteen, twenty, twenty four...

Or use real jars or bowls and counters and try sharing among three bowls starting of with a multiplication of three – nine, twelve, fifteen... You will be able to tell when your child is being challenged.

Figure 4.6 Sample activity with extensions

Teachers were asked to become familiar with the materials and recommend those materials with which their students should start. The trial was problematic as the tight timelines on writing, illustrating, publishing and printing the materials provided teachers with little time (one to two weeks) to become acquainted with pedagogical shifts and structural changes. This change was also new to home tutors and their children.

Feedback collected through the research indicated that parents favoured the guidance of a structured timetable, while those who were confident were free to move away from the suggested timetables. Suggested timetables were subsequently provided for those needing a structure for their school days and their children's routines. Collaborative planning of the materials allowed students to work towards common skills, understandings and values at differing levels.

Project work provided schools with opportunities to have greater input into school-based curriculum, allowing the curriculum to be less crowded. Project work also allowed teachers to create student-centred learning experiences based around the needs and interests of individual students. Other aspects of the materials included the introduction of Viewing, a greater focus on Speaking and Listening outcomes outlined in the *Curriculum Framework* and the inclusion of goal setting, self assessment and reflection opportunities that would allow for metalinguistic and metacognitive development. Figure 4.7a and 4.7b show two activities that encourage the home tutor and student to goal set and reflect on the learning that has been taking place.

## Goal setting

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Goal Setting is negotiated between your child, yourself (home tutor) and in some instances the teacher may also like to be involved. Set goals need to be realistic and appropriate within the four week time span for that set.

**Having achievable goals allows children to experience success.**

### You will need

goal setting pages

pencil case

*SIDE Show* – Colour , shape and pattern

### What to do

With your child reflect on what was achieved in the last theme. Discuss with your child the goals he/she may like to aim towards for this theme. By this time your teacher will be the best support for directions in goal setting. Watch the introduction to the *SIDE Show* video before you continue (If you don't have the video look at patterns and shapes around your home).

### Skill related goals

Don't forget to think about a skill or problem that your child may need to focus on or something that they may need more help with. Keep the goals for each set very clear and simple, with possibly only one focus.

Your child's individual skill related goals may include:

- Writing my name
- Leaving spaces between words
- Remembering capitals or full stops
- Taking more care when writing

These goals will differ greatly for level 1 children and need to be chosen directly related to your child's own needs and level of development. Your teacher will be a great guide for this.

Figure 4.7a Sample activity of goal setting

# Reflection

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In this activity children will reflect on their learning. This allows for your child to look back on what they have learnt and how they have felt about this learning. It will also provide valuable feedback for the teacher for ongoing assessment and planning.

## You will need

- |                                       |                   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| activity page                         | pencil case       |
| kit audio – Colour, Shape and Pattern | weeks school work |

## What to do

Help your child to identify what he/she has learnt and what they need to do this week. Choose your own reflection method or use the sheet supplied. Listen to the audio now.

## Suggested discussion

- *Okay it's time to reflect on our weeks work.*
- *What have you learnt about this week?*
- *Did you learn something new?*
- *What did you learn about colours?*
- *What did you enjoy most? Why?*
- *Okay this reflection sheet asks you some questions about your favourite activity. I will read them to you and I'll write in your answers.*

## Extension

Have your child have a go at writing the answers themselves.

Look back at the reflection process and choose a manner of reflection to tell your teacher your thoughts about this weeks learning. Remember your **Home Tutor Guide** has an overview of the reflection process to help you.

Figure 4.7b Sample activity of reflection

As mentioned, 56 families across six schools participated in the trial during term 3 of 1998. Parents provided feedback through comments on the lesson notes, verbal comments to teachers and myself as the curriculum writer, feedback to parent representatives and questionnaires that accompanied the new draft curriculum materials trialled.

**A questionnaire**

I developed a questionnaire that was sent to all families and teachers involved (see appendix D). Observing the trial, listening to parents and analysing the quantitative and qualitative data provided feedback that resulted in changes and modifications to the curriculum design. Responses from the questionnaires were analysed and summarised. The main positive and negative factors that emerged from the trial and the new aspects that were introduced to the early childhood curriculum are presented in Table 4.3. Where possible I have used the verbatim responses of the participants so that their voices are heard.

Table 4.3 Factors emerging from the trial of new draft curriculum materials

Positive feedback	Negative feedback
"Clear and easy to follow format and instructions"	"Too much content for one day"
Trouble shooting instructions that allowed for the learning experiences to be further broken down for tutors with students at educational risk	
Extension activities for talented or gifted children, "I like the extension activities"	Some tutors felt these extensions needed more depth, "The extension activities just provide more work but don't extend my child"
Children sufficiently encouraged to use information and communication technologies	Some tutors felt power supplies affected the time technologies could be utilised, "We don't always have access to power"
Photographs and illustrations of children's work samples effective for modelling to	"Print quality turns samples into black blobs"

tutors, "Great to have samples to guide us"	
The introduction of goal setting, reflection and self evaluation provided self reflection, reflection by the tutor and increased ownership of the learning process	Some found this difficult without any prior experience of goal setting and reflection, "This needed to be explained to me but once I got use to it I found it valuable"
Increased range and balance of fictional and non-fictional texts including brochures and pamphlets	
The inclusion of Drop Everything and Read time (DEAR) written into the weekly timetable overview at the front of the Lesson Notes books	Tutors asked for this to be written into the lesson notes as it was only included as a reminder in the weekly timetable
Increased use of purpose made audio and audio visual resources for learning, including texts read on audio	Several tutors without power or access requested that written scripts could provide back up
	"Too much art," "Kids can do art after school"
	"We need for a nine day fortnight to allow for catch up, public holidays, shopping and other commitments"
Collaborative activities allowed students to work together at times and tutors to plan time more effectively, "I liked having the kids learning about the same topic, it gave them an opportunity to discuss their work."	Some found the timing difficult for collaborative activities, "My kids were never at the same level so we found it difficult to do these together"
	Needed more opportunities for older ECE children to follow instructions and work independently - more instruction written for child rather than home tutor
All learning experiences integrated into the one set of lesson notes allowing outcomes to be integrated and learning experiences to be more related to real life experiences	Most parents liked the integration of different subjects into more meaningful and related activities but asked for mathematics to remain separate as they felt many children often worked at different levels in mathematics and English. The same applied to handwriting. "Maths and handwriting need to be separate."
More choice and flexibility for students and tutors/teachers to follow or develop their own learning experiences	

## **A play-based curriculum**

In my observations of children during several years of visits to isolated families, I found that the majority of children had rich opportunities to play, especially outdoors. On the other hand, not all environments provided children with the opportunities to develop their linguistic, cognitive, physical, creative, social and emotional development. With this in mind, tutors were encouraged to establish different play environments for the interests of their children and to allow time for their children to be involved in play during the course of the school day. The 'Draft Home Tutor Guide' provided a brief outline of the value of play for young children. A brief five page overview focused on:

- The value of play
- The need to observe and monitor play
- Setting up a variety of learning environments for play; and
- A play checklist that allowed home tutors and/or children to monitor the varieties of play their children were immersed in.

The home tutor instruction on and inclusion of play in the lesson notes was kept to a minimum, reminding parents to provide opportunities for their children to play each day and referring them to the home tutor guide for further details. Over each fortnight the materials provided a play check-list in order monitor the variety of play environments and domains that children were involved in. These included a communications centre with books and writing materials, access to music and dance, blocks and construction, painting and drawing, manipulative experiences, outdoor and physical play and sand or water play.

Parent/home tutor response to play throughout the written feedback was fairly consistent. While many tutors did not comment on play, some felt that while it was important for their children to play they did not see this play as part of, or related to, their children's learning. This argument was strong for parents who compressed the formal school day into the morning, allowing the afternoon free for their children to play and for themselves to continue with their regular duties and work beyond the schoolroom. However, my observations confirmed that some children were not exposed to a balance of opportunities that allowed them to develop across all of the domains of learning. Of all the teacher feedback, there was only one teacher who commented on the issue of informal learning or play. This may be due to the fact that the majority of teachers involved in the trial were not early childhood trained.

The teacher who did comment on play highlighted the need for parents to be provided with training or support that emphasised how much can be learned in play situations. She talked about indicating to tutors the opportunities for interacting with children in learning situations that exist outside the structured school directed curriculum and formal activities. It was evident that for play to be valued as a part of the learning process, more support for tutors was needed, as well as for the teachers. Tutor feedback about children's play can allow teachers to analyse children's learning and determine needs for future planning. Fler (1996, p.2) describes play 'as a powerful tool for profiling children, as well as a providing a context in which children's knowledge and abilities can be meaningfully assessed.' Specific comments from parents related to play displayed in Table 4.4 indicated differing opinions as to the value and nature of play for early childhood learners.

Table 4.4 Parent comments on the inclusion of play in the curriculum

- 
- "We did no formal directed play, what a waste of time!"
  - "Another time waster, my kids play every moment together when not doing school."
  - "Directed play is not suitable for our timetable."
  - "We didn't have a directed play time."
  - "This was completely unstructured."
  - "Not applicable to Year Three."
  - "I'm not sure about the purpose of directed play time ... my children naturally play in their free time, why make it part of the school day?"
  - "We did not have time for this during the school day, some of the activities were like directed play anyway."
  - "This was done out of school time independently."
  - "No directed play time the children are too busy."
- 

Some felt play was only needed in the non-compulsory early years of Kindergarten and Pre-primary; others were very happy with their children playing, but valued it as a social experience outside the school room. Much of the difference of opinion related to play may in fact stem from the different meanings that parents, teachers and others construct when talking about play. Fler says, 'There is great confusion with regard to this term, since people often assume that the meaning framework they hold for this construct is the same as the person with whom they are speaking' (1996, p.3). Again the need arises to support parents and teachers to develop understandings of play based learning experiences.

One parent, while valuing play as a very important part of their children's development, wrote:

I consider directing children's play the role of the parent out of school time and not the role of the educator during school. If we can conclude school activities by lunchtime, my children have the whole afternoon for free, creative play that I can observe from a distance.

I had stayed for several days with this family and did observe that the children were involved in a great deal of play in a rich and varied environment. Providing play in the curriculum materials allows those parents who appreciate the value of play the opportunity of including it in the school curriculum. Increasing parent awareness of how play is a valuable part of the learning process was seen as an issue that should be further developed. This parent also commented that there should not be a variety of play environments in only a fortnight, as children often immersed themselves in a particular interest for hours, days or weeks.

Ensuring play was student-centred and directed was indeed valuable feedback and the final draft curriculum materials reflect this. It was clear from the feedback that the final curriculum materials would need to help parents to gain a greater understanding of the value of play and the importance of a play-based curriculum for early childhood learners. Play experiences needed more direction or instruction, while still providing opportunities for the children to direct and lead their play.

### **Phonics and phonological awareness**

Phonics instruction was one area that changed to provide children with more opportunities to become aware of the alphabetic principle, that is the correspondence between letters in the alphabet and sounds in language (see Rohl, 2000). Phonics cards were designed to illustrate the 44 phonemes of the English language that are represented, in different ways, by the 26 letters of the alphabet. In the Kindergarten and Pre-primary years there is emphasis placed on phonological awareness. Existing materials had little emphasis here, past the provision of some songs and rhymes.

Phonological awareness was emphasised through increased use of onset-rime in songs, books and language games and activities. Greater emphasis is on metalinguistic awareness as children and home tutors are encouraged to reflect on words, letters and sounds in language. Figure 4.8 shows two sample lessons from the Pre-primary curriculum materials.

# Sounds the same

**Your child will:**

- use rhymes, poems and songs to enhance their awareness of sounds in language

**You will need**

simple songs, poems and rhymes from your *ECE Resource File*

other poetry, rhymes and jingles your child knows well

**What to do**

Read some favourite rhymes to your child. If you have other books of rhyme that your child knows, read some of those too.

Now read again, this time whispering the poem and saying the rhyming words loud. Repeat. Now ask your child to join in too.

Try the other way around, saying the rhyme aloud and whispering the rhyming words.

Talk about how the words sound the same at the end.

- *Can you hear words that sound the same at the end?*

If your child can recognise the rhyming words tell them these are called rhymes or rhyming words.

Developing children’s awareness of onset and rime (the sound before the vowel and the sound after; f – our, d – oor, w – all, f – all) helps your child with later decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling and writing) development. As often as you can recite, read, act out rhyming songs, jingles, poems with your child. Play with the rhyming words to develop your child’s awareness of them.



## Did you ever?

---

### **Your child will:**

- use rhymes, poems and songs to enhance their awareness of sounds in language

### **You will need**

simple songs, poems and rhymes from your *ECE Resource File*,  
other poetry, rhymes and jingles your child knows well

### **What to do**

Read some favourite poems with your child, introduce new poems and songs from the set or library books you have.

Make up new rhymes to the tune of 'If you're Happy and You Know It', like this:

Did you ever see a (cat) with a (hat)  
Did you ever see a (cat) with a (hat)  
No I never, no I never, no I never, no I never  
No, I never saw a (cat) with a (hat)

**bear with a chair**

**mouse in a house**

**frog on a log**

**sheep fast asleep**

**pig do a jig ...**

Figure 4.8 Sample phonological awareness activities from Pre-primary draft

The samples also illustrate the structure and layout of lessons for home tutors to follow. Many language games and activities are introduced through the materials that home tutors can repeat frequently during reading of rhymes and songs, stories and games. Home tutors are encouraged to keep an 'ECE Resource File' with rhymes and songs, as well as language ideas and games that encourage the development of phonological awareness.

Not only are activities introduced that encourage metalinguistic awareness, but also metacognitive development is facilitated through regular goal setting, reflection and self-assessment, which was new to many teachers as well as parents. A further difficulty was that, as some aspects of the existing curriculum materials and texts were modified and included in the new draft materials, some children were required to read texts they had used in the previous year.

### **Feedback from family visits**

There were many problems with the nature of the trial that became apparent during my opportunities to visit several families. From the beginning, schools were aware that problems would arise due to the new structure and nature of the trial curriculum. The *Curriculum Framework* heavily influenced the structure and nature of the draft curriculum materials in ways with which many teachers and parents were still not familiar. While many of the changes in the new draft materials were expected, there were some that were not expected, such as a different approach to the teaching and learning of phonics, metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies and the introduction of

play in the curriculum materials. Some teachers were not familiar with many of the new strategies for learning that use of the materials entailed, such as the use of goal setting and reflection and strategies to support new outcomes from the *Curriculum Framework*, such as Viewing. The structure too differed from previous materials and required the use of new and unfamiliar routines.

### The Walker Family

The first family I visited was The Walker family. They lived on their remote cattle station in the North West and had three children. Elisa was participating in the Pre-primary program being offered by the school. The mother, Helen was the children's home tutor and in addition to her teaching role, she cooked for the family and station workers, maintained the garden, fed the animals including the poddy calves and mustered run away cattle during the lunch break. Experienced in living and working with remote station families this seemed a normal workload for Helen in addition to the duties of being a mother and housekeeper. At the time of my visit a family with three children were also visiting for several weeks; visits were common on this station. The three children shared a dedicated schoolroom with a desk each and a separate desk for the HF radio and computer. The mother, Helen aimed at completing schoolwork around lunchtime, allowing the children to play after lunch. My observations on this visit showed that the students in fact played with their visiting friends in the schoolroom for the entire afternoon and language was central to their play. The children were involved in a lengthy role-play of a schoolroom and used language for different purposes, including power, as they negotiated roles such as who would be the teacher. It seemed

that much of this after school play in fact goes on unnoticed while parents or tutors are heavily involved in their many other duties.

The aspects of metacognition introduced in the materials through self reflection, sharing and goal setting in the materials being trialed indicated a need for clarification. When Helen asked for clarification on these new strategies I directed her to her children's teacher who accompanied me on the visit to encourage greater use of teachers as a resource for the curriculum. The teacher, however, was also unfamiliar with metacognitive strategies. Using language as the focus, I modelled goal setting to both the teacher and tutor. During a later interview with Helen, she stated that the same teacher later "developed her own goal setting strategies that she did over the radio with the kids, it was good and it helped the kids, (and us), to understand goal setting and reflection". This provided her tutors and students with some success. Many of the general comments Helen made included the value of collaborative activities, but the difficulty of synchronising them with three children in the schoolroom.

I like the collaborative activities but unless we do them at the beginning of the day the kids are never at the same place. One gets to a collaborative activity when another is half way through a different activity. You don't want to stop them so we had to go back to them later. The kids liked that they were all learning about the same thing, especially Elisa it makes her feel very special that she is learning the same things as her older brother and sister.

The Mullins Family

The Mullins family had two girls and lived on a large cattle station. During my visit the father helped the girls with some activities such as designing and constructing a kite and creating a paper mache bunyip, two projects that had taken place in the trial. The mother's main concern with the new curriculum was the level of dependence required by the materials for her Year Three child. She stated that

The materials rely too heavily on me directing the learning. Year Three students at this age are capable of directing their learning themselves, they need to be learning to be independent learners and should only be asking me for help when they really need it. I think the Year Three materials need to be written for the children not the tutor.

She valued the opportunity for the children to be involved in negotiated project work that allowed them to direct their own learning.

When we read "Picasso the Green Tree Frog" I found the encyclopaedia and started looking up Picasso and then I realised that the materials introduced Picasso the artist and had a web site and fact sheet about him too. We really liked this and the girls looked up other artists after this.

#### The Andrews family

When I visited the Andrews family to collect feedback, they had four children: Tessa 3, Amelia 5, Jason 7, Scotty 9 and one on the way. As we saw in our introduction to the family in Chapter 3, both boys were identified by their teachers as 'at educational risk'. Their teachers worked collaboratively with support staff in Perth to develop individual learning materials that would provide the boys opportunities to work at their own level. This process was time consuming for the teachers due to the print-based nature of the

materials. The teachers were keen to try the new materials and accordingly the boys were included in the trial. Five year old Amelia, on the other hand, had been recognised as needing greater challenges than could be provided through the existing Pre-primary materials and was involved in learning experiences aimed at her own level of understandings and skills. During the trial the children were involved in a multi-age activity that engaged them in the development and making of a model wild life enclosure. From here they were involved in language experiences that built on their interests and experiences of the wildlife park. The boys were very motivated by the experience and upon my return to the city they each wrote me a long letter about their wildlife enclosure. The boys' teachers were surprised and delighted to see the level of writing and interest of the boys and the parents also wrote of the motivation related to the task as continuing for days. The wildlife park play continued to generate language experiences for the mother to build on, aided by the strategies provided in the materials and suggested by the teachers.

The move to a more 'hands on' curriculum had engaged the boys and allowed the curriculum to develop around their individual needs. Some parents felt the increased practical component of the trial materials was too much and not necessary for those children who had many opportunities beyond the classroom. Most of the parents however, including Margaret, felt that the new direction was more engaging and motivating for the students, especially those with learning difficulties in literacy. Margaret stated that "The boys' father had to threaten to lock the school room in the evening to get the boys to dinner, they love the hands on approach and it really motivates them to complete the written activities related to it." She also said, "I have to

cook so much everyday for the kids and workers and making it part of the set work is really good, I didn't realise there was so much maths and reading in cooking. The kids write up their own recipes now." Again the materials had met different needs and the search for a balance that catered for the diverse client population would continue.

## The trial meeting

At the end of the trial period teachers, home tutors and administrators were brought together to discuss the trial and further analyse the key factors in curriculum development for the early childhood learners in distance education. The key factors were summarised and emergent design continued to develop. These factors are outlined in table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Identified key factors in curriculum development from trial meeting

Retain	Include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inclusion of skills for physical activity program focussing on fundamental movement skills</li> <li>▪ Integrated approach to learning</li> <li>▪ metacognitive activities such as goal setting, reflection and sharing</li> <li>▪ audio visual mode of delivery</li> <li>▪ collaborative opportunities</li> <li>▪ detailed 'phonics' program</li> <li>▪ multiple literacy strategies including spelling journal for Year 2/3 students</li> <li>▪ extended whole language and meaningful learning experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nine day fortnight and opportunities for project time allowing children, home tutors and teacher greater flexibility in meeting individual needs</li> <li>▪ Models of goal setting and further support for home tutors to implement metacognitive strategies</li> <li>▪ greater choices for children in writing experiences</li> <li>▪ opportunities for children to use information and communication technologies</li> <li>▪ greater emphasis on phonological awareness</li> </ul>

It appeared that the ungraded nature of the materials and flexibility of multi-age materials were not structured enough for a distance education setting where home tutors were given the responsibility to choose the activities appropriate to their children's

needs. For home tutors time is very important, with many aiming to complete the school day by late lunch time after an early start. Many tutors, including Helen, preferred to focus 'school time' on the basic fundamentals of literacy and numeracy. Many parents requested activities, such as cooking experiences, physical activities, art activities, science experiments, projects involving construction or gardening to be compacted and placed in blocks once per week. They were considered to be 'very time consuming'. The structured nature of the school day in distance education is very different to that of most classrooms in mainstream schools, with home tutors following carefully the instructions and dialogue laid out in lesson plans.

Providing opportunities for all of the *Curriculum Framework* outcomes changed the nature and direction of the new draft curriculum materials. Existing Years One to Three materials were largely English based. As the new curriculum needed to cater adequately for all learning areas including English, Mathematics, The Arts, Technology and Enterprise, Science, Society and Environment and Health and Physical Education, the new draft curriculum materials appeared to some home tutors/parents to have less focus on language and literacy. While it was agreed the curriculum should not be 'crowded' it was seen as important to provide children with a balance of opportunities over the early childhood years to learn the skills, understandings and values mandated by the *Curriculum Framework*.

## **Document analysis**

Curriculum materials being developed in states outside of Western Australia are taking on directions that mirror national directions in outcomes focused education. The shift across Australia to National Profiles has seen the need for a set of curriculum areas to be addressed and has resulted in the development of integrated materials in several states. Several states have also looked at phases of schooling, such as the early childhood years, or middle primary years, rather than a focus on each year level independently of the previous or following year. This allows for the development of materials to ensure that they meet the needs required within a given phase of childhood.

With the shift to profiles or outcomes, play is emerging as an important factor in the development of curriculum materials. Some curriculum developers, such as those in South Australia and Tasmania, have placed an emphasis on the value of play within the learning program and support home tutors in observing play. This has involved helping home tutors know what to look for and how to monitor and assess their children's knowledge, skills and understandings through play. The South Australian distance education materials describe for home tutors:

- The environments that enhance play;
- Appropriate levels of adult involvement or intervention;
- The need for play to be student centred or directed; and
- The benefits of providing plenty of time for play.

Writers and curriculum developers in South Australia have told me they feel there is, however, a top down pressure to include more formal work in the early years, including handwriting and phonics-based worksheets.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the trial of new draft curriculum materials, including the extensive feedback, I spoke with several families who had been involved in the development of the materials and the trial from the very beginning. This would help me finalise the blue print and curriculum design. The interviews were informal in nature and I encouraged those involved to speak of issues that were relevant to their own needs. Many of the interviews were conducted by email or fax.

## **Interviews:**

### **Remote/rural home tutors**

Helen Walker, one of the parents I visited on the family cattle station in the North West of WA, was a confident home tutor and very keen to be involved in the further development of a curriculum blueprint for her three children's needs. I asked her which factors she felt were important for writers of curriculum materials to have in mind. She felt that:

- "Writers need to be aware that many home tutors have no teaching experience and that assumptions shouldn't be made about their levels of understanding";
- "Materials written in haste resulted in errors which cause a great deal of confusion to home tutors";

- "Home tutors have limited time and are often working with several children of different ages and needs at the same time";
- "Families living in geographic isolation do not have immediate access to materials and resources are often limited, making us improvising with what we have".

Time was a crucial element. In a letter to me written on a school day while her husband was 400 km away at the nearest town buying supplies she wrote,

I've been up on the roof all day helping to put the tin on the new quarters. Work experience of a different kind ... The kids are all well and have been teaching themselves while I've been building. They're quite good at coping without me actually.

From my experiences as a visiting teacher this work situation was fairly common for many parents who were running stations, farms, roadhouses, or maintaining a business.

In relation to literacy development Helen had been involved for many years with the existing materials that provided a combination of strategies and approaches to literacy development. These included *First Steps* strategies and direct instruction in drilling of words and sound/letter combinations, graphs, digraphs, blends and grammatical rules, often out of context from the texts in which students had been immersed. The trial materials were written to allow an increase of whole language development and the deconstruction of texts and to allow for learning experiences that provided instruction in phonological awareness, word study, grammar and other literacy needs, including the introduction of viewing.

As an experienced tutor Helen spoke about how she had changed over the period of time she taught her three children literacy skills and understandings. She felt that as each child passed through the early years and another started she became much 'more flexible and less methodical in [her] delivery'. She felt confident now to provide her children with more control over the management of their learning and sharing decisions with them and accepting their creative ideas. These are valuable insights that perhaps cannot be developed for the first time home tutor. Confidence with teaching or any skill comes about through practice, but perhaps greater access to training would allow new tutors to see the techniques and skills of others.

When asked about how her children learnt in comparison to each other Helen felt each learnt very differently. Both of her girls had been confident and eager especially in their literacy development. Her second child, David, however, learnt in a very different style which initially provided Helen with a great deal of concern. Having only taught one child to read and write she stated, "I expected that they would all develop in the same way and style". She was not prepared for David's different learning style and for his different rate of development and felt the materials provided at the time did not cater for him.

Margaret Andrews was one of the few mothers who really enjoyed the many concrete, hands on activities that led into language and literacy activities. She said she felt cooking, making models, constructing, building and art activities engaged her children, especially her two boys who were not motivated by activities that stemmed from written texts. She said, "My boys love reading recipes" and instructions that allowed them to

make something and they were also more motivated than they had been by the existing materials". She said that as their motivation to write increased they were more receptive to and interested in the spelling and grammar of their writing. She said, "The time taken for cooking doesn't matter as the food is always eaten and the kids love making things". Other parents such as Mrs Mullins felt that, as her two girls were good independent workers already, the inclusion of experiences such as cooking, designing and creating impacted on parent time that had not previously been needed. She stated, " I don't have the time needed to help the girls with art projects and cooking but luckily their dad likes doing things like that s they have been making their bunyip at night." However, Valerie's husband helped the girls with these projects during times when he was home at night, or on days when he was working in the house.

### **Teacher interviews**

Teachers in the six different schools have responsibilities for different students. Schools of the Air cater for the rural sector while Perth based Preparatory School caters mostly for overseas and travelling families and their students. The teachers' main role is to dispatch the work to their students, maintain frequent communication through radio, telephone, Email or post and mark the work that comes in. Teachers are also required to cater to individual student needs through the modification of materials and additional assistance through regular communication and support to the home tutor. Interviewing staff responsible for different groups of students highlighted the differences faced by each of the three main client groups: rural, travellers and overseas.

Beth, one of the Perth-based teachers I interviewed, was the teacher of a combination of remote, overseas and travelling families, mostly the latter. The Perth-based distance education Preparatory School was staffed on a ratio of 1 teacher to 25 students so each teacher would have from ten to fifteen families depending on the number of children in a family. She described the overseas families as "largely professionals, with positions such as structural engineers, doctors, general managers of international companies, geophysicists" and more. She said, "Many of these families live in cities but do not have access to what they consider to be 'appropriate' schooling contexts for their children, largely due to language barriers". Many, however, chose to remain on distance education from Western Australia rather than enrol in an international school. She explained, "This is to maintain consistency in the philosophies and directions of their children's education so that when they return to Western Australia they are able to fit back into a mainstream schooling". Usually in these instances the mother remains the home tutor, although in some instances a governess is employed. She said for the Perth based school, "Many of the overseas families are missionaries living in isolated and remote locations, in these cases both parents usually share the role of home tutor".

I asked Beth about some of the factors important to curriculum development for this client group. She felt that the curriculum materials developed needed to provide home tutors with the necessary understandings to deliver feedback, through monitoring and assessment in situ, as the turn around of materials is so long (often many months) that teacher feedback is of no use. Again this raises the question of adequate training and support for home tutors.

I also asked Beth about the English language and literacy development of children in their early years, who were living in a land where English was not the first language and where the environmental print would not be in English. Although a very experienced teacher in the field of language and literacy, Beth had not previously considered this issue. Many such students were involved in successful second language learning, some working on their third language as they moved from country to country. Beth felt the existing and new draft curriculum materials, provided home tutors with a rich variety of texts that could be displayed around the schoolroom and home. As the children's primary caregivers were English speaking she thought this to be appropriate.

Another issue that Beth felt important was the need for the curriculum materials to be summarised for teachers to help them assist the many families, both travellers and overseas families, who enrol in the school throughout the year. She said,

We need to be able to tell home tutors what is necessary and what can be left out because travellers and some overseas families supplementing an education either don't have time or don't need to do all of the work provided. For this reason we need to know what is the core and what is optional.

She felt this was especially important for teachers to determine both the language and literacy needs of the children and the 'sets' of materials. She also felt that the experiences and activities provided in the materials to help children develop their phonological awareness needed to be summarised. In addition she felt an overview should be provided for teachers and home tutors to allow them to work together to determine their children's individual needs in early literacy development and locate learning experiences to meet the needs of individual students. For overseas students she

discussed the issue of the time taken for feedback as hampering this process. She also talked of the problem of overseas students when the teachers are unable to hear their students read, except via a tape that is sent through the mail, along with writing samples that may be several months old as these are crucial months of literacy development for children in the early childhood years. She felt that home tutors seemed to need further support in recognising the needs of their children's development in literacy, especially phonological awareness and strategies for helping children become literate.

Beth also felt moreover that in order to maintain effective monitoring across the curriculum areas a similar overview of all of the knowledge, skills, understandings and values of the overarching and learning area outcomes needed to be developed to provide teachers with a framework for monitoring children's development. She felt this would help teachers to further support parents in monitoring their children's development and guide further planning to meet children's needs.

The factors Beth considered important in curriculum development for travelling families were time and space, "Many travellers are in vans, caravans or buses, with no space for a permanent schoolroom or environmental print." In fact the regular schoolroom would most likely be a box under the table cum-fold-out-bed. Before the introduction of the new draft curriculum materials these families had tended to use only English and mathematics materials. Beth felt that the new integrated materials with their more open ended and flexible learning experiences, such as cooking to focus on measurement, a viewing activity with a video, or an interactive science experience followed over several weeks, needed the time and space that were not always available

to these families. She felt that while many parents valued the learning their children were engaged in through immersion in new environments they were in fact keen to maintain the "three R's" and that;

Travellers just want their kids to keep up with the three 'R's as they are immersed in learning about the environment and people through their travelling. Travelling parents need a simplified or compacted version of the curriculum, perhaps with key activities highlighted to provide a skeletal support for parents to supplement their children's learning with their travel experiences.

She also felt this might be favourable for overseas parents who chose distance education materials to supplement a school system in another country. These views put forward by Beth were consistent with those of distance education families in various contexts. Station-based tutors spoke of times during the year when 'we just can't be in the classroom due to other commitments' and recommended curriculum materials 'maintain some flexibility within the set work and ensure that home tutors understand that not every activity needs to be done to the letter'.

The final issue that Beth addressed was that of parents being guided in what to expect from their children. She felt that home tutors often "had no comparisons of children outside the family and often sought support or reassurance as to whether their students were achieving appropriately". She described situations where families with more than one child would regularly compare subsequent children to the first and panic if they did not learn in the same manner or rate as the older child. Again this was an issue common to many distance education families. One of the mothers interviewed spoke of this concern and described her own experiences with three children. She said,

All my children have been offered the same environmental stimulus with regards to literacy. However, it has seemed to come naturally to my two daughters but not to my son. I don't seem to have ever 'taught' the girls to read and write just provided the means and opportunity. My son has needed much more encouragement. He needs a purpose and good reason in order to apply himself.

Beth had also seen this situation many times and felt materials needed to provide different starting points and flexibility for children to develop at their own rates. Further, support would be needed to develop parents' understandings of developmental learning and the strategies important to support the needs of their children.

### **Travelling families**

The Garner family were travelling around Australia in a catamaran for 12 months with Paul, their five-and a half-year-old son. Their primary method of communication was e-mail, although this was only viable when they were in a port or in a vicinity where the mobile phone could work. Paul was enrolled in Year One and had completed his first term at his local primary school. I asked Sally, the mother and home tutor, what factors she felt were important for writers of curriculum materials to have in mind in regards to the needs of travelling families.

She felt that space was of primary consideration for travelling families. She described putting up environmental print, displaying pictures on the walls, keeping activity boxes, communication centres, recycled materials for craft and other activities as very difficult.

She overcame some of these problems by keeping environmental print in plastic sleeves that could be brought out daily. She described the living conditions on the boat as somewhat more spacious than some boats because it is a catamaran. However, the only table was 1.5 x 0.8m and this did not allow for a lot of plastic sleeves.

Limited access to regular communication with the school was not seen as a problem. Sally felt comfortable with the new draft curriculum materials and support provided, was having no problems with Paul's learning and didn't feel hindered by limited communication. Sally in an email described some aspects of life on the boat as follows:

We are at sea for anytime from 1 week to 6 before we go into port, so Patrick's experiences are mainly of natural environments, we don't have TV and would only get the newspaper once a week in port. This stop [Darwin] is the longest in any port so far and the yacht club is well equipped with TV and many other cruising families.

We currently only do Maths & English. However we encourage Patrick to use our activities as a basis for his writing. He uses our various fauna books to find out about the wildlife we see. If an activity calls for creativity we encourage him to do it on the beach with sand, rocks, shells etc. He then will look for suitable items and knows their names. He has a love for all aquatic life and for example can identify various species of small crabs!

Patrick uses the computer for a variety of educational games and tells me what to type for the e-mail and knows how it works. He is trying to understand a

compass and has his own. He is interested in the GPS and how it works and is learning the VHF radio.

She could only access the Internet on the laptop computer when the mobile phone was within range. There was no television and limited access to newspapers or magazines. Sally didn't feel this lack of environmental print as a hindrance as Paul had access to, and enjoyed, a variety of texts. They carried a large quantity of books, including reference and fiction and spent time each day reading with Paul. They read each night, one book of choice and another in preparation for the learning activities of the following day. They played many games as a family including 'Uno', 'Scrabble' and dominoes which Sally believed were educational and good for collaborative and life skills.

Travel itself was an obstacle. Time taken travelling in a boat, in particular seasickness and rough weather conditions, did not induce avid learning below deck. During these times Sally and Paul opted for the deck where they waited out the weather, reading and playing simple word and sound games and activities. Navigating also interrupted tutoring every 15 minutes.

Sally suggested writers could provide:

- "Less structure for language experience, as travelling children are exposed to a great deal of content and contexts through which early language and literacy skills and understandings could be developed";
- "Audio recordings on CD's which would allow for easy location of the correct track";

- "Less paper work and fewer items to be stored in terms of word cards, for prolonged periods of time".

### **Overseas family**

Kathy Murphy and her family had been living in East Asia for several years and recently moved to Russia. Her three girls (6, 8 and 11) had all been schooled at home, with Kathy as their tutor for the past three years. The children had spent some time in a local International Baccalaureate school. However they left due to several factors, one being concern about the curriculum. The children preferred to continue their schooling at home and were involved in many activities beyond their distance education curriculum, including horse riding, gymnastics, skiing, 'Brownies' and Russian lessons.

Kathy felt the new draft curriculum materials provided her with a consistency in her children's schooling and felt the instructions provided were clear and easy to follow. Due to travel commitments to Asia I only received one email from Kathy.

### **Curriculum Writers**

Kate another writer and I were responsible for the development of the new draft curriculum materials. Kate came with a background in early childhood teaching in rural and city schools. She had not worked in a School of the Air or a distance education setting. Her first opportunity to visit these settings was not until the trial was taking place.

Kate described her visits as a valuable learning experience in understanding the range of conditions and environments in which the families worked. She felt that one of the most important factors in curriculum development for the writers was the need to visit and spend time with families as they went about their regular days in the schoolroom. She felt writers had to be aware of the different environments and factors important to the entire client group across the different schools and not be focused on any one group. When we visited families of the different Schools of the Air Kate was surprised that many of the parents did not realise that the client group for the writers included travelling families and Western Australian families living overseas. In summary she felt that writers needed to:

- "Have a thorough understanding of the diversity of the client group, the children and their many backgrounds";
- "Take into account the learning and living conditions and available resources of the clients";
- "Be flexible in a situation which was achievable - not a pressurised timeline";
- "Take into account current early childhood education beliefs in areas such as play, literacy development" ;
- "Consider the skills of the home tutors"; and
- "Take into account *Curriculum Framework* and allow teachers to use *Student Outcome Statements* to assess students."

Kate's feelings take into account the socio-cultural considerations of families and stress the difficulties faced by writers in meeting the needs of such diversity and allowing children to build on their own backgrounds and prior knowledge.

## **Summary**

The stakeholders reflected and commented on the materials from different viewpoints: their needs as home tutors, their needs as parents and their expectations of school administrators or curriculum writers. Administrators felt confident that the new materials would provide a more up to date curriculum that better catered to the diverse needs of students in contemporary society. Teachers felt that the materials provided a strong balance of curriculum skills and knowledge, while providing for a seamless transition across the early childhood years. Some teachers felt the need for more summaries of the content and contexts of learning to assist them better meeting new students needs and assess their students on an ongoing basis. This, they felt, might take the place of skills, knowledge and understanding check lists across the curriculum areas.

Parents felt, for the first time, that materials had been developed through consultation and they spoke positively about them as they felt some ownership due to their involvement in the development and trial processes. However, many parents still felt unfamiliar with new aspects of the materials such as play, phonological awareness, goal setting and different teaching strategies. On the other hand many parents welcomed the opportunities to increase their own understandings of early childhood education, to cater for students at different levels, to cater for family groups through shared contexts and

collaborative activities. They also appreciated the enhanced information and communication strategies and access.

Administrators' main concerns for writers was that they met the budget and timelines of writing while delivering a curriculum that met the mandated requirements of the *Curriculum Framework*. Teachers felt that writers needed to be aware of all the distance education families not just the rural clients of the Schools of the Air. While all teachers involved appeared to accept the new materials in terms of the balance of curriculum, catering to individual needs and multi-age aspects, teachers from the Preparatory school had a different focus. Preparatory staff dealing with overseas and travelling families felt that writers needed to summarise the materials and provide lists of activities that could be left out. Another difficulty was that technology access was different for client groups. Some families had ready access, while others had little or no access to technology.

From the data analysis presented here it seems that the implication for writers developing language and literacy early childhood distance education are to:

- Have a thorough understanding of system requirements and current practice related to early childhood education in general and language and literacy education in particular;
- Be aware of the various social, cultural and geographic contexts of the clients who make up distance education, including the need to cater for family groups;
- Plan for the whole five years of early childhood learning in order to develop a seamless and balanced curriculum;

- Write materials that are sufficiently explicit for home tutors, adaptable for teachers and engaging for students;
- Prepare packages that provide training opportunities for home tutors.
- Develop new materials in consultation with stakeholders, trial draft materials and take into account the feedback of all stakeholders in order to provide distance education materials that are appropriate for all clients.

It will be noted that there are many important implications for developing early childhood distance education materials for language and literacy, most of which relate to early childhood education in general, rather than language and literacy specifically.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION II

#### The final draft curriculum materials

#### **The final draft curriculum materials**

Extensive research, consultation and negotiated outcomes allowed for the development of new curriculum materials to be jointly constructed with all stakeholders. These new materials were due for distribution to Schools of Isolated and Distance Education in early 2001. Significant developments and changes were made from the existing materials, with some structural similarities kept to maintain ease of use and understanding. New draft curriculum materials were developed as a result of the early stages of consultation. Trialling them allowed for further refinement and clarification of many issues. From here it was possible for writers and administrators to develop and agree on a final blueprint (see Appendix E) that would guide the final curriculum materials to be used from 2001 onwards.

Significant developments resulting from the jointly negotiated curriculum feedback as seen in tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 and voiced through interviews of the participants appear to have been:

- A clear and comprehensive structure to guide home tutors;
- Fostering of a multi-age approach;
- Integrating learning areas while maintaining language and literacy across the curriculum;
- Providing a cohesive transition across the early childhood years;

- Incorporating and outlining the value of a play-based curriculum;
- The inclusion of more comprehensive and valid assessment structures;
- Catering to developmental learning needs and student centred learning; and
- The inclusion of training materials for home tutors.

In addition to these factors there were external factors that impacted on the curriculum development. These included:

- Implementation of the *Curriculum Framework*;
- Recognition of national and state directions in language and literacy and early Childhood Education; and
- The rapid impact of information and communication technologies on remote and isolated education.

## **A revised structure**

The final curriculum materials reflect a negotiated outcome that draws together the feedback provided and collected throughout the initial research and the trial. The main change from the new draft curriculum materials to the final curriculum materials was the return to providing 16 sets of learning materials for each year level, allowing children of consecutive years in the one family to see that they were working on a separate level to their siblings. Feedback from parents suggested they were not comfortable with a set of work for a developmental level and requested materials be developed for each year. This change was largely structural. Feedback also indicated that for the children to develop their own independence they should have their own set

work for each year level, although the actual year would not be printed on the materials. Parent feedback indicated this would help organization in the classroom. Structure was important for parents; those more confident and experienced tutors felt strongly that the need for structure was important to support new home tutors. These experienced tutors had the choice of following the suggested timetables or constructing a routine that suited their own needs.

Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 show suggested timetables for children. As parents had requested that Day Ten remain free for catch up, revision, public holidays, or maybe for the long trip to the nearest town for shopping, these days were left free. DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) encourages Home tutors to provide children with 10 - 20 minutes of silent reading time that allows them to focus on reading each day during school time. The Home tutor Guide encouraged parents to read to children beyond school time.

Table 5.1 Sample overview of suggested Kindergarten fortnight

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
shared book, reading or viewing each day 2 activities provided - home tutors may choose one DEAR time 10 – 20 minutes directed play 45 – 60 minutes overviews and Home Tutor Guide will have suggested play activities				No K

Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
shared book, reading or viewing each day 2 activities provided - home tutors may choose one DEAR time 10 – 20 minutes directed play 45 – 60 minutes overviews and Home Tutor Guide will have suggested play activities				No K

Table 5.2 Sample of a Pre-primary fortnight

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
shared book, reading or viewing each day				
session 1				
session 1 optional extension activity				
DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes theme overviews will have suggested play activities.				
session 2 (optional)				
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
shared book, reading or viewing each day				
session 1				free day
session 1 optional extension activity				
DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes theme overviews will have suggested play activities.				
session 2 (optional)				

Table 5.3 Sample of a Year One, Two or Three fortnight

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
activity 1 shared book, reading or viewing each day				
activity 2 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 3 English focus see CF outcomes				
Mathematics set work separate				
Handwriting set work separate				
DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
Directed play or			project work	revision, catch
hands on activities such as science and			(school	up or
technology			directed)	extension
art/music/dance/health/sport/				Reflection

Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
activity 1 shared book, reading or viewing each day				home tutor  directed  free day
activity 2 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 3 English focus see CF outcomes				
Mathematics set work separate				
Handwriting set work separate				
DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
Directed play or hands on activities such as		project work		
science and technology		(school		
Art/music/dance/health/sport		directed)		

**Fostering a multi-age approach**

To assist with the multi-age issue an overview of the five years of early childhood schooling was developed that allowed writers to develop themes and common outcomes across year levels. As was shown in table 4.1, the existing materials, while covering

similar topics in consecutive years, did not allow for topics to be covered at the same times, nor for the skills and understandings developed in one year to be built upon in following years. This scope and sequence formed the basis for curriculum planning, and writers worked together to develop a variety of learning experiences that allowed children opportunities to develop skills, values and understandings at different levels of complexity. Topics that would serve as the vehicles in which common outcomes could be addressed are outlined in Table 5.4. Each topic served as the basis of a two-week set. Some concepts, skills and understandings were addressed through consecutive sets of materials.

Table 5.4 Structure of the 16 sets of work across the early childhood years

K	PP	1	2	3
Me, myself, I	People all around me	Me and my body	People at home	People at work
In the sand	In the sea	At the beach	Sea animals	Sharks, dolphins, boats
Shop till you drop	Dancing in the kitchen	Fruit and veg	Eggs	Packaging
In the garden	Don't throw it away	Seeds and growth	Energy, light, fire	Forests, deserts and lakes
Incy wincy spider	Busy Bees	Caterpillars and butterflies	Ants /insects	Bees/spiders
Water, water everywhere	Raindrops, rainbows and rivers	Water sources	Water usage	Weather
Crocodile country	Slithery and slimy things	Turtles	Frogs	Reptiles
At the post office	Sending messages	Signs and messages	The post	Mapping
Balloons	Go fly a kite	Space	Birds	Space
The highway	Moving right along	Cars	Trucks and trains	Mining machines
Colour, shape and pattern	Games and toys	Parties and celebrations	Circus	Colour, shape and pattern
Animals	At the zoo	Pets	Bears	Working with animals
The scarecrow	At the farm	Farm animals	Horses and ponies	Primary industry
Australia	A is for Australia	Oz animals flightless birds	Marsupials	Geography, history, people
Monsters	Goldilocks	Folk Tales	stories	Fairy tales
Dinosaurs	Dinosaurs	Dinosaurs	Dragons	Endangered animals and camouflage

Table 5.5 illustrates a unit outline of the first four Pre-primary sets of work, with the learning areas are the focus of planning, monitoring and assessment.

Table 5.5 Pre-primary unit outlines from sets 1 - 4

<b>PP unit outlines 1 - 4</b>		
Unit title	Unit description	Learning Area Focus
All around me	Provides opportunities for children to discover more about themselves and the people around them, encouraging children to develop positive self-attitudes. It focuses on parts of the body, differences and similarities between people, diversity in family groups. Poetry, song and rhyme about the body will develop children's phonemic awareness in preparing children for the development of reading and writing.	English Health & PE Society & Environment
In the Sea	Develops an awareness of the way people and animals live in and by the sea. A focus on sand play provides opportunities for children to develop mathematical awareness of volume and capacity, shape, pathways and direction and comparative language of mathematics. Planning an excursion and involvement in outdoor play allows children to learn about health issues related to sun safety.	The Arts – visual English Mathematics
Shopping - Dancing in the kitchen	Develops children's understandings of food, healthy food choices and their senses. Cooking allows children to develop mathematical thinking and vocabulary while introducing children to the purpose and audience of procedures. Shop play encourages children to develop their concept of money, people's roles in society, food as a resource and oral language and literacy skills.	The Arts – music English Health Mathematics Society & Environment
Growth - Don't throw it away	A focus on recycling and the creative and practical use of recycled materials. Children will develop an awareness of how resources are valuable, using resources in enterprising ways and developing attitudes that encourage them to value their environment. Children will explore materials, their properties and their uses and have opportunities to use recycled materials to generate art works and develop their skills appreciation and understanding of The Arts in society.	English Science Society & Environment

**Common timetables**

For those with more than one child in early childhood years, multi-age links were designed into the materials. Common timetables were designed to allow home tutors to minimise preparation time. The fortnightly overview highlights areas that are common across the early childhood years. A series of learning experiences were designed that could be taught either collaboratively with two or more children or independently for tutors with only one child. The experiences included:

- Physical fitness activities, titled "Smooth Moves" were designed to increase the child’s fundamental movement skills - physical and fundamental movement skills were designed to be similar across the themes;
- A brainstorming activity on the Monday of each set to help children build on the ideas and knowledge of their peers;
- DEAR time (Drop Everything And Read), a time when all children in a family look at books, although some home tutors could choose to stagger this time and work with one child while the other children are reading independently;
- Common activities in the afternoons allow home tutors to engage children in arts experiences together; and
- Schools, home tutors and children working together on combined projects during project time.

The timetable provided in the lesson notes for the fortnight indicates to parents, through shaded areas, the learning experiences that may be done collaboratively with their children. This is shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6 Timetable overview showing collaborative experiences

Week 1	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
20 min	Smooth Moves (physical activities)				
Session 1	Topic brain-storm	Includes shared books or viewing activities Integrated English, S&E, T&E, Science ... May include purposeful play			(No day 5 for K)
	Drop Everything And Read				
Session 2	Music		Arts or Technology		
	Goal setting			Project work	
Week 2					
	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
	Smooth moves (physical activities)				
Session 1	Includes shared books or viewing activities Integrated English, S&E, T&E, Science ... May include purposeful play				No K No PP
	Drop Everything and Read				
Session 2	Arts/Technology		Show Time Performance	Reflection Project work	Free day

## Integrating learning areas

Integration was seen as a means of providing a balanced curriculum while also ensuring that the valuable skills of language and literacy were given prominence. Feedback from parents and teachers had indicated that integration was successful. Some teachers

however felt the need for further guidance in monitoring the focus skills and understandings across each set of children's learning.

Table 5.7 is a planning overview of the first Pre-primary set and identifies the integrated nature of the planned learning experiences provided for children across the learning areas. English outcomes remain a focus in all sets, with other learning areas being dominant across differing sets. While the materials provide a number of opportunities, focus outcomes guide the monitoring needed by the home tutor for feedback to the child's teacher. A simple version of this overview is in the beginning of each Lesson Notes Book for reference by either the home tutor or the teacher.

Table 5.7 Planning overview of Pre-primary Set 1

Overarching Learning Outcomes					Set 1	Focus Values
1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13					All around me	1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7
The Arts focus					English outcomes 1 – 9	
Dance	Drama	Music	Media	Visual	Students are introduced to the language of books, poetry and music	
	focus			focus	Sharing and reflecting introduced	
Through a puppet show students have opportunities to develop their – Arts Ideas, Arts Skills and Processes, Arts Responses, Arts in Society					Poetry, rhyme, alliteration and verse enable children to develop their phonological awareness	
Music & Dance – Movin' and Groovin'					Setting up the communication centre will allow children to explore written communication	
Health and Physical Education					Mathematics –	
Knowledge and understandings					Measurement	
Describes the effects of physical activity on their body, huffing and puffing					Orders event within a day	
Expresses ideas, feelings and questions about their body and growth					Uses body parts to compare and match length	
Skills for physical activity					Selects objects longer then, shorter than ...	
Smooth Moves & Play					Makes personal estimates of size	
Interpersonal skills					Uses language associated with approximation, about, almost, nearly, not quite, a bit under ...	
Identifies a trust circle of family and friends					Space	
					Uses language of position to describe	
					Uses spatial language, under, over, through	
Society and Environment						
Investigation, communication and participation					Culture	
Talks about a topic, selects pictures or objects related to a topic, draws or writes main ideas, orally presents personal accounts					Understands the diversity of family groups	
Place and Space					Identifies differences and similarities of people	
Recognises built features of places					Time, continuity and change	
Identifies places important to them cubbies, home, favourite places ...					Understands events in their own lives	
Participates in looking after places, bedroom, schoolroom, garden ...					Identifies people's different needs and wants	
Technology and Enterprise					Identifies physical changes	
Technology process					Natural and Social Systems	
Investigates, devises, produces, evaluates cubbies					Identifies needs for living	
Materials					Evaluation and assessment	
Manipulating and choosing materials safely to meet their needs of making cubbies					Sharing time	cubby reflection sheet
					Show time	play observation chart
					Photographs	work samples
					Portfolios	anecdotal records
					Observations	discussions with child
					Tutor checklists	teacher discussions
Cognitive	Language	Physical	Social	Emotional	Aesthetic Creative	
Problem solving	Writes name	Participates	Shares experiences with others	Talks about real life experiences	Makes puppets	
Recognises family routines, life events	Recognises name	In Smooth Moves activities	Plays cooperatively	Talks about own family	Develops ideas for art works	
Sorts by size	Looks at books	Plays, dances			Produces a puppet show	
	Interprets pictures	Names body parts				

## **A cohesive transition across the early childhood years**

The existing materials, as previously described, provided no Kindergarten materials. Pre-primary materials are for part time attendance only and are very craft-based, the structure being very different to that of the Year One materials. This made the move between Pre-primary and Year One difficult for children and their tutors who have the role of helping the children through this transition into the compulsory years of schooling.

Feedback from parents indicated a high degree of concern for the transition and readiness of both Pre-primary children and Year Three children moving into their following years. Parents felt that Pre-primary children needed a greater background in language and literacy and the alphabetic principle. They felt that new materials could provide more direction for home tutors to begin informal teaching of letters of the alphabet and the sounds that are represented in words by those letters.

As previously reported, what I observed as a School of the Air teacher was that, without this direction from the materials, many home tutors began to teach, using strategies that they remembered from their own schooling. These strategies often caused misconceptions among children. Several tutors introduced their children to letters of the alphabet as sounds, for instance by saying, "this is the letter /a/ as in the word cat, rather than teaching their children to recognise individual letters of the alphabet by their names. This was the subject of lengthy debate at one of the home tutor seminars I attended, several parents feeling that we were confusing children by teaching them the names of the letters rather than the sounds they make, assuming of course that each

letter made one sound. Looking at names like, Amy and Andrew, Cecelia, Chelsea, Caitlin and Kate, I was able to explain to parents why it is important for children to learn the name of the letters and then learn to differentiate the sounds that are represented by letters when they appear in words.

In the final draft of new materials the literacy directions were made more eclectic and explicit in their approach to letter/sound relationships, giving children more opportunities to make choices and see different options available to them in the English language. Helen, one of the few parents to be sent final drafts of the curriculum materials found this approach quite daunting at first, but with support from her school and time to become familiar with the materials found the increased instruction to parents provided through the accompanying home tutor notes and teacher support allowed her to provide increased opportunities for her youngest Pre-primary child. Helen said that Elisa was able to access more information and support after some initial hesitation and she herself felt better equipped to provide for Elisa's fast emerging literacy development.

It was for this reason that the trial draft materials introduced home tutors to the terminology of metalinguistics and related strategies to help children interact with written and oral texts. An extract written for the *Early Childhood Education Home Tutor Guide* that shows the level of instruction provided for parents to assist them in meeting the phonological awareness needs of their children is displayed in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8 A draft section of the Home Tutor Guide

**Graphophonics:** symbol/sound relationships

**Graph:** visual symbol representing a phoneme (a single sound)

Graphemes refer to symbol/sound relationships or the 26 letters that represent the smallest units of sound.

**Phonology:** is the study of sounds in a language (phone/voice/sound)

Phonemes are the smallest sounds that make up words.

Standard Australian English has 44 sounds or phonemes. These sounds are represented by many different letter patterns. Letters do not make a sound until they are in a word.

**Graphs** are single sounds (or phonemes) made from one letter as /a/ in Amy.

**Digraphs** are single sounds (or phonemes) made from two letters like /ch/ /ee/ and /se/ in cheese.

**Trigraphs** are single sounds (or phonemes) made from three letters like /igh/ in night or /air/ in fair.

‘Amy’ has three phonemes/sounds and three graphemes. The letters in Amy are **A**, (aye) **m** (em) and **y** (why). Each represent a sound.

‘Cheese’ has three phonemes and three graphemes even though there are six letters. The graphemes are /ch/ /ee/ /se/.

This is why we need to talk about letter names when talking about a letter as each letter does not make an individual sound. Throughout the ECE materials **letter names** will be indicated in bold and the /sound or phoneme/ will be represented inside slashes.

**a** is the name of the letter.

/a/ is the sound the letter **a** is making in the word ant, /aye/ is the sound the letter **a** is making in the name Amy, /o/ is the sound the letter **a** is making in the word was. Be sure to read the related word before you say the sound to your child.

For instance if talking to Amy we would say:

- Your name starts with the letter **a** which makes an /aye/ sound in your name Amy.

Other words with the /aye/ sound represented by different letter combinations or graphemes include:

Hay, rain, cake, they, eight the graphemes being

/ay//ai/      /a – e/      /ey/      /eigh/

You may find more combinations.

It is important that children understand from the beginning that one letter may represent a range of sounds. This is why it is important not to teach that **a** makes an /a/ sound (like in cat) only.

The table below indicates how complex graphophonics can be. This is here to highlight to you as home tutors the value of modelling correct language conventions. This way children are not taught misconceptions that may confuse future learning in reading and writing.

graphs	digraphs	trigraphs	quadgraphs
<b>a</b>	<b>ay</b>	<b>a – e</b>	<b>all</b>
			<b>aigh</b>

ant	hay	cake	tall	straight
Amy	quay	mare	tall	<b>augh</b>
bath	<b>ai</b>	delicate	<b>are</b>	laugh
was	paid	<b>al</b>	square	daughter
banana	plait	walk	<b>air</b>	
water	captain	palm	fair	
	said	halt		
	<b>ar</b>	<b>aw</b>		
	car	claw		
	wart	<b>ae</b>		
	scarce	aeroplane		
	<b>au</b>	aesthetic		
	haunt	archaeologist		
	sausage			

While teachers in classrooms plan phonics instruction through whole language programs in context, a great deal of instruction would also be informal and spontaneous to meet children's needs as they arise. Children will learn quickly if they have further opportunities to focus on elements that have current meaning for them. Therefore you are encouraged to talk about letter-sound relationships that have not yet been introduced in the set work with your child as the need arises. Your teacher will be able to support you with this.

#### In summary children need to know:

- Letter names, not sounds when first asking about letters;
- Sounds they hear in words;
- That letters may represent different sounds  
A/my            /a/pple            b/a/n/a/n/a/            /a/ddress            w/a/s ...;
- That letters can work alone and in groups;
- That letters only make a sound in a word,  
for instance the letter y in /y/es, bab/y/, sk/y/;
- That one sound or phoneme can be represented by different letters  
ch /ee/ se,            m /e/,            bab /y/,            cr /ea/ m ...  
t /oo/            n /ew/            bl /ue/ ...; and
- That the same letters or graphemes may make different sounds depending on the word they are in:  
/oo/ in moon or /oo/ in book  
/ow/ in cow or /ow/ in tow.

Devising this detailed level of instruction for parents as home tutors was a complex task. A system of instruction was needed to guide parents about whether to use a sound or a letter name. Parents required access to this type of information about phonics instruction, as it was an area they felt was of greatest importance for their children's reading and writing development. Learning technologies were employed to assist both home tutor and children in this area. It was agreed that a training video for home tutors could provide examples phonics of instruction. This is discussed further below. Audiotapes were developed to accompany the lesson notes for Years 1-3 to assist home tutors in narrating the written instructions.

To further enhance the transition from Pre-primary to Year One and increase children's opportunities for development in reading and writing, a series of activities were designed entitled 'Sounds like fun' which focus on children's listening skills and allow home tutors to develop strategies for a fun and functional introduction to metalinguistic awareness. The following extract is taken from lesson notes I developed to introduce these activities.

The 'Sounds like fun' program allows your child to build up their phonological awareness. Phonological awareness, or the ability to hear and manipulate the smallest sounds in spoken language (phonemes) allows children to take the next step into literacy development, phonics, linking letters and sounds. Before children can identify letters and sounds they need to be aware of the sounds in spoken English and be able to manipulate them. 'Sounds like fun' introduces a series of short activities that throughout the year build up your child's phonemic awareness, preparing them for a literate future.

Read the phonological awareness section of the Getting Started in ECE: Home Tutor Guide for more information.

The first part of the program is to introduce your child to listening skills, to be an active listener and to be aware of the listening process.

(Extract from Draft Home Tutor Guide)

The final curriculum materials allows the children moving into Year One to be familiar with many language and sound games, onset-rime and letter names through immersion in alphabet songs and rhymes and repetitive, alliterative and rhyming texts. This approach to phonological awareness and the similarity of structure of the materials from year to year were seen as highly important factors for a smooth transition.

Parents of the Year Three children wanted to ensure that their children had opportunities to develop independence as their reading and writing developed. This required Years One and Two children to repeat simple instructions that were read aloud by the home tutors from the activity pages to be completed by the children. By the end of Year Two it was anticipated that the children would begin to read the lesson requirements unaided as they developed skills and confidence in literacy. By Year Three the more skilled and confident children would be moving into more structured materials that provided them with the means to follow the instructions independently.

This developing independence of older children was an important factor for those home tutors with younger children in the early childhood years as it allowed them more time to focus on the younger children.

## **Incorporating a play based curriculum**

Play was the area that had the broadest range of feedback. Hall and Robinson (2000, pp. 109-140) discuss how many parents may feel uncomfortable with play being part of the school day. This was reflected in the feedback and issues that came from some parents as home tutors in the development and trial of new materials. Some parent comments regarding play were identified in Table 4.4. While a number of parents indicated informally that they were wary of play as a component of the school day, many did not comment at length on play. Some thought the play section of the questionnaire related only to children in the Kindergarten and Pre-primary Years. Only one parent spoke strongly for the value of play and she felt that play was already an important factor in her children's lives and it did not need to take up valuable school time. The teachers, many of whom were not qualified early childhood educators, spoke little of play. These teachers focused on other issues in curriculum development. It was the curriculum writers, informed by the research literature, who felt the need to support the value and importance of play in the early childhood curriculum.

The feedback on play that has been documented allowed me to see that the emphasis placed on play in the draft curriculum materials used in the trial was not sufficient to help home tutors develop their understandings of the value of a play-based curriculum for early childhood learners. The following extract from the *Getting Started in ECE*:

*Home Tutor Guide* shows the introduction to play placed in the final draft curriculum materials introduced in 2001.

The ECE program immerses you and your child in play. Play may be the most educational experience your child will ever participate in. The learning children gained from play will go with them into adult life. The six Learning through Play books have been developed to assist you in establishing rich play environments for your child.

Young children learn most effectively through play, experimentation and interaction with other children and adults in situations that allow them to explore, manipulate objects, materials, technologies and physical movement.

Through play children develop:

- Social skills;
- Thinking abilities (cognitive development);
- Physical abilities;
- Emotionally;
- Linguistically (language development); and
- Their aesthetic and creative potential.

Establishing a rich environment for play enables children to explore, experiment, communicate, discover, plan, organise, collaborate, improvise, innovate, create, question, solve problems, use mathematical ideas and technologies. This is essential for young children. Play naturally integrates all learning areas.

Remember the activities provided for K and P children are suggested, if your child is deeply involved in play of their own making then foster this play.

(School of Isolated and Distance Education, 2001)

The new draft curriculum materials had provided only a two-line reminder each day in the lesson notes for parents to involve their children in play. Those parents who did provide further feedback in this area felt that any experience provided for the child should be outlined as a full lesson in the lesson notes in order for home tutors/parents to be able to carry out the experience or activity with their child. This also included other daily experiences such as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and 'Smooth Moves'. The

change in emphasis from a two-line reminder about play to a more formal instruction on a suggested play experience that could be provided for their child/ren is shown in Figure 5.1.

# Play

In play this fortnight, focus on setting up a play environment related to your home. A home corner, dress up box or cubby house. See the *Learning through Play: Indoors* for further guidance in setting up these play environments.

If you have another child in Pre Primary or a preschooler encourage your children to play together.

Each day allow your child up to an hour to explore and investigate. If you have more than one child in school you may use this time to get the others started.



Read the *Getting started in ECE* guide, **Play** chapter for more information.

Figure 5.1 Sample of a play based lesson in the Pre-primary Set One

As well as a general introduction to play in the *Home Tutor Guide*, six simple booklets were developed by the two writers that described to home tutors how to set up environments for children's play. Many of these suggested environments built on

everyday experiences that could be relevant to children in many different cultural and social settings. Everyday items are suggested and ideas for interventions and participation are also given. Children are encouraged to participate in the development of their play environments and to initiate its direction. The booklets focus on six different play environments or domains, these being; indoors, outdoors, paint, manipulative, communication centres, and construction. Extracts from the *Learning Through Play: Indoors* and *Learning Through Play: The Communication Centre* booklets relating to home corner and communication are included.

### **Home corners**

A home corner can provide opportunities for a variety of learning. By providing different materials the home corner can become a shop, a kitchen or laundry, a hospital and more. Children will be influenced in what they want to create by experiences in their lives. A trip to the hospital, a book about a baker, a video on a fire station ...

As the children play inside they will discover:

- that everyday objects have different uses;
- that adults support and value play; and
- that play doesn't require costly toys.

If you have cultural beliefs that impact on the use of some everyday items, use cardboard boxes or other suitable items.

(Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, 2001, p, 1.)

### **The Communication Centre**

A communication centre will provide children with opportunities to develop linguistic skills and awareness. Effective communication is a key to engaging with the world around us. Communication centres provide children opportunities to develop the early language and literacy skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing that contribute to children's communication and social skills.

It is important that children are allowed the freedom to express and develop language skills. It is not just the communication centre that provides these opportunities. Language and literacy experiences are naturally embedded and integrated in all aspects of play, role play, socialising, creating ...

(Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, 2001, p, 1.)

## **Monitoring and catering for individual needs**

To assist teachers and home tutors to cater better for the needs of individual children, flexibility was developed into the new draft curriculum materials and maintained in the final curriculum materials through a balance of both closed and open-ended tasks. Many of the tasks had either extensions or 'if' boxes that allowed home tutors to extend and further challenge the child's understandings or skills or provide the home tutor with further instruction in explaining, modelling or scaffolding the skills and understandings for children. Some learning experiences were indicated as 'optional' allowing home tutors and teachers with students 'at educational risk' to know which activities might be left out in order to allow more time for children's specific needs (usually in literacy development). The tasks marked 'optional' were those that did not break a sequence of learning experiences leading towards the achievement of a specific set of skills or understandings related to an outcome. A sample of this was shown in figures 4.6 and 4.8.

Open-ended learning experiences allow the children to consolidate their learning and reveal the depth of their skills, values and understandings. Play also provides this opportunity as when the children involve themselves in play, the home tutor has an opportunity to monitor a child's use and understandings of language and literacy. This notion is also emphasised by Hall and Robinson (2000, p. 109-140) who describe play as a vehicle that enables adults to observe and document the extent of a child's understandings, an analysis that may not be possible in formal, classroom learning activities.

## Training for home tutors

For home tutors the final draft set materials continue the aim of providing a clear outline of what is expected day by day, lesson by lesson. At a cursory glance the structure and 'look' of activities in the final draft materials appear similar to those of existing materials. This structure was chosen to ensure that home tutors feel some familiarity in using the new materials in 2001. However, greater flexibility is provided in the final draft materials that allow the home tutor and the individual needs of the child to influence and direct the direction of the learning. Rapid changes in many areas, particularly the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* brought about the need, through feedback, of greater opportunities for home tutors to understand the purpose of the new curriculum. This led to the development, for the first time in Western Australia of a series of home tutor training videos that focus on current issues raised by the home tutors.

The videos developed to support new curriculum materials focused on the following four areas of identified need:

1. English language and literacy development in early childhood education;
2. Learning technologies and Technology and Enterprise, clarifying the terms, the differences and their roles in learning;
3. An outcomes focused approach to learning and teaching in early childhood education; and
4. Learning through play, focusing on the value of play and learning environments for young children's development.

The six booklets entitled *Learning Through Play* were developed to accompany this video. Highly positive feedback has been received from the distance education schools who feel that the videos and booklets are a valuable resource for new teachers in distance education schools as well as for parents/home tutors.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have explained how the trial of the new draft curriculum materials resulted in the further development of an early childhood distance education curriculum blueprint, agreed upon by all stakeholders. The trial of new draft curriculum materials had allowed, for the first time in the development of distance education curriculum materials in Western Australia, the teachers, parents/tutors and students involved to provide extensive feedback and to contribute to the final curriculum developed for use from 2001. Some of the changes in direction included clearer directions and timelines for the use of multi-age collaborative learning experiences, explicit inclusion of generic, daily learning experiences such as play, silent reading and fitness activities. A seamless transition through the five early childhood years was considered important for writers planning from the end of one year to the beginning of the next, ensuring that, as children progressed, they had greater opportunities to develop independence.

As the writers were influenced by current literature in language and literacy development and incorporated increased opportunities for phonological awareness, reflective practice, technologies, play based learning and student centred learning, the issue again was raised of increased opportunities for parents/home tutors to have access to training. Training booklets and videos were prepared to allow teachers and tutors to

further understand the purpose for various learning experiences and help to equip those unfamiliar with changing pedagogies to understand the learning experiences.

The issues important to the development of language and literacy in early childhood distance education in Western Australia were further discussed by those involved and incorporated into the development of final curriculum materials in use from early 2001.

## CHAPTER 6

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

#### **Factors important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum**

This study set out to answer the research question: What factors appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia? In this chapter I draw together the many factors that emerged as being important during the course of the study and this contributes to the theory and final draft materials. These factors were identified as important from the literature review, the analysis of existing distance education materials, the development and trial of new draft materials and the development of final draft curriculum materials. An overview of the theory can be seen in table 6.1. I then give some suggestions for further research and outline some implications for educational practice.

Table 6.1 Factors that appear to be important in the language and literacy curriculum development of early childhood distance education

Factor	Example
External	Western Australian <i>Curriculum Framework and Outcomes and Standards Framework</i>
	National Literacy and Numeracy Plan
	Information and Communication Technologies
Nature of Distance Education	Catering to cultural and geographic diversity
	The needs of Home Tutors
Literature Review	Outcomes focused education
	Multi-age grouping
	Language and literacy focus
	Play based curriculum
	Cultural and Social practices
	Prior learning
	Immersion
Analysis of Distance Education materials	Phonological awareness
	Provision of environmental texts and resources
	Time factors
	Multi-age needs
	Catering to diversity
	Comprehensive assessment
	Clear instructions
	Changing technologies
	ECE age changes
	Greater phonological awareness
Development and Trial of draft materials	Seamless curriculum over the ECE years
	Enhancing parent understandings
	Familiar structures throughout the years
	Greater independence towards Year Three
	Workload flexibility and diversity
	Examples of students' learning
	Utilisation of technologies
Final draft materials	Development of training videos for Tutors
	Flexibility for modification
	Comprehensive and explicit monitoring
	Overviews of learning opportunities

## **External factors**

Various external factors impacted on the development of new materials the most important of these were state curriculum documents, federal government initiatives, the impact of information and communication technologies, the need to acknowledge diversity and the needs of home tutors:

### **State curriculum documents**

- The shift to an outcomes-focused approach to education mandated for all Western Australian schools from K-12 appeared to be the most important factor. The *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year Twelve Education in Western Australia* came about as a result of the Temby report (1995) which recommended the provision of a common framework of outcomes describing what all students should know, understand, value and be able to do, as a result of the programs they undertake in schools in Western Australia.

### **Federal government initiatives**

- It was important to recognise the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan described in the monograph *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (DEETYA 1998). It states "every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level." It also addresses standards for the early years: "that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years." Accordingly distance education materials had to specifically address the literacy needs of students in the early years of school.

The National Literacy and Numeracy Plan identifies factors important in the language and literacy of all early childhood learners and the central importance of literacy in these years. These include:

- The need for early intervention for students at educational risk; and
- The importance of home literacy practices and parent involvement.

### **Information and communication technologies**

- Information and communication technologies have impacted on the available methods of delivery for curriculum in distance education.
- The Schools of Isolated and Distance Education supported the use of learning technologies. However the infrastructure and power access across the diversity of home and learning environments was often unable to support these technologies. Therefore materials had to be provided that promoted learning technologies, but did not disadvantage those students without access.

### **Acknowledgement of diversity**

- An understanding of the linguistic, social, geographic and cultural backgrounds and influences of the distance education client group created the need to provide learning experiences that had both structure and the ability to cater for students at various levels of ability.

### **The needs of home tutors**

- Home tutors were responsible for the delivery of education to their children. Therefore their concerns, claims and issues relating to the everyday implementation

of the curriculum supplied by the distance education schools influenced aspects of the materials' structure and delivery.

### **Factors identified in the literature review**

The literature review highlighted some factors that appeared to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia. From the analysis of the mandated *Curriculum Framework* I identified the following factors as being important:

- The opportunities for children to have learning experiences that allow them to demonstrate progress in the 79 outcomes outlined in the *Curriculum Framework* and the values that are explicit within each of these outcomes;
- The need to connect with and challenge children's existing knowledge and skills, to promote reflection, purposeful learning experiences and respect differences between learners;
- The need to provide comprehensive and valid assessment for students, home tutors and teachers.
- From my analysis of the literature review I concluded that factors important to curriculum development also come about through an understanding of the nature of distance education, the materials development process, the client group and the multiple roles taken on by home tutors.

Other factors important to the language and literacy development of early childhood learners I identified in the literature review include:

- There appear to be collaborative advantages of multi-age grouping (EDWA, 2000);
- The early childhood years are crucial to a child's language and literacy development (DETYA, 2000; International Reading Association, 1998);
- Play based activities may facilitate language and literacy development (Hall & Robinson, 2000; Flear, 1996; Syvensky, 1999; Bruce, 1996; Wardle, 1998);
- Children's language and literacy development is shaped by cultural and social practices (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000);
- Literacy development begins prior to formal schooling (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000; DETYA, 2000; International Reading Association , 1998; Sulzby & Teale 1998; Teale & Yokota 2000);
- Children learn through immersion in literate experiences (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000; Adams, 1990; International Reading Association , 1998);
- Learning programs should try to take into account children's experiences and backgrounds and challenge inequality (DETYA, 2000; Vygotsky 1978; Tayler, 2000);
- Children's understandings of literacy differ (Tayler, 2000; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000);
- Learning environments may influence literacy development (Tayler, 2000; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000);
- Phonological awareness is an important component of language and literacy programs for young children (Ericson & Juliebo, 1998; Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000);

- Phonological awareness can be facilitated in a variety of ways (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000; Ericson & Juliebo, 1998).

These factors are central to language and literacy development in the early childhood years. I concluded that curriculum writers needed to find ways of addressing these important factors in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials in Western Australia. This conclusion was validated through further analysis of the existing distance education materials and discussions with stakeholders in early childhood distance education.

### **Factors recognised through the analysis of existing distance education materials**

Analysing existing materials from the multiple viewpoints of curriculum writers, administrators, teachers, parents and home tutors allowed for the early recognition of some of the factors important to curriculum development. These included:

- The provision of materials that could enhance the learning environment, such as environmental print, texts and resources;
- The time needed for parents/home tutors to provide supervision for their children;
- The need to provide multi-age opportunities for children to develop collaboratively and build on the knowledge of their peers, also helping minimise workloads for parents/tutors with several children;
- More opportunities to cater for difference among learners;
- More comprehensive assessment opportunities;
- Clear and concise instructions for home tutors and students;
- Keeping pace with changing technologies;
- Providing a balance of learning area opportunities;

- Integrating language and literacy across the curriculum;
- Providing for changes in state schooling ages, particularly in regard to the Kindergarten and Pre-primary Years;
- Providing greater opportunities for phonological awareness in the early childhood years;
- Providing a curriculum over the five early childhood years (K-3) that allows children to build on skills and understandings from previous years; and
- Providing a seamless curriculum over the five years (K-3) of learning that does not change radically in structure from one year to the next.

#### **Factors identified through the development and trial of new draft curriculum materials**

The development of new draft curriculum materials continued to identify new factors important to the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials. Parents and teachers involved in the trial had opportunities to further modify the materials. These factors included:

- Enhancement of the skills of teachers and parents involved in early childhood distance education;
- Familiar structure in the materials throughout the early childhood years;
- Developmental learning opportunities;
- Opportunities for children to work more independently as they moved from year to year;
- A workload that is not too high for students and home tutors;

- Extension activities that challenge children, rather than provide more work of the same level;
- Work samples and photographs to illustrate activities and learning intentions;
- Opportunities for learning technologies, while providing alternatives for those families without access to such technologies;
- Opportunities for teachers and/or home tutors to build on the needs and interests of the students, through student centred project work;
- Flexibility for a tenth day free from set work for teacher or home tutor input or direction;
- Greater recognition of the value of play built into the materials;
- Balance of fiction and non-fiction texts; and
- The need to provide increased understandings to parents and home tutors in the development of unfamiliar issues such as language and literacy development in the early childhood years, information and communication technologies, learning through play and an outcomes focused education.

### **Factors arising from the development of the final draft curriculum materials**

The development and production of the final draft curriculum materials allowed for further important factors to be identified. These included:

- Clear and concise explanations to Home Tutors through a Home Tutor Guide, videos and booklets to help them supervise children in new directions;
- An even greater emphasis on phonological awareness;

- The need for materials to cater for the diversity of client groups including travellers, overseas families and remote and rural Western Australians;
- The need for common timetables across the year levels that allow for collaborative learning experiences;
- Comprehensive and explicit monitoring and assessment tools for home tutors and teachers;
- Overviews of the learning experiences for teachers who need to modify and condense the 'set work' for various reasons, such as travellers and students with special needs.

Together the factors identified above all appear to be important in the development of early childhood distance education curriculum materials for language and literacy in Western Australia.

## **Suggestions for future research**

The development of a grounded theory has raised many questions beyond the scope of this research project. There is a need for more research to examine:

- The impact of socio-cultural advantage or disadvantage on early childhood distance education learners;
- The effectiveness of English language and literacy development of ESL or ESD homeland Aboriginal students enrolled in distance education who have no English speakers in their communities;
- The validity and importance of play in distance education settings;
- Similarities and differences in early literacy acquisition in mainstream and distance education settings;

- The implications of the increasing use and application of information and communication technologies on distance education, with specific reference to early childhood;
- The impact of home tutor understandings and prior experiences on early language and literacy development;
- The evaluation of English language and literacy development of early childhood learners living in non-English speaking countries, particularly in cultures that use non-alphabetic scripts;
- The effectiveness of new curriculum resources to allow students opportunities to achieve the outcomes of the Curriculum Framework at increasing levels of complexity;
- Continued research into the effectiveness of the new materials being put into use in 2001 for early childhood distance education learners.

## **The implications for educational practice**

Educational practice needs to continue to take into account the changing face of education, society and technologies. In distance education the socio-cultural, geographic and linguistic diversity needs to be taken into account by future curriculum developers, teachers and schools alike. The views of families, home tutors and those involved in distance education can continue to provide valuable insights into the factors important to the educational needs of students involved in language and literacy distance education.

The issues important to the development of language and literacy in early childhood distance education in Western Australia do not stop with this study. This is a starting point for the development of distance education materials. The value of this research that led to an emergent curriculum design is in how the process and methodology actively sought to reflect, value and build on the experiences and understandings of many people.

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## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Letter of consent**

Dear ... ,

I am currently undertaking a Masters research degree through Edith Cowan University, in the area of early childhood distance education. As a teacher and writer of distance education materials I have recognised that very little if any research exists in this field at this phase of development. I hope to write a thesis that provides valuable information for writers, teachers, parents and future researchers into the issues and factors influencing the education of early childhood children in distance education.

When trialing draft materials data was collected that would assist me in this research. I seek your consent to use this data to assist me in writing up my research project. In my research individual schools, teachers, parents or children will not be identified. In gathering further data from teachers or parents, individual consent will be sought and no data will be collected or used without continued informed consent.

A summary of the data will be available to the school upon request. Please contact Lis Turner, [REDACTED] if you have any further questions you would like to ask before signing the statement of consent.

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researcher

## **Appendix B: Letter of consent to parents/teachers**

Dear parent/teacher

I am currently undertaking a Masters research degree through Edith Cowan University, in the area of early childhood distance education. As a teacher and writer of distance education materials I have recognised that very little if any research exists in this field at this phase of development. I hope to write a thesis that provides valuable information for writers, teachers, parents and future researchers into the issues and factors influencing the education of early childhood children in distance education.

I intend that my research will be based on the issues, claims and concerns of the teachers, parents and home tutors responsible for the education of their children. Through contact with those involved I hope to be able to develop a report that provides a clearer picture for current and future writers.

The contact will be in the form of a phone call (or face to face conversations if possible) that will take approximately 30 minutes. During this time I would invite you to discuss issues related to the teaching of your early childhood learners through distance education. My aim would be to determine the issues, concerns or positive aspects of materials in place and information relating to new early childhood curriculum materials to be developed.

All participants will remain anonymous throughout the research.

If you are interested in providing feedback regarding the early childhood materials, your child's needs and your own needs as a home tutor, please contact me on [REDACTED] or [eturner@student.ecu.edu.au](mailto:eturner@student.ecu.edu.au) or by post to Lis Turner, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Any information collected will remain confidential and no individual schools, teachers or home tutors will be identified in the study.

Please contact me as above if you have any further questions you would like to ask before signing the statement of consent.

---

researcher

Lis Turner

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## **Appendix C: Copy of consent forms**

### **Informed consent**

#### **Agreement**

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I have read the foregoing letter that explains the research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study that is exploring the factors influencing early childhood students in distance education settings, knowing that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix D: Final feedback questionnaire

## General information

Number and ages of children participating in ECE trial, tick twice if you have two children the same age

4 yrs ☐      5 yrs ☐      6 yrs ☐      7yrs ☐      8 yrs ☐

Tick the box to describe your situation

Other students at SIDE schools      yes ☐      no ☐  
Access to a computer?      yes ☐      no ☐  
Type of computer      IBM platform ☐      Apple Mac ☐  
Power access      24 hour ☐      limited ☐  
Modem?      yes ☐      no ☐  
Phone lines support a modem?      yes ☐      no ☐  
Access to a video player?      yes ☐      no ☐  
Access to an audio player?      yes ☐      no ☐

Please tick the box which best describes your circumstances

SOTA ☐      Traveller ☐      Overseas ☐  
other ☐ please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## Timing

The time icon has been removed on purpose because it is recognised that the time taken to complete individual activities will vary for different children. The suggested timetables and overviews will guide you on how to structure your school day. However, we are very keen to see if we are putting too much or too little into your child’s school day. We have therefore asked you to assist us by timing both individual activities and several whole days.

Please time how long it took you to complete these days	hours and minutes
Set 9 Day 9	
Set 10 Day 18	
Set 11 Day 7	
Set 12 Day 13	
Please time how long it took you to complete these activities	
Set 9 Day 10 <i>Pinchem, Pullem Possum Pie</i> shared book	
Set 10 Day 11 My favourite Australian animal	
Set 11 Day 5 My book of colours green day	
Set 12 Day 14 Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star	

4 strongly disagree

### Other comments on time

4 strongly disagree

Other comments:

## Spelling Journal

The Spelling journal (level 2 only) was:	1	2	3	4
• well structured and easy to follow				
• valuable in helping my child with his/her spelling				
• effective in providing a variety of activities				
• suitable for my child's level of spelling				

Other comments:

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Tick the boxes to rate all answers according to these criteria

1 strongly agree

2 agree

3 disagree

4 strongly disagree

During Directed Play time my child was involved in:	1	2	3	4
• a variety of play activities				
• recording learning logs (with support)				
• play for approximately 30 minutes per day				
Goal setting, reflection and self evaluation provided:				
• opportunities to reflect on my child's learning	1	2	3	4
• opportunities to see my child's point of view				
• my child with opportunities to experience success				
• my child with opportunities to reflect on his/her learning				
• my child with opportunity to have ownership of learning				
The overview of outcomes in each set provided:				
• an effective outline of the expected outcomes				
• a useful way of recording my child's progress				
The resource packs provided:	1	2	3	4
• a wide range of reading materials for children 4 – 8 years of age				
• reading materials suitable for my child/ren				
• a balance of informational and make believe (narrative) texts				
• motivation for the theme				
DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time enabled my child to:	1	2	3	4
• participate in reading for 15 minutes each day				
• read independently each day (with encouragement)				
• enjoy looking at books independently				
• access a variety of books (home, library, kit)				
• talk about books he/she chose				

Other comments:

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## Audio visual

Tick the boxes to rate all answers according to these criteria

1 strongly agree

2 agree 3 disagree

4 strongly disagree

Watching SIDE Show videos enabled my child to:	1	2	3	4
• see some activities being modelled				
• be motivated in a new way				
• develop a greater understanding of sports related skills				
• develop a greater appreciation of arts processes				
• develop an enjoyment and appreciation of music and dance				
• enjoy books in a different manner (story time)				
• be stimulated to complete his/her set work				
• be exposed to learning through a different medium				
The inclusion of videos in general:				
• provided a stimulus for my child/ren (Don Spencer)				
The audios provided my child with:				
• alternatives for listening to texts being read				
• opportunities to develop their listening skills				
• a variety of songs to enjoy				

Other comments:

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## General

Tick the boxes to rate all answers according to these criteria

1 strongly agree

2 agree 3 disagree

4 strongly disagree

### Families with more than one child in ECE only

The collaborative structure of the materials allowed:	1	2	3	4
• my children to learn effectively together				
• my children to work at their own level				
• my planning time to be reduced				
• teaching time to be more manageable				

Other comments:

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All participants please comment on the questions below.  
Which aspects of these materials do you think are better than your current materials?

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How does the design of these materials better support your child’s learning? Are there any other ways the materials can support your child’s learning?

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How does the design of these materials better support you as a home tutor? Are there any other ways the materials can support you as a home tutor?

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Any further comments related to the materials and the trial.

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Please return this feedback to your child’s teacher.  
If you are willing to be contacted regarding the trial please provide your name and number below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Revised Curriculum Blueprint

### Project Blueprint

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**Final Draft :** 1st December 1998

**Course title:** ECE Integrated Project

#### The team

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Writers **(4FTE)**

Project managers:

Curriculum Validators:

Editors:

Illustrators

#### Reference group

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During Term 1 1999 a Reference Group will be established for this project. This group will include two teachers and two home tutors, (one of each from the same school) and one principal. It is essential that, once or twice per term, a family or families will be asked to trial a complete set with a student to provide feedback on issues such as:

- The length of a day and set.
- The break-up of the set (learning areas covered)
- Student ability levels.
- The readability or flow of the lesson notes.

During 1999 one to two sets for each year level will be trialled as above. This will provide the school communities with opportunities to see the materials as they progress and liaise directly with the writers in terms of minor issues or directions. As a result minor (10%) changes may take place.

Teleconferences will be organised with the Reference Group once per term to discuss these issues.

## The course:

The ECE project was initiated through the need to:

- develop Kindy (K), to come in line with EDWA requirements to offer four half days a week to K by the year 1999. (K and PP remain non compulsory year)  
No K materials currently exist for SIDE Students.
- produce a full time Pre Primary Program to fall in line with EDWA requirements.  
No full time PP materials currently exist for SIDE Students
- write new materials for year 1
- write new materials for year 2
- write new WA materials for Year 3  
Current year three materials are from QLD.

All materials developed will be in line with the *Curriculum Framework* and the *Outcomes and Standards Framework*, ensuring students have the opportunities to achieve all of the learning outcomes within the *Curriculum Framework*. Looking at the five years in their entirety allows writers to develop a comprehensive scope and sequence within the early childhood domains.

In March 1998 the CDC, in collaboration with the client group, presented an initial blueprint which was signed by all parties involved. Materials were written and extensively trialled. In October 1998 a meeting with representatives from the six schools involved met to discuss the materials, the structure of the project to date and to make recommendations. Based on the recommendations and outcomes of this meeting the following blueprint for the ECE project has been established. The project remains due for completion in the year 2000 and ready for use in 2001.

Summary of group feedback from ECE trial group meeting 21st October

Retain	Include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Healthy Heart cards</li><li>▪ themes</li><li>▪ Goal setting, reflection ...</li><li>▪ audio visual materials</li><li>▪ spelling journal</li><li>▪ collaborative aspects</li><li>▪ DEAR</li><li>▪ Play</li><li>▪ art (but reduced in quantity)</li><li>▪ integrated approach</li><li>▪ cooking</li><li>▪ dialogue in italics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ nine day fortnight</li><li>▪ models of goal setting and students work</li><li>▪ free choice writing activities</li><li>▪ optional activities/choices</li><li>▪ descriptive time frames</li><li>▪ multi media options</li><li>▪ separate maths and handwriting</li><li>▪ extension activities</li><li>▪ project packs / generic set</li><li>▪ more explicit, clearer instructions</li><li>▪ more basics: phonics, language conventions ...</li></ul>

Materials will be written for Kindergarten, Pre Primary, years 1, 2 & 3. To allow for greater flexibility the materials will not have grade levels on the covers. The ECE course will be written to meet the needs of the **Major Learning Outcomes** and the

**Learning Area Outcomes** of the **Curriculum Framework** and is aimed at students in Foundation, Level 1 and Level 2 of EDWA's **Student Outcomes Statements**. The open ended design of activities will enable children to demonstrate achievement at level 3 outcomes. The desired outcomes for each activity will be indicated for teachers.

## **Professional Development**

Professional Development (PD) for the teacher and Home Tutor is an integrated component of the ECE course. Four PD videos will be developed. The provision of professional development for the schools by the writers is not part of this project.

All of the videos will demonstrate children from 3 – 8 years of age involved in learning. The videos will show how the materials work in a distance education environment. In addition they will demonstrate to Home Tutors how children in other settings are working towards similar outcomes in a number of educational settings.

### **1. ECE: Learning Through Play**

- early childhood domains
- observing play to evaluate outcomes
- the role of the Home Tutor in play
- the importance and key features of the learning environment

This video will accompany all K and PP general dispatch and will be available to all parents through the schools. It is also recommended for PD during seminars.

### **2. ECE: Outcomes focused approach to learning and teaching in ECE**

- achieving the learning area outcomes through integration
- looking at the eight learning areas and the overarching statements
- looking at the core shared values
- working collaboratively with schools and teachers
- working collaboratively within a family setting

### **3. ECE : Teaching, learning and assessment**

Would look at the complete materials, how they can be used, how they can address individual needs. Look at each of the following aspects of the materials.

- portfolio assessment
- teaching to open ended tasks
- goal setting, self evaluation and reflection
- developmental learning
- fostering the needs of Talented and Gifted students
- students at educational risk, and Individual Education Planning

### **4. ECE : Technology and Enterprise and learning technologies in ECE**

- looking at the outcomes of Technology and Enterprise through children's projects from 3 – 8 years of age within the materials
- Information and communications technologies as a tool to enhance learning looking at the range of technologies available to distance education settings now and in the future

While a variety of different modes of delivery for PD are being explored all PD will be available in both video and print form. New writers will have one field visit each in 1999.

## **What it looks like – How it works**

As with current materials the course will provide students with 16 sets per year. Materials will be developed to allow students to work towards a common theme across the first five years of school. Each year different concepts within an overall theme will be focused on. (See theme overview.) Current texts still in print will be reused and numbers ascertained during the 1998 audit will be supplemented within the project budget parameters. New texts purchased will ensure a suitable balance of reading materials for each level in both informational and fiction texts.

### **All materials**

All materials will be integrated across English, Science, Society and Environment, Health and Physical Education, Technology and Enterprise and the Arts. Separate Mathematics and Handwriting materials will be supplied for years 1, 2, & 3. LOTE (mandatory from year 3 from 2004) remains the responsibility of individual schools.

### **Kindy**

As K is an optional year home tutors may choose how many activities are suitable for their child. Between 8 – 16 activity cards will be provided for each theme. In addition a series of play based books will help guide home tutors through play and the early childhood learning domains (cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, creative and aesthetic). Theme overviews will provide a suggested timetable but this is only a guide. Home tutors will be encouraged to develop a timetable that suits their situation.

Resource materials will serve as a stimulus for activities and allow students to become familiar with some of the more formal aspects of schooling, such as shared reading, pre reading skills, etc. It is recommended schools provide additional library resources in the form of texts, audios and videos to K students to supplement students exposure to texts in all forms. It is also recommended that schools provide non-consumable ECE resources for K students. (Many schools already have this in place.)

### **Sample overview of K fortnight**

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
shared book, reading or viewing each day				No K
2 activities provided home tutors may choose one				
looking at books 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes				
Theme overviews and HTG will have suggested play activities.				

Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
shared book, reading or viewing each day				No K
2 activities provided home tutors may choose one				
looking at books 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes				
Theme overviews and HTG will have suggested play activities.				

Any day may be chosen as the non-school day.

## Pre-primary

Pre-primary also remains an optional year and tutors will have the choice as to how many activities are suitable for their child. Guidelines and timetables will provide recommendations.

Pre-Primary materials will provide for nine days per fortnight of full time teaching. A balance of directed activities and play based activities will be provided. Optional activities will be included to provide opportunities at various levels. Materials in the second semester will provide greater extension opportunities for students developing and demonstrating level 1 outcomes. Activities will provide opportunities for children to demonstrate and work towards all learning areas.

### Sample of a PP fortnight

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
shared book, reading or viewing each day				
session 1				
session 1 optional extension activity				
looking at books 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes				
Theme overviews will have suggested play activities.				
session 2				
may be one large activity like art or two smaller activities (optional)				

Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
shared book, reading or viewing each day				<b>Catch up day (school directed)</b>
session 1				
session 1 optional extension activity				
looking at books 10 –20 minutes				
directed or purposeful play 45 – 60 minutes				
Theme overviews will have suggested play activities.				
session 2				
may be one large activity like art or two smaller activities				

**Year 1**

Phonics and language conventions will be built into the materials in a meaningful context. New (consumable) kit books will be written ensuring that sight words, graphophonics and word study skills enable students to build and develop their reading and writing skills and knowledge. As consumable kit books increase in number students will build up their own library that allows them to revise and consolidate word study and graphophonic skills. While some mathematics will be naturally integrated, mathematics and handwriting will remain separate.

**Year 2**

The Year 2 materials will build from the year 1 materials. In addition students will be introduced to spelling journals, some aspects of which will have been introduced in term four of year 1. In year 2 students would revisit and consolidate the graphemes and phonemes from year 1 and be introduced to new and more complex graphemes, phonemes and language conventions. While some mathematics will be naturally integrated, mathematics and handwriting will remain separate.

**Year 3**

Year three will continue to build from year 2 and at the end of year three the materials will make a gradual and unnoticeable transition from year 3 to year 4. While some mathematics will be naturally integrated, mathematics and handwriting will remain separate.

### Sample of a year 1, 2 or 3 fortnight

Activity	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
activity 1	activity 1 shared book, reading or viewing each day				
activity 2	activity 2 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 3	activity 3 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 4*	Mathematics set work separate				
activity 5	Handwriting set work separate				
activity 6	DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
activity 7	Directed play or hands on activities such as science and technology			project work (school directed)	revision, catch up or extension
activity 8	art/music/dance/health/sport/			project work (school directed)	Reflection (school directed)

Activity	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
activity 1	activity 1 shared book, reading or viewing each day				<b>catch up revision (school directed)</b>
activity 2	activity 2 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 3	activity 3 English focus see CF outcomes				
activity 4*	Mathematics set work separate				
activity 5	Handwriting set work separate				
activity 6	DEAR time 10 –20 minutes				
activity 7	Directed play or hands on activities such as science and technology			project work (school directed)	
activity 8	art/music/dance/health/sport			project work (school directed)	

\* Mathematics may have more than one activity.

**Inclusivity**

Through ongoing assessment and monitoring of student outcomes by the teacher, home tutor and student, student's abilities will be monitored and teachers must make changes or recommendations to ensure the teaching is outcomes focussed. Teachers will need to be aware of National Benchmarking and the state Literacy Net indicators to ensure that students at educational risk are identified and targeted. Other learning areas have similar indicators, such as the Fundamental Movement Skills assessment strategy to identify students at risk in movement.

The open ended nature of the materials will allow teachers and Home Tutors to cater to students at their own level. Prevention strategies will allow tutors to extend students understandings of an activity. These strategies will be included in the Home Tutor Guides and demonstrated in the professional development videos. Structured extension and remediation strategies will also be included. Activities based on these strategies will be the responsibility of the school, according to individual student needs.

**Thematic/collaborative**

Five years of learning will be written across 16 themes. The themes will be collaborative but each year students will be exposed to different aspects of the theme and not repeat activities, texts or concepts covered in previous years. The following table gives an example. As the writers ensure students have opportunities to meet all of the learning outcomes within the Curriculum Framework, changes to the proposed themes may take place.

**K states the more global theme.**

<b>K</b>	<b>PP</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>People at Home</b>	people at home	people at home	people at play	people at work
<b>The Sea</b>	in the rock pool	at the beach	sea animals	sharks dolphins boats
<b>Food</b>	shopping	fruit and veg	eggs	packaging
<b>Growth</b>	recycling	seeds and growth	energy, light fire	forests, deserts and lakes
<b>Little creatures</b>	spiders (counting)	caterpillars and butterflies	ants /insect facts	bees/spiders
<b>Water</b>	fun with water	water	water usage	weather
<b>Frogs and reptiles</b>	Frogs	turtles	frogs	reptiles
<b>Communication</b>	general	signs and messages	the post	mapping
<b>Flight</b>	kites/planes	space	birds	space
<b>Animals</b>	general animals	Pets	bears	working with animals
<b>Transport</b>	transport	cars	trucks and trains	mining machines
<b>Entertaining</b>	games and toys	parties and celebrations	circus, fairs	colour, shape and pattern
<b>In the country</b>	in the country	farm animals	horses and ponies	primary industry
<b>Australia</b>	Oz general	oz animals flightless birds	marsupials, mammals	geography, history, people
<b>Tales</b>	Fun and nonsense	Folk Tales	Fun and nonsense	Fairy tales
<b>Dinosaurs, dragons and endangered animals</b>	dinosaurs	dinosaurs	dragons	endangered animals and camouflage

## **Course materials**

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These details need to be read in conjunction with page 12.

### **Included with each K theme are:**

- up to 16 activity cards (to allow choices), lesson notes and kit books
- texts, audio tape, video/s (some materials may cover a number of themes)

### **Included with each PP theme are;**

- one lesson notes book and one activity book + kit books
- texts, audio tape, video/s (some materials may cover a number of themes)

### **Additional general dispatch materials for K and PP include:**

- a video on play and an accompanying booklet
- *Learning Through Play* booklets
- *Getting started in ECE* booklet (Home Tutor Guide)

### **Year 1 materials per theme will include;**

- one lesson notes book and one activity book (up to 4 spelling journals)
- commercial texts, video/s and consumable kit books
- 1 set audio

and a *Learning to Learn in ECE* booklet (Home Tutor Guide) for the year.

### **Year 2 materials per theme will include;**

- one lesson notes book, and one activity book
- a spelling journal
- commercial texts, video/s and consumable kit books
- 1 set audio

and a *Developing and Exploring in ECE* booklet (Home Tutor Guide) for the year

### **Year 3 materials per theme will include;**

- one lesson notes book, and one activity book
- a spelling journal
- commercial texts, video/s and consumable kit books
- 1 set audio

and a *Becoming Independent* booklet (Home Tutor Guide) for the year

## **Length of course**

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### **hours of instruction**

The suggested timetables provide students with:

- 2 hours per day, four days per week for 4 year olds - (optional)
- 4 – 5 hours per day, nine days per fortnight for 5 year olds - (optional)
- 3.5 – 4 hours per day, nine days per fortnight for 6, 7, 8 year olds

## **Assessment and evaluation**

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### **Portfolio assessment/outcomes based**

Portfolios will include pre-selected activities that demonstrate student skills, knowledge and understanding over the seven learning areas (eight for students involved in LOTE from year 3) (Liaison will take place with the mathematics writer to plan and integrate the selection of portfolio items in mathematics.) Portfolios will reflect each child's learning, their strengths and their challenges. The portfolio will map in detail, each year, students educational pathways and progress and allow for judgements of student achievement in a range of contexts. The onus is on schools to complete portfolios in a manner which suits their own schools needs. Contents of the portfolio could include:

- information to parents
- feedback from parents
- work samples of pre selected open ended activities with related SOS
- photographs relating to observable outcomes (from camps or visits)
- self assessment and self evaluation tasks
- location on progress maps - eg Student Outcome Statements and First Steps Developmental continua
- teacher /Home Tutor observations
- assessment tasks
- work samples chosen by the child
- work samples chosen by the Home Tutor
- work samples chosen by the teacher
- formal written report, (this is as determined by schools, following mandated guidelines in the CF and EDWA's Curriculum Policy and guidelines document).

An overview of the portfolio assessments will be provided for each year level for teachers. An outline of portfolio assessment will also be given in each Home Tutor Guide and in one of the professional development videos. Items for portfolio assessment will be highlighted in the set overviews and with an icon alongside the selected activity. Each week, one activity will be selected and designed for assessment purposes.

### **Goal setting, reflection and self evaluation**

Goal setting, reflection and self evaluation will be included to allow opportunities for teachers to monitor student outcomes and needs. These procedures will be described in the Home Tutor Guides. Goals will be set once or twice a term.

## Writers' projected timelines

The following materials are to be produced for the ECE project over two years with 7 FTE - 4.5 FTE in 1999 and 2.5 FTE for 2000.

The equivalent of 11 themes (55 sets) are to be written (to editing stage for print materials) in 1999. These will be published in 2000; 5 themes (25 sets) are to be written in 2000.

The professional development videos are to be produced by the end of 1999.

Audio tapes will be produced and dubbed in line with the printed materials timeline.

A minimum of 8 SIDE Show videos will be produced and dubbed in 1999, with the remainder in 2000.

The filming for the music and physical education segments will be completed by the end of 1999.

	<b>K</b>	<b>PP</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Lesson notes</b> 6 learning areas (LA's)	16 7 LA's	16 7 LA's	16 6 LA's	16 6 LA's	16 6 LA's
<b>Activity books</b> 6 learning areas	16 sets/activity cards 7 LA's	16 7 LA's	16 6 LA's	16 6 LA's	16 6 LA's
<b>Spelling Journal</b>			up to 4	16	16
<b>Audios</b>	4/1hr	4/1hr	16/30 min	16/30 min	16/30 min
<b>PD Videos</b>	4 / approx 30 minutes each 1 booklet per video				
<b>Videos</b> <b>Free to air</b> <b>OR</b> <b>SIDE Show</b>	4 ~ 30 min	4 ~ 30 min	4 ~ 30 min	8 ~ 30 min	8 ~ 30 min
	0-2 30 min	8-16 30 min		0-2 30 min	0-2 30 min
<b>Home Tutor Guides</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Living Books</b>	Refer to Appendix				

## **Media (level of involvement of writer )**

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Writers will be involved at different levels for the different media components:

- **commercial videos/audios and free to air videos/audios** - viewing and selecting programs; integration with print materials - Level 1.
- **SIDE Show videos** – the intention is to maximise the use of ‘free to air’ video programs to the number indicated above. Where appropriate ‘free to air’ content is not available, SIDE Show programs will be made to make up the full complement of programs. Scripting content; writing or selecting activities, stories, songs; integrating with print –all, studio presentation to camera – 2 writers, offsite shoot with students – 1 writer - Levels 1 – 3.
- **PD videos (CDC TV)** - writers to provide overview, determine content and suggest activities - Level 1. Contracted support is to be provided to liaise with company, contribute to scripting, shooting and editing .
- **ECE audios** audio scripting by writers, relief will be used for recording – Level 1.

## **Occupational health and safety issues addressed**

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The writers will take into consideration consumable and non consumable kit materials and ensure that no materials supplied to families have any hazardous substances or objects that may be potentially harmful. In addition the core shared values of the Curriculum Framework will be addressed.

In the Physical Education lessons issues such as EDWA’s sun policy and safety guidelines will be taken into account.