

2023

How public libraries in Western Australia support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to age three years

Jennifer Ruth Campbell-Hicks
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Author also known as Ruth Campbell-Hicks

Recommended Citation

Campbell-Hicks, J. (2023). *How public libraries in Western Australia support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to age three years*. Edith Cowan University. <https://doi.org/10.25958/773ne862>

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/2691>

How public libraries in Western Australia support the
language and literacy learning of children from
birth to age three years.

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Ruth Campbell-Hicks

Edith Cowan University

School of Education

2023

ABSTRACT

Early language and literacy skills develop rapidly during the first three years of children's lives. Successful development of these skills is based on dynamic interactions and supportive relationships within children's families and communities. However, nearly a quarter of Australia's children do not receive the necessary support or proactive interactions, and therefore start their schooling at age four or five with inadequate language and literacy skills. Reducing early difficulties is beneficial since evidence indicates that children who struggle at the start of their education rarely catch up.

Children and their families may be supported with language and literacy learning by engaging with programs, activities and resources at local public libraries. Such programs, activities and resources are offered at no cost to the user and are found in more than 1,500 communities throughout Australia. Yet this study reveals that Western Australian libraries' early language and literacy role is undervalued and often unknown. Policy makers have limited understanding of libraries' capacities, and families lack awareness of what libraries provide. Impediments to library use by young families remain, including persistent out-dated perceptions of libraries as unsuitable places for young children.

This study engaged qualitative research methods to gather data on the lived experience of families with young children when engaging with library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources. It also gathered data from families with young children who did not engage with such services, and from library staff with a range of roles. Library based events offering language and literacy content for children from birth to age three years and their parents/carers were observed, along with library use by this cohort during regular opening hours.

Six different library facilities from Local Government Areas in metropolitan, regional and rural environments in Western Australia participated. Audits of facilities and resources

were conducted to collect comprehensive information about public library services for young children and their families.

The study proposes that improving awareness of libraries and their role in early language and literacy learning may assist young children and their families in children's years before formal schooling. Building awareness may involve libraries engaging in broader outreach, creating innovative promotional opportunities, and developing robust evaluative processes. This may result in increased engagement and more children arriving at school with effective language and literacy skills, prompting subsequent benefits for their educational, social, emotional and financial futures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From initial idea to final full stop, my ECU supervisors have guided me with their expertise, encouragement and endless patience. My sincere thanks and appreciation to Dr Caroline Barratt-Pugh, Associate Professor Lennie Barblett and Senior Lecturer Pauline Roberts.

Thank you also to my family, friends and colleagues, for listening, for being fun to be with, and for providing the required quantities of coffee and chocolate over many years.

Thank you to all the children in my life for your enthusiasm and joy. I love you.

To my local beach and bush, thank you for nurturing my soul on a daily and hourly basis.

To the study participants who gave their thoughts so happily, the IT gurus for working through technology issues, the public transport system for getting me to campus and back, and to my cosy bed at the end of long days, thank you.

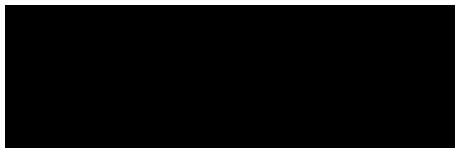
And finally to my parrot for her company and quirky commentary as she perched on my computer while I wrote. Thank you and R.I.P., Tikki Tikki Tembo No Sa Rembo Kari Bari Ruchi Pip Perri Pembo.

DECLARATION

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

- I. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education,
- II. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis, or
- III. contain any defamatory material.

Candidate signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the candidate's signature.

Date: 11/04/2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
DECLARATION	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF ACRONYMS	x
GLOSSARY	xii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Context.....	1
2. Problem statement and rationale.....	2
3. Purpose and significance	3
4. Definitions of language and literacy	7
5. Organization of the thesis.....	10
CHAPTER TWO.....	11
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
1. Introduction	11
2. Contexts of early language and literacy learning	11
3. Public libraries and early language and literacy around the world	27
4. Public libraries in Australia.....	32
5. Impediments to library based early language and literacy learning	44
6. The research questions	51
7. Conclusion.....	51
CHAPTER THREE	52
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	52
1. Introduction	52
2. Contextual information.....	52
3. Conclusion	59
CHAPTER FOUR.....	60
METHODOLOGY	60

1. Introduction	60
2. Research design	61
3. Sample.....	62
5. Ethical considerations	80
6. Trustworthiness	82
7. Conclusion	83
CHAPTER FIVE	84
DETAILS OF SELECTED LIBRARIES	84
1. Financial and legal context of libraries	84
2. Socio-economic context of regions.....	85
3. Buildings and library interiors.....	90
4. Staff and stock.....	93
5. Conclusion.....	95
CHAPTER SIX.....	97
LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT	97
1. Introduction	97
2. Key finding 1: Multiple library programs and activities support early language and literacy learning	98
3. Key finding 2: Comprehensive library resources support early language and literacy learning	108
4. Key finding 3: Varied focus is given in library based support of early language and literacy learning	118
5. Conclusion.....	125
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	126
FACTORS AFFECTING LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT	126
1. Introduction	126
2. Key finding 1: Supports include friendliness, diversity and free availability	126
3. Key finding 2: Impediments involve poor perceptions, marketing, communications, operational processes and resourcing.....	135
4. Conclusion.....	152
CHAPTER EIGHT	154
KNOWLEDGE OF LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT	154
1. Introduction	154
2. Key finding 1: Stakeholders' knowledge of library based early language and literacy support is uneven	154

3. Key finding 2: Stakeholders' knowledge of effectiveness of library based early language and literacy support is limited.....	167
4. Key finding 3: There is limited information about interactions of library based early language and literacy support with children's Home Learning Environments	174
5. Conclusion.....	177
CHAPTER NINE.....	178
DISCUSSION	178
1. Introduction	178
2. Theme 1: Information sharing, literacy modelling and social engagement	178
3. Theme 2: Diverse knowledge and skills among library staff	186
4. Theme 3: Evaluation of library based early language and literacy support	191
5. Theme 4: Promotion of library based early language and literacy support	196
6. Relationship of findings to the frameworks	203
7. Conclusion	204
CHAPTER TEN	206
CONCLUSION.....	206
1. Introduction	206
2. Key findings.....	206
3. Recommendations	210
4. Contribution to knowledge and significance of the study.....	216
5. Limitations of the study	217
6. Opportunities for future research	218
7. Concluding remarks	220
APPENDICES	222
Appendix A.....	266
Details of library programs from USA, Canada, Ireland and Norway	266
Appendix B.....	269
Participant Consent Forms and Information Letters	269
1. Consent Form examples: Parents and Staff.....	269
2. Information Letter examples: Parents and Staff	271
REFERENCES	222
Appendix C:.....	275
Data Collection Instruments	275
1. Audit and Observation Checklists	275

2. Focus Group and Interview Questions	278
Appendix D	283
Library Snapshots	283
Appendix E	286
Audit Data	286

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Selection of Libraries	62
Table 2: Library Size and Location	65
Table 3: Interviewees	68
Table 4: Parent/Carer Participants	70
Table 5: Data Collection Instruments	71
Table 6 Observations	75
Table 7: Context of Participating Libraries.....	85
Table 8: Library Interiors.....	92
Table 9: General Statistics.....	94
Table 10: Junior Statistics	95
Table 11: Library based Early Childhood Language and Literacy Programs	99
Table 12: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in the USA.....	266
Table 13: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Canada	267
Table 14: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Ireland	267
Table 15: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Norway	268

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Structure of Western Australian Library Provision.....	53
Figure 2: Graphic Representation of Conceptual Framework.....	57
Figure 3: Research Design	62

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AGDE	Australian Government Department of Education
ALA	American Library Association
ALIA	Australian Library and Information Association
ALNF	Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation
APLA	Australian Public Libraries Association
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ASCEL	Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DESE	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
DPIL	Dolly Parton Imagination Library
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECRR	Every Child Ready to Read
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FIFO	Fly In Fly Out
GAL	Global Alliance for Literacy
HLE	Home Learning Environment
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IMLS	Institute of Museum and Library Services
IRSD	Index of Relative Social Disadvantage
JK	Junior Kindergarten
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGA	Local Government Authority
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
MCEEDYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCRI	Murdoch Children's Research Institute
MGOL	Mother Goose on the Loose
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
NELLC	National Early Language and Literacy Coalition
NELLS	National Early Language and Literacy Strategy
NELP	National Early Literacy Panel
NSCDC	National Scientific Council on the Developing Child
NSLA	National and State Libraries Australia
PIC	Parent Information Centre
PLA	Public Libraries Association (USA)
PLWA	Public Libraries Western Australia
QR	Quick Response
ROI	Return on Investment

SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index For Areas
SES	Socio Economic Status
SLWA	State Library of Western Australia
SPELL	Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries
SROI	Social Return on Investment
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
TKI	Telethon Kids Institute
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
WA	Western Australia
WALGA	Western Australian Local Government Association
WHO	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY

Development. The process by which a child changes over time. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia [EYLF] (AGDE, 2022, p.65) defines development as “the sequence of physical, language, cognitive, emotional and social changes that occur in a child from birth through to adulthood. Development and learning are dynamic processes that reflect the complex interplay between a child’s heredity, biological characteristics and the environment.”

Early Childhood Education. A formal arrangement for the teaching and care of a young child. Early Childhood Education is provided for babies, toddlers and young children up to the age of six years.

Evaluation. A process of working out the value or worth of something: how good it is, whether it has value and what value it has. Evaluation also refers to educators’ critical reflection on this information, and consideration of the effectiveness of planning and implementation of the content of children’s learning, development and wellbeing (AGDE, 2022).

Language and Literacy Learning. Learning is the process of gaining knowledge, skills and dispositions. As a result of influences in the environment, and through experiences with people, a child’s behaviour, language or knowledge changes. In early childhood education, language and literacy learning involves social participation and oral language experiences as well as reading, alphabet knowledge, letter sounds and shapes, print awareness, mark-making or early writing, and digital literacies. Literacy involves many systems, codes and symbols for constructing reality and communicating with others.

Outcomes. Changes in skills, abilities, attitudes, behaviour, understanding or knowledge that are expected as a result of attending a programme, receiving services or being exposed to experiences or equipment.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter provides the context of the study, detailing the social and geographical environment in which it occurs. The study's problem statement is given and the rationale of the research is described. This is followed by explanation of the purpose of investigations, suggesting why it is important to understand more about the topic. Next, the significance of the research is outlined and the chapter ends with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1. Context

A significant problem in Western Australia relates to one in five children arriving at school ill-prepared with relevant language and literacy skills suitable for formal education (AEDC, 2021). A recent international study suggests that an assumption children have adequate language skills when enrolling in school is "a falsehood that is severely hurting the long-term development of children" (Peaselee, 2022, p.78). This challenge is found across all states of Australia where international assessments by the OECD have ranked the nation 27th out of 45 developed countries for children's reading performance (Schmidt & Hamilton, 2017a).

Since it has been found that language learning begins at birth (Horowitz-Kraus et al., 2017; Murray & Egan, 2014; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013), it is proposed that support for families starting from the birth of their child(ren) could help with building effective language and literacy skills (Moss, 2016; Sangalang, 2018; Swain & Cara, 2017). This is particularly important given that infants' brains have an exceptional opportunity for language learning in their first months and years of life (Seligman, 2017). Missing this opportunity may result in lost potential and a need for socially and financially expensive remediation at a later stage (Field, 2010; Tassoni, 2016; Teager et al., 2019). One of the supports available for families at this important time is Western Australia's free public library service.

2. Problem statement and rationale

Poor language and literacy skills among children on entry to school may be improved by more attention being given to language and literacy learning in their years before school. Public libraries are a potential source of support for early language and literacy, and their free services are available in more than a thousand communities across Australia. However, the early language and literacy role of libraries has received limited research attention (Djonov et al., 2018), and while a call for inquiry was made more than a decade ago (Strempele, 2009), much remains to be explored.

An Australian evidence report from 2018 (Colab, 2018a) specifies a need for more research around the content, practical outcomes and long term effects of early childhood programs, thus giving guidance to libraries' language and literacy support of young families. This study seeks to examine such matters at public libraries in Western Australia, with an aim to provide new information about library based language and literacy learning experiences and perceptions by families with young children, as well as stakeholders involved with the provision of library services.

This study seeks to understand how the public library system in Western Australia contributes to language and literacy learning in children aged birth to three years. While diverse programs, activities and resources for young children are provided in public libraries world-wide, most research centred on language and literacy learning activities has focused on children over three years of age (Gilley et al. 2015; Tayler, 2016). There is currently less information about experiences for babies, toddlers and younger children and their families. New evidence of the lived experience of families, children and library staff with early years' language and literacy based programs, activities and resources in public libraries has been sought in this study, and interactions between library based language and literacy learning and children's Home Learning Environments (HLEs) has been explored.

Initiating data for the study was statistical information from the national Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) concerning children's early language and literacy abilities. This comprehensive and long-term study aims to record how parents/carers have been

encouraged by the community with their childrearing. It captures information on 98% of Australian children in the year they start school (AEDC, 2021), exploring impacts of children's social ecologies in their decisive before-school years. AEDC data indicates more than 20% of children are beginning their formal schooling insufficiently prepared, which is a concern that forms a foundation for this study. An additional driver of this study was the high level of 32% of children in the study's regional area who were found to be neither regularly read to nor encouraged in their reading (AEDC, 2018).

3. Purpose and significance

The purpose of the study was to explore how public libraries support early language and literacy learning by engaging families in relaxed and enjoyable activities at free public libraries. The study aimed to find out what currently takes place at libraries and how programs were perceived by families. It aimed to identify ways in which library programs, activities and resources could be enhanced for the benefit of young children's language and literacy learning in their years before school.

Presently, libraries can use data from the AEDC to inform decisions about their role as community-based education settings, delivering early language and literacy programs, activities and resources either within library buildings or at external venues (Djonov et al., 2018). To improve the quantity and quality of relevant information, new data may be obtained from studies such as this, indicating possible routes for inclusion of libraries in long-range educational planning (Swain & Cara, 2017), as well as encouraging co-operative and expanded partnerships between libraries and the formal education sector. New evidence from this research aims to augment present information about early childhood language and literacy inputs and outcomes related to free public library services.

A statistical foundation for libraries' early language and literacy input is found in AEDC results that illuminate language and literacy changes in children's first years. These reveal measurable factors such as vocabulary levels as well as less measurable factors such as motivation, attitude and confidence that impact successful language and literacy learning (AEDC, 2018). Research indicates how these characteristics may have greater

influence on outcomes than the learning of specific pre-reading and de-coding skills such as sound/letter relationships or an understanding of print conventions (Cullinan et al., 1990; Fellowes & Oakley, 2014; Neuman et al., 2007). Social characteristics may further be implicit in early *everywhere-learning* (Keenan, 2022), which supports general brain growth and which may provide a lifelong benefit of encouraging a love and ease of reading (Barratt-Pugh & Maloney, 2015; Clark, 2017; Moss, 2016; Van Buren, 2016). It is of concern, then, that a study in Western Australia in 2020 found that for children outside the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, parental anxieties about their own reading skills could prevent sharing of books with their children on a regular basis (Cassells et al., 2020). Moreover, evidence indicates that parental distraction (Hotta, 2022) and lack of knowledge of children's songs (Parkhill, 2022) may adversely impact parent/child interactions. In addition, according to Professor Susan Neuman (2018), without supportive adult input children "really begin hating reading very early on" (p.4).

It appears that Australia's 1,700 public libraries lack visibility in the early language and literacy field, arising from libraries' generally low profile along with insufficient evaluation of how they support early language and literacy learning of young children (Herrera, 2016). Leadership from within the library sector could potentially improve this situation, resulting in enrichment of library based programs, activities and resources to complement families' language and literacy activities at home (Elliott, 2006; Rosenkoetter & Knapp-Philo, 2006). This may help reduce the gap between children who are school-ready with their language and literacy skills and children who are vulnerable in these areas.

The regional area in which part of this study is based has Western Australia's highest number of children who are vulnerable with their language and literacy abilities on school entry (AEDC, 2018; Cross, 2017). It is additionally noted from a study more than 15 years ago that school teachers spoke of a worrying increase in the number of children arriving at school with language skills that did not fit well with formal education requirements (Elliott, 2006).

Despite growing interest in the early childhood sector around the world, gaps in research around library based early language and literacy programs are found internationally. Gaps in research include what libraries do in the field, how stakeholders perceive libraries' role in this work, why libraries provide early language and literacy support, when it occurs, who takes part and whether it is effective. This has been noted by Clark (2016) who cited a substantial lack of information regarding library based early language and literacy practices and how they impact children's emerging skills. A report by library scholars Campana et al. (2015) proposed that since library language and literacy activities are largely undocumented by empirical research, new studies are required specifically around assessment and evaluation of library based storytimes. Without such an evidence base, libraries may continue to be left out of major language and literacy efforts such as those examined by the USA's influential National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (Campana et al., 2015).

Economist James Heckman (2011) offers an economic perspective on the significance of early learning, and the importance of ensuring early learning is well supported, recommending proactive inputs into early language and literacy skills for financial reasons. Heckman provides evidence of a 13% Return On Investment (ROI) for high quality early childhood education in which social and oral foundations of early language are embraced (Heckman, 2011). He suggests that if children under the age of three years are consistently engaged in high value and interactive education, cumulative benefits to their language skills can accrue, providing economic, health and social advantages in their later lives. Heckman's research additionally indicates that early education may be helpful in addressing poverty across genders as well as across generations (<https://heckmanequation.org/resource/faq>, para.7). This idea proposes there may be long-term and holistic benefits of supporting families with early language and literacy.

Acquisition of language and literacy skills by young children is necessarily unhurried and lengthy (Goodman & Martens, 2020). Children must add the intricacies of engaging with complex tasks of language learning and reading at the same time as developing comprehensive skills in the fields of movement, cognition, self-regulation and socio-emotional development (Gil et al., 2020; Seligman, 2017). In this vulnerable context, the

power of external impacts on young brains is substantial (NSCDC, 2010). Even by the age of one year, some children are at risk of not building the necessary language skills (Fernald et al., 2013) and to minimise differences, research recommends that from the moment of birth, language abilities can be encouraged (Bowe, 2022; Niklas et al., 2016). Niklas et al. (2016) advise that to increase children's future reading skills, it is helpful to engage frequently in language experiences with very young children, including determining which aspects of these experiences have the most impact. The value of such interactive experiences has been repeatedly confirmed in the literature (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Bowers et al., 2018; Hayes & Ahrens, 1988; McFarland et al., 2018; Meltzoff & Kuhl, 2016; World Health Organization, 2020).

Interactive experiences include conversations between adults and children which involve attending, hearing, understanding and speaking. These can form a practical base from which young learners can later become literate in terms of performing reading and writing tasks (Dickinson et al., 2003), with children learning up to 10,000 words in their first five years (Keenan, 2022). For example, just talking with children in commonplace conversation has been found to cultivate vocabulary, print awareness, letter knowledge, sound knowledge, general knowledge and the essential feature of motivation (Campana et al., 2016; Mesut, 2016). The simple daily talking with children that is required of parents/carers has been described as engaging everyday opportunities that "do not need a special degree, advanced training, a high IQ, special creative talent ... or a specific regimen of baby activity classes, videos or prescribed music" (Barton & Brophy-Herb, 2006, p.17). Professor Neuman (2006) accordingly advises that language and vocabulary are learned through constant communication with adults, and not "by magic" (p.276).

In Australia, the importance of the first years of children's lives when this development takes place was acknowledged in 2018 with a proposed AUD50 million investment into early childhood education (<https://www.mediastatement.wa.gov.au/pages/mcgowan/2018/03>) and again in 2022 by the government's proposal for a year of play-based learning before children go to school (<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/16>). Also in 2022, Western Australia's Legislative Council established a parliamentary enquiry into child development services (<https://www.parliament>).

wa.gov.au). Finally, the importance of the early years is acknowledged by Western Australia's *Origins* project that is the largest of its kind, investigating 10,000 families for health and social data over a decade, beginning from pre-birth (Hagemann et al., 2019).

According to Barton and Brophy-Herb (2006) the limited attention that has been paid to children's first three years is worrying. While an increased awareness of socially based difficulties with early language and literacy learning has been noted, this has been in conjunction with concerns about insufficient attention to children's first years.

Consequently, calls have been made for more consideration to be given to the before-school years during which children and adults spend much of every day together (Hand et al., 2014; Parra et al., 2019; Tassoni, 2016). To assist parents/carers in these intense early years, a greater role for the wider community in raising children has been advocated (Barton & Brophy-Herb, 2006; Goldfield et al., 2018; Pfeifer & Perez, 2011) with former First Lady Hillary Clinton (1995) reminding politicians in the USA more than 15 years ago about how children's current and future lives are critically affected by how society supports its families and individuals.

4. Definitions of language and literacy

Language and literacy are embedded in almost everything people do, being described as both a human speciality and a human right (Rankin & Brock, 2015; Zubrick et al., 2015). Literacy can be defined in many ways, with some earlier definitions concentrating on interactions with written language only (Bormuth, 1973). Later and broader definitions term literacy as using language in all forms whether written or spoken (Quach et al., 2017) and may encompass different modes such as digital literacy, musical literacy, health literacy and visual literacy (Campana et al., 2016; Narey, 2021; Sanders & Albers, 2010). A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) definition of literacy includes seven specific abilities. These abilities are the capacity to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use written materials (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/literacy>). Definitions by the UK's National Literacy Trust include foundational pre-literacy skills of concentration and attentiveness (Gilbert et al., 2018), while literacy as described by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) in Australia includes five skills applied to four types of delivery. The

five skills are reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating applied to the oral, print, visual and digital modes of delivery (DESE, 2020). In this thesis the phrase language and literacy learning incorporates understandings of foundational levels of child development, as language development and literacy learning are inextricably linked (Renshaw & Goodhue, 2020). Terms are described in the Glossary.

Despite this comprehensive collection of characteristics relating to language and literacy, pre-linguistic activities that encompass the skills of babies who cannot yet speak with words are not defined in such detail. Non-verbal communication skills exhibited by babies in multiple forms may benefit from further research, conversation and description (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988; Makin, 2006). An example of such research is a study by Towell et al. (2021) offering descriptions of baby talking that does not rely on words and language. Towell et al.'s research (2021) describes how infants from the age of six months responded when looking at books, including vocal and physical behaviours:

When the infants and toddlers in this study were engaged in a text, they made nonverbal responses, such as smiling, laughing, patting the pages, pointing to images, clapping their hands, or turning the pages. If they were not engaged, the children became fussy, cried, slept, looked away, kicked, waved, blew kisses or left the area. (p.332)

Towell et al. describe babies' pre-verbal interactions that precede learning of words as they grow older. Since babies change and grow rapidly in their first years, support for their move from pre-verbal to verbal modes of communication requires careful timing and age-related considerations (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2008). A report by Gilley et al. titled *Too late and not enough for some children* (2015) argues that language and literacy programs, activities and resources are often provided when children are too old, such as four years of age or more. The report suggests that delivering programs to infants and younger children from birth to three years may deliver greater gains (Gilley et al., 2015). Similarly, academic and former librarian Debra Knoll (2014) advises that waiting until the age of three or four years for language and literacy input may be too late for optimal development.

To achieve language and literacy benefits, researchers submit that early education needs to start with babies' first days when parents/carers talk directly with them in person, taking part in rudimentary serve-and-return conversations (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child [NSCDC], 2012). These oral language interactions have been found to be key components of early language learning (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2014; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013), including children's understanding of the relationship between spoken and written language, and print/sound relationships. Their importance as a precursor to formal written literacy skills is based within the theories of socio-cultural learning (Nagel & Scholes, 2016), emergent literacy (Clay, 1966) and social learning (Bandura, 1969). These theories have been explored extensively in the literature, including how language and literacy learning occurs constantly during children's everyday lives (Rankin, 2014a). Vygotsky's (1978) description of language learning that begins with an infant's first skills in paying attention and listening (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) along with seeing and hearing adults using language for practical purposes (Pierce & Profio, 2006) highlights the socio-cultural context of language learning. As a result of theoretical and practical endorsement of insights by Vygotsky, Clay and Bandura's, this thesis takes a socio-cultural understanding of how language and literacy is developed.

With an understanding of social cultural learning theories, language learning in babies is encouraged through informal daily interactions starting at birth. This encourages a gradual acquisition of skills in conjunction with children's growth and development. Therefore, language learning is developed through immersion in supportive relationships, varied experiences and multiple opportunities (Edwards, 2014; Moss, 2016; Rohde, 2015). With this social basis, oral language is regarded as a foundation from which children can then progress towards future understanding of the formalities of the written word (Sensenig, 2012). Since these formalities of reading and writing are complex and challenging (Keenan, 2022; Rosenkoetter & Knapp-Philo, 2006) an abundance of instructive and graded programs for school-aged children has been created (<https://www.dese.gov.au/australian-curriculum/year-1-phonics-check>). In contrast, language and literacy programs, activities and resources to support learning among younger children in their years before school currently appear to be under-

represented in the literature, as does the potential role of public libraries in this domain. This research seeks to add information on this topic.

5. Organization of the thesis

This first chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the way in which the subject has been addressed through the study. The context and problem statement are given, followed by explanations of the purpose, rationale and significance of this research. The second chapter of the thesis describes current relevant academic literature, including research relating to public libraries, early language and literacy, and family engagement with language and literacy in their children's first years. The third chapter explains the study's conceptual basis and theoretical foundations, while Chapter Four details the research paradigm, design, data collection tools and analysis methods. Chapter Five gives comprehensive details of the libraries that were selected for this study, and Chapters Six, Seven and Eight examine the findings for each of the study's research questions using qualitative information collected from key stakeholders, observations and library audits. Chapter Nine discusses themes within the findings to understand complex ideas in relation to the research literature. The study concludes with Chapter Ten which reiterates the answers to the research questions and proposes recommendations arising from the study, along with ideas for further study to fill gaps in current knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

The literature on the importance of language and literacy learning in children's first years of life for continued successful learning is compelling. Of note is Item 4.2 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which states that by 2030 countries should ensure that all children have the opportunity to take part in early childhood education which includes language and literacy (<https://unric.org/en/sdg-4>). In this thesis, the role of public libraries in young children's language and literacy learning is explored in a contemporary context. Literature about the nature and importance of early language and literacy is investigated first, followed by examples from international perspectives on the topic. Literature concerning public libraries' early language and literacy role in an Australian context is examined next, and finally enquiries are made into supports and impediments to family use of the early language and literacy programs, activities and resources that libraries provide.

2. Contexts of early language and literacy learning

Since language is described as a social construct, it is regarded as inseparable from the culture in which it is based (Nagel & Scholes, 2016). Sensenig (2011) proposes that interactions have meaning only within their cultural context, and it is this context that is intrinsic in broad policy settings. For example, an Australian report co-written by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) alleges that the early years have become a key policy area due to their ability to either perpetuate or mitigate social inequities (Noble et al., 2021). Which of these opposing actions of perpetuation or mitigation is invoked involves an underlying philosophy from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) that how children are supported in their first years of life is in indication of what society values.

Values placed on early language and literacy may be dissimilar in communities with contrasting cultural backgrounds. An example of language-related cultural differences is when child directed and play-focused learning is advocated, as in the USA (Wright, 2021), while in non-Western cultures there may instead be focus on the wisdom of elders accompanied by adult-led teaching. For example, in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures storytelling are significant parts of passing on oral histories, languages do not have a history of being written but are orated.

Cultural norms are further implicated in literature about socio economic status (SES) as it affects language and literacy. Language differences are evident within differing social contexts before children's third birthdays, with effects on their future language and literacy success (Ramírez-Esparza et al., 2014). For example, five-year-old children who rely on welfare have been found to express fewer vocabulary words than three-year-old children from professional backgrounds (Palmer, 2016). Further, on school entry, children from cultural milieus associated with lower SES may be up to a year behind their middle-class counterparts in terms of expressive and receptive school-ready language (AEDC, 2018; Cartmill, 2016; Exley, 2019; Gurdon, 2019; Hannon et al., 2020; Kuchirko, 2017). However, description of the complex causes of this issue through deficit perspectives which use words such as 'lower' and 'behind' are now being replaced with more constructive strengths-based philosophies (Gillon et al., 2022).

From a strength's perspective, research suggests that language differences may relate noticeably to inequities between children who are engaged by their parents/carers and children who are not, regardless of SES status (Noble et al., 2021). In their extended Australian work, Noble et al. (2021) relay the importance of this approach since parental engagement and attitude substantially impact general wellbeing and school involvement. To manage and improve differences in parental engagement, social support for children's early language and literacy learning is valuable. Descriptions of valuable engagement with language and literacy in children's early years are given in the next section, along with children's need for sound relationships and social input.

Public libraries are contexts that have been proactive in promoting oral language among families with children in their early years of life, despite limited representation of this topic in the academic literature. Rosenkoetter and Knapp-Philo (2006) suggest that learning to read is based on a foundation of effective cognition, exposure to language and positive motivation, all of which can be enhanced through informal learning at public libraries. Additionally, acceptance of the role of oral language in social theories of literacy and learning (Mol et al., 2009) has become evident in libraries' early childhood programming.

Early childhood pedagogies based on play and daily experiences for younger age-groups as described in the professional and academic literature (Colliver et al., 2021; Wilson-Scorgie, 2022) are being embraced by libraries. These experiences illustrate a perception of the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) that it may be the conversations adults and children have around books, rather than the books themselves, that have more impact (Keenan, 2022). It is noted, however, that when engaging with such conversations, the culturally-based and non-neutral nature of language must be considered (Cairney, 2003). If underlying cultures of the adult and the child are different, outcomes of language and literacy activities may be less successful. The cultural element of early language and literacy learning is described next.

2.1 Children's first years of language and literacy learning

Research findings overwhelmingly indicate that attention be paid to children's language and literacy learning before they start school. Evidence has been available for more than 30 years that shows how language development begins before children are born. Brain growth begins from one month after conception, with mothers' speech and conditions in the womb impacting the emerging individual (DeCasper & Spence, 1986; Kopko, 2007). Babies in utero can hear the rhythms and intonations of their mother's voice (Mooney, 2015) as well as the speech patterns of their family's languages (Abbott & Langston, 2006). Foetal programming during the first five months after conception results in the formation the majority of a person's neurons (Pearson, 2016), and as the brain grows in physical size it is estimated that over a million neural connections are made every

second. This rapid brain growth continues from conception to birth and into children's first months of life (Cross, 2017; Thurow, 2016).

Following birth, a newborn's brain which weighs approximately 25% of its adult weight increases in size to 50% of adult weight in the first year of life, and 80% in the next two years (Goulding & Crump, 2017; Neuman et al., 2017). Along with increase in size comes increase in activity, with a toddler's brain being twice as active as an adult's (Lathey & Blake, 2013). Toddlers' brains also function differently, with brain pathways prioritising features such as exploration and an openness to new possibilities, which are unlike the focus and decision-making that are characteristics of adult brains (Gopnik et al., 1999). In addition, resistance to change tends to increase along with age, making the first years of life when networks are being dynamically created vital for new learning (Allen, 2011; Eagleman, 2017; Goulding & Crump, 2017; Jana, 2017).

Over the past decade, understanding of this growth has been facilitated by technological advances, with accurate information now available via Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans. This has resulted in new understandings about the creation of 90% of neural pathways during babies' first months of life, along with improved understandings of how to support babies and their families in these earliest days (Barnett et al., 2020; Duncan et al., 2022). Research has found that working proactively with babies during this vulnerable but adaptable time of rapid brain growth is effective, especially in building the foundations of language (Fricke, 2012; Owens, 2010). When a time for language development that is available during children's first months is activated by secure parental attachment, social opportunities and multiple stimuli of daily living, the child's language skills have been consistently shown to benefit (Moore et al., 2017). By the time the child is 15 months old, parental engagement with their language learning is already seen to be having a significant impact (Schmidt & Hamilton, 2017b). By the time the child is two years old, observational and participatory learning are soundly in place to make use of these secure social relationships (Rosenkoetter & Wanless, 2006).

2.2 Early language and literacy support by public libraries

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has been in existence for nearly 100 years. During that century, IFLA has encouraged public libraries in their core role of supporting language and literacy, to the extent that more than 150 countries now work within IFLA's literacy guidelines (Rankin, 2018). IFLA recommends that public libraries be acknowledged as partners in children's early educational journeys, although in a more relaxed manner than the formal education sector that functions with prescribed assessment and curriculum requirements (Rankin, 2018). IFLA considers libraries to have a special responsibility to promote children's services, noting they can have an unequivocal impact (Rankin, 2018, p.4) on children's acquisition of speech and language, and that children should have unrestricted access to relevant resources that suit their needs. In line with IFLA guidelines, early learning strategies are noted as elements in public policy where major parties frequently agree on importance and direction (O'Neil & Watts, 2015).

Libraries specifically for children began in the twentieth century. A 1932 publication titled *A Manual of Children's Libraries* (Sayers, 1932) advised that while handsome shelves and beautiful furniture would be good to have, there was no need to wait for them since the librarian and her manner were the most significant factors in running a successful library for children. This primary characteristic of good staffing remains consistent to the present day, despite the processes and practices of libraries having changed extensively in the past ninety years.

Heseltine (2020) notes that public libraries now function in a world that is entirely different from the one in which they started, and this is especially so with their early childhood services. Some of the changes to libraries' early childhood services are illustrated in the ways in which library based storytimes have evolved. Until the 1950s, library storytimes were called *Story Hour* and were aimed at older children who could sit in rows to listen quietly for a full hour to a story being read to them by an adult (McKend, 2010; Prendergast, 2011; Scott, 2015). By the 1990s this structured adult-to-child format had shifted substantially. Instead of hesitantly allowing children into the library if they remained quiet, libraries now welcomed all ages and noise-

levels, including young babies (Saxby, 1997). A further 15 years on, more than 80% of Americans believed libraries should offer free literacy programs for young children (Pew Research Centre, 2013) and the care and development of young children had become an entrenched political issue (Press & Wong, 2013). Since that time, politicians and parents/carers alike have consistently requested provision and access to quality early childhood education for children from birth to five years of age (Cerny et al., 2006; Press & Wong, 2013).

In response to a higher profile for children's issues, the early language and literacy roles of public libraries expanded, including providing comprehensive and dedicated resources along with flexible programs and activities with early language and literacy intent (Bruce, 2015; Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018). As an illustration of this change Garmer (2016) describes contemporary libraries involving a "dynamic environment, not bound by school bells and mandated curricula" (p.19), and now acting as a base for early learning activities along with connecting families and communities to comprehensive resources. The job of libraries was not direct teaching but instead, provision of opportunities to facilitate discoveries (Gonzalez-Mena, 2006; Stagg Peterson et al., 2012). Thus, libraries' role in early childhood education for language and literacy learning was evolving.

This expanded concept of libraries' language and literacy role for young children means library staff require training in a variety of processes. However, professional training of library staff in early language and literacy, child development and the pedagogy of literacy learning has sometimes struggled to keep pace with extra demands, and this difficulty remains among staff groups in multiple locations (Elek et al., 2021; Mardhani-Bayne & Shamchuck, 2022; Rosenfeldt et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2022). Nevertheless, such limitations have not been a barrier to innovative program development and provision by enthusiastic public library staff, with libraries' values involving support of individual families along with broad community services (Deerr et al. 2006). Even without educational scaffolding or early literacy curricula, early childhood services that libraries have created and delivered over the past 20 years have provided encouragement and reinforcement of the oral language that initially immerses small children in their homes and communities (Celano & Neuman, 2001; Celano et al., 2018; Ptacek, 2016; Ramos,

2012; Sensenig, 2012). Library staff's encouragement of parents'/carers' reading, singing, talking, writing and playing with their children is now seen as a commonly acceptable policy goal as well as a low-stress, low cost, low-key way of improving early learning (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016; Noble et al., 2021; Raphael, 2020).

Investigations by Crisp (2004) found that parents/carers who engaged with library based programs shared books with their children more frequently after taking part in programs. Crisp's study (2004) found increased language and literacy behaviours among all participating parents/carers, encompassing diverse ages, ethnicities, education and income levels. Moreover, a study by Hayes (2015) found that benefits of family engagement and book sharing were boosted by children's library books containing 50% more rare words than adult prime time television, and by libraries enabling children to make their own choices. Another study on library outcomes detailed that "a \$1,000 or greater per-student capital investment in local public libraries increases reading test scores," (Gilpin et al., 2021, introduction), and Gilpin et al. also found that investment in libraries increased the number of children's visits to the library and number of books borrowed.

Authors have specified multiple benefits for young children that may accrue from encouraging them to use libraries with their families. Benefits include increases in the amount of reading for pleasure, building extended vocabularies, enhanced comprehension, and greater general knowledge (Becker, 2012; Langendonk & Broekhof, 2017; Vanobbergen et al., 2009). Libraries have also been described as offering a benefit of equity of access to resources (AEDC, 2018), having the potential to be protective experiences for those at risk (Lloyd, 2020; Smith et al., 2021) and providing community venues valued by families during the Covid-19 pandemic (Wakeling et al., 2021).

Libraries are not all about buildings with books, however, with twenty-first century changes to library services promoting intergenerational learning as well as the proactive role that parents/carers play as their child(ren)'s first teacher (Becker, 2012; Ralli & Payne, 2016; Smith, 2008). Empowerment of parents/carers through demonstration of techniques that could potentially be continued in the home has been found to be a

practical outcome of enhanced children's library services worldwide (Cahill & Ingram, 2022; Goulding & Crump, 2017; Neuman et al., 2006; Rosenkoetter & Knapp-Philo, 2006). An account of positive library effects shown among parents/carers and their children is given by Knoll (2014):

We regularly observe infants turning pages and otherwise manipulating books as object of exploration as early as six months of age. By around eleven months, we witness babies paying attention to the printed page. They actively follow an adult's pointing finger and are lifting flaps, touching pages with intention, absorbing vocabulary words and anticipating the next page. (para.7)

Descriptions such as this indicate academic, political and public interest in young children, including consideration of increases in input to the early childhood sector by public libraries (AEDC, 2018; Teager et al., 2019). While it is acknowledged that broad changes for children cannot be made by just one initiative, agency or sector (Teager et al., 2019), the public library system in Australia has been seen to be a proactive agency that has embraced a role of language and literacy support for children from birth to the start of school. The role has involved supplying library based language and literacy services for infants and their parents/carers, including the development of targeted programs and activities, and the provision of dedicated and comprehensive resources. Libraries are additionally places where adults can socialize with each other, sharing information in a relaxed and supportive environment, and where library staff may talk with parents/carers about their strengths and assets (Lopez et al., 2016).

In Australia, examples of support for community-based developments include the State Library of Queensland's *First Five Forever* program (<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/first5forever>), the Minderoo Foundation's *Thrive by Five* initiative in Western Australia (<https://thrivebyfive.org.au>), a recently completed *National Early Language and Literacy Strategy* (NELLS) (<https://earlylanguagenadliteracy.org.au>) and continuing government reviews of early childhood policies (<https://www.dese.gov.au/education-ministers-meeting/resources>). While NELLS decries a lack of federal acknowledgement of early language and literacy as a priority area, along with continuing problems with fragmentation in the sector, it nevertheless identifies places where language and literacy

are likely to be nurtured. These places include children's homes, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) venues, and community settings such as libraries (Renshaw & Goodhue, 2020).

In low-key and informal ways, libraries' role in helping children arrive at school ready to learn is gradually being acknowledged. Libraries have been described as offering a multitude and variety of developmental opportunities (Becker, 2012) and their provision of multiple early learning opportunities has been noted in recent years (Cahill & Ingram, 2022; Chen et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2017; Neuman et al., 2017). When investigating the role of public libraries in their support of families, the Harvard Family Research Project used the word 'extraordinary' when describing the work that libraries do (Lopez et al., 2016) and defined libraries as a 'vital space' for family engagement (Lopez et al., 2016). Although from the USA, the following description of the library's role in supporting early language and literacy is closely aligned with storytime activities in Australia, and indicates just one of the ways in which public libraries may assist with early language and literacy learning:

The library experience for many of us starts before we can even walk or talk—let alone read. The main driver of this experience is *Storytime* ... What better activity and place for parents to take their kids when it is raining/snowing/boiling hot outside? Not only does this help with early literacy and kindergarten preparation, but it is free ... Parents can also get some social engagement as well as access to kids' books (and) busy parents are provided with their own personalized bag of books that are ready to pick up at the end of *Storytime* and are even pre-checked out. (Costello & Keyser, 2016, para.13)

Library programs, activities and resources are widespread, and appreciated by those who use them. However, their effectiveness in assisting children's early language and literacy learning is affected by both supports and impediments, which are discussed in the next section.

Supports

Prominent support for libraries' early language and literacy role is given by the IFLA/ UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994), which has as its first key mission the creation and strengthening of reading habits in children from an early age. Similarly, the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians [ASCEL] (2015) points out that it is a contemporary role of public libraries to develop reading skills by working with children and their parents/carers through interaction with their Home Learning Environments (HLEs). The dual target of working with children *and* parents/carers is common across library systems (Anderson et al., 2014; Neuman et al., 2017; Roth, 2018; Vanobbergen et al., 2009) and it is apparent that both library funding bodies and practising library staff are increasingly aware of the double target (Becker, 2012; Djonov et al., 2018; Slaby, 2014). The potential for libraries to empower parents/carers as their children's first teachers is revealed in research across multiple nations (Fenton et al., 2014; Swain & Cara, 2017; Yeo et al., 2014) and is predicated on low-key, non-judgmental, non-technical and social assistance.

With an underlying parent-and-child focus at the root, libraries have been found to provide non-intensive, non-stigmatizing and universal services. Evidence shows that this approach can be advantageous when compared with services based on deficiency-outlooks or targeted at solving specific problems (Rankin & Brock, 2015; Slaby, 2014; Zubrick et al., 2015). It has been found that library programs with their widespread appeal and access can achieve greater success than problem-focused remedial programs offered elsewhere and, as such, they have been promoted by paediatric professionals for their durable impacts on learning (Mendelsohn et al., 2018; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). A preferred universality has been described by the Telethon Kids Institute (TKI) which includes a move away from crisis mode and towards the setting of common goals. TKI advises that universal interventions that encourage parents/carers to talk more with their children may be more appropriate than interventions targeted towards disadvantaged families (Brushe et al., 2020). With this understanding, libraries appear to be well placed to support all children according to their regular needs rather than concentrating on children with extra needs.

To ensure universal services remain openly available to all children irrespective of age, gender, race, financial means, physical ability or intellectual aptitude (Becker, 2012; Flewitt, 2013; Rankin et al., 2007), contemporary libraries offer flexibility in regulations and library processes. They also offer curated selections of language and literacy resources according to local requirements (Neuman et al., 2017; Stooke & McKenzie, 2011) and are promoted as accessible and welcoming spaces with kind and interested staff (CCYP, 2013; Cox, 2000; McIntyre, 2002; Rankin, 2016; Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018). ALIA's *Early Learning Framework* (ALIA, 2014a) maintains that the attitude, demeanour and performance of staff is central to family engagement (Nadkarni & Klatt, 2014; Neuman et al., 2007; Reid & Howard, 2016), including warmth, responsiveness, consistency and knowledge (Massis, 2008; Phillips, 2015; Stice & Levine, 2006; Wasik & Hindman, 2015). Specifically, library based early language and literacy services need to be supported by the right adults, with the right manner, the right resources, the right activities and the right professional skills (Prendergast, 2016; Ramos & Vila, 2015; Tough, 2013). Staff also need to be well informed in local early childhood matters so that they can be active connectors between families and services in their communities (Djonov et al., 2018).

A final consideration in this comprehensive list of requirements concerns relationships between children, their parents/carers and library staff. It has been proposed that relationships may have greater impact than the language and literacy content of library programs (Clark, 2016). It is therefore vital for libraries to have the best possible staff delivering their services in stable, nurturing and responsive environments (Hopkins et al., 2013). Twenty-first century parents/carers appear to concur with words spoken in 1896 by a professional city librarian that "The public library is a center of public happiness first, of public education next" (Dana, 1920, p.15). For many parents/carers, the purpose of going to the library may indeed be happiness, with getting out of the house and having a break from chores (McKend, 2010) being a common motivation to visit the library. Other motivators included entertaining the children and giving them an opportunity to play (Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018), or getting to know other families (Kettle, 2014). Social features of library storytimes and other early childhood events have been found to include pleasure for the caregiver as he or she enjoys watching others,

has fun, spends quality time with children and prepares children for formal school routines in non-stressful ways (Ghoting & Martin-Diaz, 2006). To accommodate socialisation needs, looser library policies on noise and food in contemporary libraries allow parents/carers and young children to be loud and messy in the library. Neuman et al. (2017) additionally notes that putting the children's area away from the adult area could reduce anxiety about children making too much noise.

Among families who may or may not be regular library users, it has been proposed that accessing library programs is easier for those who do not live with financial and social stress than it is for families whose lives are consumed with daily worries (Bendickson, 2020; Manz et al., 2010; Melhuish et al., 2008). It may also be easier for families who already enjoy reading, talking, reciting nursery rhymes and playing together (Allen, 2011; Diamant-Cohen, 2020; Prendergast, 2011; Tayler et al., 2016; Trelease, 1982), especially when compared to families who find no value in 'old fashioned' nursery rhymes and stories (Kropp, 2013; Teager et al., 2019). It has been found that interventions may be less successful if they fail to take such characteristics into account (McManus & Suizzo, 2020), or alternatively fail to remember that children from wealthy families may be as vulnerable to emotional neglect as children from poorer families (Palmer, 2016).

Libraries' role in contemporary life has been described as building the social capital that makes the difference between a community that thrives and one that struggles (Walljasper in Dudley, 2013, p.1). However, libraries can only stimulate social capital and community enrichment if underlying problems are considered and ameliorated, including loneliness, social isolation and parenting anxieties (Dalmer et al., 2022). The problem of loneliness (Train et al., 2000) is seen to be growing at a disquieting rate in particular for new mothers who are facing increased workforce participation, increased geographic mobility and increased distance from family members. They may also be single parents/carers with minimal social support (Hancock et al., 2015). However, parents/carers who attend library storytimes may find the sessions can help them to develop social skills to support their children's early learning (Jana, 2017). Contrary to possible parental fears, direct teaching of reading to their children is unnecessary, while

providing a positive learning environment, engaging in shared book reading, and singing, reading or playing with their children are consistently encouraged (Neuman et al., 2007).

2.3 Evaluation of library based early language and literacy programs, activities and resources

Children's library staff are described as entertainers in the compulsory Working with Children Check in Western Australia (<https://workingwithchildren.wa.gov.au>). Labelling staff as entertainers rather than as educators may indicate that their literacy role is undervalued, and a lack of robust evidence about the outcomes of library based early childhood language and literacy programs, activities and resources is implicated. Improvements in children's language and literacy following library engagement are infrequently quantified (Campana et al., 2016; Djonov et al., 2018; Stooke & McKenzie, 2011) and evidence about the outcomes of library work remains an under-researched concern. Cahill et al. (2020) correspondingly advise that "one of the critical challenges facing public libraries is the lack of recognition for the work they do and their importance to the communities they serve" (p.2), with reports about libraries' lack of recognition and of evaluation permeating the literature for decades (Dowd, 1997; McDermott, 2019; Smardo, 1980). Further, there is no current Western Australian data about the economic value delivered by libraries through their support of children's language and literacy (SLWA, 2022) and while evaluation of library work has been explored by economist James Heckman (2022) in his research on *The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program*, more remains to be done.

Inadequate or absent evaluation of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources is common, especially for those targeted at the birth to three years' age group (Campana et al., 2016; Lance & Marks, 2008; Sensenig, 2011). Most studies begin from age three or older, including Australia's longitudinal study *Effective Early Education Experiences* (Tayler, 2016), while pedagogies and evaluations for under-five-year-olds are not covered by either the AEDC (AEDC, 2018), or the State Library of Western Australia's literacy framework (Anderson et al., 2014). According to Wise (2005) there is limited information about effectiveness of early childhood programs, activities and resources currently provided in Australia, while the difficulties of assessing language

and literacy teaching in a complex environment have been found to be an ongoing issue (Chaitow et al., 2022).

In the absence of evaluative techniques for understanding how families perceive and benefit from libraries' early language and literacy programs, activities and resources, researchers suggest that they may be perceived as, or be, ineffective (Campana, et al., 2016; Clark, 2016; Schmidt & Hamilton, 2017a). As advised by Burnett et al. (2020) a lack of recognition of libraries' language and literacy input is unlikely to improve without measurable outcomes and quantifiable evidence being made available to the political and financial sectors. Advocates for clear measurement allege that judgment about library impacts can best be made using hard data (Paley et al., 2015), and the State Library of Western Australia (2022) has called for research and data to inform stakeholders of the social impact and economic value of library services. However, when seeking suitable assessment strategies, Burnett et al. (2020) warn that evaluations should not be too narrowly based on numerical measurements and linear logic, as such methods may prevent capture of libraries' holistic innovations and interventions. Cox (2000) has additionally advocated for evaluation that is not based solely on economic criteria, while Djonov et al. (2018) reinforce the idea of assessment that looks at the whole person and context. Djonov et al. (2018) advocate for greater awareness of the broad, socially based nature of libraries' support for early language and literacy learning. In recent developments, DeLeon (2021) describes how libraries have been used in work on the concept of Social Return on Investment (SROI) as an alternative method of evaluation. However, it is noted that SROI does not cover specific language and literacy outcomes such as improved vocabulary, phonological awareness or book knowledge.

To improve the current single-strand assessment method of counting the number of library visitors or library program attendees, Campana et al. (2016) have developed a strategy which involves a multi-pronged tool for use by library staff in the USA. The tool consists of asking staff to note changes to children's behaviour following attendance at library activities, as well as using reflective practice and peer mentoring techniques to assess possible impacts. In comparison, in Canada, Peterson et al. (2012) have promoted observational techniques as a useful assessment tool, followed by detailed word-by-

word analysis relating to specified early language and literacy skills of print motivation, phonological awareness, narrative skills, print awareness, letter knowledge and vocabulary. Analysis by Peterson et al. (2012) has been singular in its ability to describe changes to children's knowledge of vocabulary and the sounds of language, along with noting their attention spans, participation rates and changes to disruptive behaviours during multiple *Storytime* attendances.

Research on how storytimes can support language and literacy learning is increasing incrementally. Studies have investigated how storytimes can encourage children to listen, ask questions, take turns, follow instructions and other perform other regular social skills (Maclean, 2008). These studies have been augmented by research in Campana et al.'s book *Supercharged Storytimes* (2015) which aims to strengthen understanding of libraries' early language and literacy inputs and impact. While the authors begin by questioning "is it even possible to create valid and reliable instruments that can measure effectiveness of public library storytimes?" (Campana et al., 2015, p. ix) the authors continue with information about why recording language and literacy progress should become a priority for library programs. Recommendations for how to achieve practical measures of effectiveness include library inputs such as sessions being interactive and staff being intentional with their language and literacy information (Diamant-Cohen & Goldsmith, 2016). They also include staff actively detecting and recording behaviour changes in both adults and children, staff reflecting on how activities were sent and received, and staff consistently considering if activities have made a difference (McDermott, 2019). In concert with *Supercharged Storytimes*, a large-scale three-year project called *Valuable Initiatives in Early learning that Work Successfully 2* (VIEWS2. Weebly.com) involves a systematic study of library based storytimes to discover their impact on early language and literacy. Based in an American context, VIEWS2 aims to model simple behaviours for librarians, educators and parents/carers to increase the language and literacy effectiveness of their shared reading, storytimes and daily interactions with young children. Also in the USA, the Public Libraries Association (PLA) has developed a program called *Project Outcome* (www.ala.org/pla/data/performance measurement) which includes a practical toolkit of

surveys and processes for measuring and analysing outcomes, along with providing resources and training support for library staff. Information from both VIEWS2's Program Evaluation Tool ((VIEWS2.weebly.com) and *Project Outcome* (www.ala.org/pla/data/performance) may be transferable to Australian libraries if local contexts and variances are considered.

With an increasing call for formal measurement, professional library associations internationally and nationally have been developing guidelines for evaluative practices through formal strategic documents. These include work by IFLA and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), as well as through the *National Early Language and Literacy Strategy* (NELLS) strategy specific to Australia. Australian experts are also developing a world-first Early Language and Literacy Development Index (ELLDI) (<https://alnf.org.au>) as an assessment tool for young children (Keenan, 2022), while an Australian pilot study conducted in 2020 has measured engagement and impact of early childhood programs through qualitative and quantitative analysis (Qayyum et al., 2020). Further, library professionals in the Australian State of Victoria have created a program to improve evaluations in libraries for financial, advocacy and educational reasons (Phillips, 2018). In the resultant report titled *Reading and Literacy for All* (Phillips, 2018) authors provide an impact-evaluation framework for use in libraries of all sizes. They advise that services should be able to identify measurable educational indicators, at the same time as taking care to remain relevant when library data is assessed according to conventional measures.

Phillips' (2018) evaluative framework is comprehensive and detailed, including advice that libraries need to remain consistent with established requirements and philosophies of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia (AGDE, 2022). While Phillips appears to concentrate on library service input rather than on specific language and literacy outcomes, opportunities to modify the proposed processes according to local needs may be possible. Phillips advises, however, that it is important to remember that early childhood activities exist in a multifaceted and changeable context, and that libraries are just one agency among many, thus cautioning against over-stated outcomes for libraries.

In Western Australia, robust outcomes-based research has until now been limited. One exception to this limitation is an evaluation by Barratt-Pugh and Maloney (2015) of Western Australia's *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program*. Barratt-Pugh and Maloney's study provides evidence of the language and literacy effects of *Better Beginnings* including the following benefits:

A significant outcome of this initial family literacy program was the positive impact on mothers' confidence in sharing books with their child, the increased interaction and communication with their child, and the recognition of the importance of sharing books and its impact on their child's early literacy development ... (also) parents' need for continued support of their children's reading and literacy development. (p.364)

Through these and future studies, improved evaluative practices for library based language and literacy programs are being sought (Cahill et al, 2020; Peterson et al., 2012; Wise, 2020). Evaluations may enhance library based language and literacy work, and ensure that library staff who work with young families remain "heroic and large" to small children (Raphael, 2020, para.17).

The role of public libraries in working with children and parents/carers for the benefit of their language and literacy learning is specified for libraries internationally by IFLA (IFLA, 2018). Some ways in which countries are working with this opportunity as defined by IFLA are given in the next part of this report.

3. Public libraries and early language and literacy around the world

There are approximately 320,000 public libraries worldwide in countries that are impoverished as well as those that are wealthy (Kosciejew, 2020). The following-section describes some of the library services and early language and literacy programs that are currently provided in the USA, Canada, Ireland, Norway and other countries.

3.1 United States of America (USA)

American libraries have been placed in a central role in early childhood learning through the high profile *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR) project (ALSC, 2011). ECRR has

involved families of all backgrounds, races, incomes and education levels since 2004, with more than 6,000 libraries encouraging the development of early language and literacy skills by reaching out to their local communities (Campana et al., 2018).

Assessment of the ECRR program reveals specific details about libraries:

This research has significant implications for teaching and our focus on the skills necessary for children to read. It suggests that although letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and concepts of print are initially important and should be taught, they lead only to temporary gains on skills, and do not predict long-term outcomes. The critical skills are vocabulary, comprehension, and background knowledge—skills that take more time to teach and review and these skills should be a major focus in helping children learn how to read.

(Neuman & Celano, 2017, p.7)

ECRR's five practices of talking, reading, playing, singing and writing with young children are now behind many library based early language and literacy programs (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians [ASCEL], 2015; Swain & Cara, 2017). Likewise, Mother Goose on the Loose [MGOL] that began 40 years ago (Diament-Cohen, 2006 & 2019) repeats findings that singing rhymes and songs in a nurturing environment can help infants with oral language. New programs such as *Hatchlings* (<https://mgol.net/mgol-hatchlings>) and *Talking is Teaching* (<https://www.talkingisteachingtulsa.com>) offer informal learning supports to expectant families in public libraries (Helmstetter, 2022) along with connections between parents/carers, infants, books, stories and songs. Further, calls have been made to increase funding for the ECEC sector in the USA (Sojourner, 2021) suggesting increasing awareness of the importance of children's first years.

The USA additionally hosts a unique philanthropic agency that has been found to be making a measurable difference to language and literacy in young families. The agency is the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) which gifts books to children in the USA and other parts of the world. DPIL has given over 150 million developmentally appropriate and diverse books world-wide, providing home-based support before children's

transition to formal schooling ([https:// imagination library.com/news](https://imaginationlibrary.com/news)). Analysis of DPIL (Waldron, 2018) and similar programs has shown that children who receive free books have better letter identification, print and text knowledge, illustration orientation, and word and letter orientation than children who do not receive such materials. Waldron (2018) found that reading stories to children had a strong influence on their literacy knowledge and provided a solid foundation for later early language and literacy skills and learning strategies. This finding is similarly applicable to library storytime outcomes when children engage with books and stories on a regular basis, assisted by caring adults (McKechnie et al., 2019).

While the presence of libraries is well known, and many residents hold library cards (Oliphant, 2014) there are gaps in library membership and use. To ameliorate the effects of membership gaps, libraries in the USA have been experimenting by taking services out into the community, such as through *Books on Buses* and *Storybook Land* trucks (Zukoski & Luluquisen, 2006). One library program for under-served communities is storytimes at laundromats, which have been funded by an IMLS grant of USD248,000 (Andrzejewski, 2021). The laundromat storytime program has proved successful in increasing the amount of time young children in these places spend on literacy activities. Further examples of regular language and literacy based programs offered by New York City libraries are shown in Appendix A.

3.2 Canada

A whole-child approach to Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been long established in Canada, where policies are informed by comprehensive data from a national index similar to Australia's AEDC (Kerai et al., 2021). Public libraries are included in this holistic approach, with a report titled *Public Libraries as a Hub for Early Childhood Development* (PolicyWise, 2017) advising that libraries are a central hub for early literacy, early childhood development and young families. This has been achieved by libraries offering a broad array of learning and literacy activities, programs, services and events for children and their families (Peterson et al., 2012; PolicyWise, 2017;).

Early language and literacy engagement is well represented in Canadian libraries, including offering a unique drop-in program for families with children between the ages of birth and four years, and closely partnering with infant development services (PolicyWise, 2017). Further, librarians in Vancouver created an evidence-based program called the *Early Years Community Program* which was a strengths-based language and literacy platform that targeted the multicultural nature and SES diversity of Vancouver's communities (Prendergast, 2011). Prendergast notes that qualitative assessment over the ten-year life of the program indicated that increasing value is being placed on literacy, language and learning as a result of engaging with the Early Years Community Program. Programs for children and parents/carers in Canada continue to be developed and provided by proactive Canadian public libraries, with paediatricians referring families to libraries to encourage engagement in richer and frequent language and literacy practices (<https://cps.ca/en/statgeic-priorities/literacy>) Canadian libraries also offer the *Calgary Reads* program (<https://calgaryreads.com>) and the *Grow a Reader App* ([grow-a-reader/id1580126016](https://grow-a-reader.id1580126016)) (Palmer, 2022). Finally, Canadian libraries are educating parents/carers in play-based learning with their children, endeavouring to overcome misunderstandings and underutilisation of play in children's oral language learning (Wartman, 2012; Wilson-Scorgie, 2022). A selection of early childhood language and literacy based programs offered by public libraries in Canada are shown in Appendix A.

3.3 Europe

Countries including Belgium, Germany, Holland, Portugal, Sweden and the UK are active in early childhood language and literacy learning through library based national book-gifting programs (Adenfelt et al., 2021; Egan et al., 2020; Hedemark, 2017). Programs include *Bookbabies* in Belgium (www.ibby.org), *Buchstart* in Germany (www.buchstart.ch), *Bogstart* in Denmark (<https://slks.dk>) and *Boekenpret (Fun with Books)* (<https://boekstartpro.nl>) in Holland. The UK was one of the first countries to develop such a program, with The Literacy Trust's *Bookstart* program (www.booktrust.org.uk) becoming a model for comparable programs across the world since 1992. In Portugal, authorities have gone one step further by developing libraries specifically for babies called *Bebetecas* which have furnishings, facilities and resources for children from ages birth to six (Ramos, 2012).

In Britain, libraries offered some basic, if strict, literacy services to youngsters from the early 1900s, and by the 1920s they were becoming proactive in supporting children's language and literacy (Bamkin et al., 2013; Black, 2001). From the 1950s, understanding of the potential educative role of library storytimes was growing, and literacy-focused story hours became a first step in an early education role (Albright et al., 2009). In the 2000s promotion of the importance of children's early years expanded considerably. This included sponsorship by the Duchess of Cambridge of the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood (<https://royalfoundation.com>) and an early childhood initiative called *Tiny Happy People* which adds highlights to the role of libraries for the under-fives. With the tag line 'Your words building their world' the initiative aims to help parents/carers with children's communication skills, including through use of free public libraries (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>). A selection of common early childhood programs offered by public libraries in Europe is detailed in Appendix A.

3.4 Other countries

Seventy percent of the world's 400,000 public libraries are in developing or transitioning countries (IFLA, 2018) where an average of 14% of the population is illiterate (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2018). While improvements have been made in early language and literacy in the last decade, UNESCO acknowledges that gaps still exist in many countries (<https://learningportal.iiep.unesco>). For the youngest members of under-resourced populations, IFLA offers the following advice from its *Report on the Futures of Education*:

Early childhood education is achieved together – and the youngest learners and their families can benefit when day-care centres, libraries, museums, community centres and parks are well-funded and treated as essential public services. For libraries, this is especially important (in) the critical role of building literacy and reading skills in young learners. (<https://www.ifla.org/news/the-unesco-general-conference-recognising-libraries-as-partners-in-culture-education-and-access-to-information>, 2021, para 7)

In comparison to IFLA's strategic advice, an opinion piece from The Guardian newspaper speculates on proactive work by libraries in developing countries. The piece both asks

and answers the question *Why public libraries?* when considering how to promote education and basic literacy. The answer given is as follows:

First of all, they already exist. It's that simple. Public libraries, whatever the level of their funding, are physical spaces that are incorporated into government frameworks and strategies. They have dedicated, ongoing budgets for staff and information resources and a positive feeling across communities that their potential could be unlocked with greater government attention. Publicly supported libraries offer sustainability that narrow, project-focused approaches do not. Public libraries increasingly offer public access to the internet and all of the information resources it can provide. This is fundamental to understanding the potential they offer in terms of empowering people to meet their information needs (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/mar/12>, para.3).

Raising public awareness as in this media article is perhaps a proactive step in encouraging formal research and development in the field, with urgency added by UNESCO's advice that an ability to read could lift more than 170 million people out of poverty (Krolak, 2005). However, for this to be successful, family interactions with relevant services are required, and reduction of barriers to library use as experienced across the different nations of the world is necessary.

4. Public libraries in Australia

4.1 Background

An Australian study of 10,000 library users in 2005 indicates libraries are viewed as having the widest role of all studied agencies, along with having the greatest actual and potential impact on the community (Bundy, 2005). Since that study, libraries have consistently increased their capabilities, including Djonov et al. (2018) advising that Australian public libraries have recently promoted a greater focus on early language and literacy learning. Libraries have been found to deliver a four-to-one return on the annual AUD1 billion cost of delivering the service (McDougall & Finney, 2017), with funding from government sources providing diverse library programs and resources.

In Western Australia, libraries are well used, with 11 million visits annually to 233 public libraries spread across 2.6 million square kilometres (SLWA, 2022). Advocacy for libraries' educational directive in Western Australia has been included in a comprehensive report called *Future Considerations* written by the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA, 2015). This report (WALGA, 2015) is the result of consultations by independent researchers concerning library services in Western Australia in the years ahead up until 2025. The authors advise that public libraries are set to continue playing a key role in supporting language, literacy and learning during this time. Nevertheless, despite promotion of this role by WALGA, it has been found that libraries' capacities and inputs have consistently been under-reported (Campana et al., 2016; Cox, 2000; McKend, 2010; Sensenig, 2012). Under-reporting has been intensified by research about public libraries emanating from the UK, USA and Canada rather than from Australia (Bundy, 2005) and due to poor reporting, neither libraries' changing nature, nor their growing language and literacy role appear to be well understood by funders or politicians (ALIA, 2014b; Colab, 2018b). Poor perceptions persist, and although modern libraries continually transform themselves to stay relevant (Chelliah, 2017; Goulding, 2006; Leorke et al., 2018; Massis, 2008) the popular myth of severe cardigan-clad librarians presiding over irrelevant and unused libraries remains (McKechnie et al., 2006). For example, Ferguson (2007) reported 15 years ago that an obstinate belief that libraries were quiet, staid and relaxing was misleading, while Bundy (2009) claimed that potential library users being unable to enjoy a good coffee at their library was already outdated.

In contrast to perceptions of staid and unchanging services, libraries in 21st Century Australia have instead exhibited a variety of new roles. As they transform from quiet warehouses of books into active community spaces (Field & Tran, 2018; O'Hehir & Reynolds, 2015) they have become a place to play (Bastiansen & Wharton, 2015; Bateman, 2023; Colliver et al., 2020; Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018), a safe place to meet (Bishop, 2016; Cox, 2000), a place to be social (Delica & Elbeshausen, 2017) and a place to go with the family (Lopez et al., 2016; Ramos & Vila, 2015). Library spaces are regarded as integral to smart cities as place for social gathering, learning opportunities and various forms of creativity (Leorke et al., 2018). Additionally, the roles that libraries

now play are indicated in some places through rebranding as Knowledge Centres, Ideas Stores and Community Hubs.

Along with these recently developed roles, libraries' traditionally-established roles and provision of children's services have developed in quality and quantity over the past 50 years. Progress was initiated in the 1980s when the potential value of early language and literacy programs rose in response to needs of the emerging knowledge economy (Bentley & Savage, 2017; Economic Intelligence Unit, 2012). An associated need for community-based programs is more recently being investigated to improve accessible and affordable Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] in Australia (ABS, 2017). One recent response to this this urgent need in Australia is a *Starting Better* Guarantee (Centre for Policy Development, 2021) which would initiate an annual investment into ECEC of AUD2 billion, rising to AUD20 billion by 2030. The guarantee would deliver expansion opportunities for early childhood services, along with financial and political support for community services such as library programs (Williams, 2021).

A strong public profile for the *Starting Better* campaign may helpfully support the Australian Library and Information Association's *Early Literacy Framework* (ALIA, 2014a), which has been unobtrusively co-ordinating and creating early childhood language and literacy services for nearly a decade. However, including libraries in the strategic educational planning for under school-age children which these activities are aiming for has yet to be achieved (Leorke et al., 2018), and to improve libraries' visibility calls have been made from researchers and practitioners for a national strategy to support young children's learning (Quach et al., 2017). This may include extending the collection of robust evidence that accurately describes children's early language and literacy learning in real-world conditions (Quach et al., 2017), described as follows:

Library based approaches and experiences have been developed based on existing evidence about how child emergent language and literacy skills can be improved by improving the quality and quantity of a child's reading interactions and difference uses of literacy skills. However, robust studies are required in which libraries are used as a platform for delivering evidence-based approaches

to fully understand the impact and outcomes on child early language and literacy outcomes. (p.12)

Although library profiles are gradually improving, and large numbers of people attend libraries, professionals working in the library field face problems that prevent swifter development (Barclay, 2017; National and State Libraries Australia [NSLA], 2020). Library progress is seen to be hindered by inconsistent library funding (ALIA, 2014a; O’Hehir & Reynolds, 2015), concern about dwindling levels of library professionals (ALIA, 2014b) and inadequate promotion of library activities (Lockyer-Benzie, 2004; Rosenfeldt et al., 2014). Further, the problem of engaging families who do not see early language and literacy value in libraries (Sullivan, 2015) and the difficulty of demonstrating the impact of libraries’ light-touch, non-intrusive interventions are issues yet to be successfully addressed (Zubrick, 2018). How library staff, storytimes and books aim to achieve this in contemporary Australian contexts is described in the following section.

4.2 Foundations of Australian library based early language and literacy services

Demand for early childhood services is continual, with 300,000 births annually across Australia, and 34,000 in Western Australia (ABS, 2021). Western Australia is currently home to more than 600,000 children (Commissioner for Children and Young People [CCYP], 2013) including 207,000 under the age of five. This is 8% of the state’s population (Cassells et al., 2020). To encourage and monitor positive development of these large numbers of children, AEDC evidence has been used to initiate the creation of library based early childhood language and literacy programs such as Western Australia’s *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* (<https://slwa.wa.gov.au/learning/literacy/better-beginnings>) as well as South Australia’s *Raising Literacy* program (<https://raisingliteracy.org.au>). It has also provided a wealth of accurate and accessible data to reinforce ongoing professional development in libraries and other early education agencies, with an aim of offering public support for families and giving children a strong start.

Libraries can find support for their language and literacy work in ALIA’s nationwide library-specific *Early Literacy Framework* (<https://read.alia.org.au>) in conjunction with

using AEDC evidence when developing children's programs. ALIA includes information about the following aspects of libraries:

By comparison with other service providers, including Council children's services, Playgroups, kindergartens, childcare centres, government and non-government early literacy initiatives, only libraries provide all five of these aspects to their service:

1. Physical space that can be shared by other organizations.
2. Programs - rhymes and stories.
3. Resources - books, CDs, DVDs, reading lists.
4. Activities and events, both regular and one-off.
5. Early literacy focus and expertise. (ALIA, 2014a, p.3)

Library staff also have access to the national Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (AGDE, 2022) which is a comprehensive resource for planning and scaffolding early childhood language and literacy programs. The recently updated EYLF document gives some attention to infants and under two year olds, offering broad pedagogical approaches to young children's learning. For library staff who may be new to the field of early childhood education, including working with pre-verbal and newly verbal babies and toddlers, this information may be helpful.

Children under three years old could helpfully be provided with a precise pedagogy that is distinct from that of children of three and over, as advised by Davis et al. (2015). Davis et al. (2015) assert that since library programs often work with under-two-year-olds and their families, determining what such a pedagogy might consist of could require thorough practical study, plus examination of early childhood curricula in other countries. Research on pedagogies for under three-year-olds has been found to be taking place in ECEC centres internationally, providing evidence of positive linguistic outcomes from deliberate language and literacy programs for children as young as 15 months (Barnes, 2011).

In Australia, informal investigations of suitable learning practices for infants are based on daily experiences in ECEC centres. These practices are described as promoting a culture of care for children within suitable social and physical environments rather than emphasising curriculum content, lesson planning or direct teaching (Clark, 2020). Clark encourages storytelling as a learning strategy for the under-three age group and advises staff to make sure that joy is paramount in any language and literacy activities with small children (Clark, 2020). In addition to ensuring joy and enjoyment for all participants, early childhood language and literacy programs were found to be increasingly constructed to work with both adults and children, rather than solely with children (WALGA, 2015). Programs were further based on a premise that all families can benefit from support in the early years of children's lives, not just families who are struggling with language and literacy progress or with general life circumstances (Zubrick et al, 2015).

Notwithstanding the acknowledged importance of early years' learning, the problem of unrecognised teaching and learning in libraries has existed for over a decade. Strempel noted in 2009 that libraries' educational work is largely unrecognised, and that:

One gets the feeling that perhaps the work done by public libraries with children in *Storytime* sessions, baby bounce and rhyme etc. are viewed as merely a form of public entertainment rather than as the educational activities that they are ... Rather than being merely ways of keeping children occupied these programs, activities, services and collections are professionally designed and formulated to promote and develop the literacy acquisition of children of all ages. Importantly these programs also include support and training for parents and caregivers to provide them with the tools to build their child's literacy and, importantly, a love of reading. (p.36)

Nevertheless, even if the educational work of libraries is unrecognised (Cook & Farmer, 2011) statistical evidence indicates keen family attendance at library programs for young children (NSLA, 2020). This attendance at libraries has been described as one way to support family provision of high quality home learning environments (Schmidt &

Hamilton, 2017a) and, consequently, research has been conducted about libraries' adaptation of children's programs in varied contemporary circumstances. With an aim to become an avenue for people of all backgrounds and with differing needs (O'Hehir & Reynolds, 2015), studies have included library use for children living with disabilities (Kaeding et al., 2017), experiencing social or financial disadvantage (Taylor et al., 2016), from multiple cultures (Sullivan, 2015) or who are very young (Barratt-Pugh & Maloney, 2015; Djonov et al., 2018).

Increasing attention to library based learning practices for the very young was shown in a first Australian *National Early Literacy Summit* in Canberra in 2016 (www.alia.org.au/web/events). At this peak event, libraries around the country were described as building innovative services, strengthening community connections and developing fresh partnerships (ALIA, 2016). As an illustration of these activities, a review by Djonov et al. in 2018 described libraries' multiple roles as follows:

1. Having a unique capacity to promote and support early language and literacy.
2. Providing a welcoming learning environment for all children and their families.
3. Offering free access to a diverse and curated selection of books and other resources.
4. Promoting a love of reading, books and knowledge in young children and their families.
5. Hosting information sessions about early language and literacy starting at birth.
6. Reaching disadvantaged communities and encouraging family engagement.

(p.53)

This wide-ranging work by Djonov et al. (2018) complements research that has investigated how early language and literacy can be further boosted in libraries. This includes building strong inter-personal relationships with families, encouraging lifestyle activities such as free play (Colliver et al., 2020), listening to music (Kimura, 2006; Nayak et al., 2021), and promoting multisensory engagement and embodied learning through movement (Brough, 2016; Deotto, 2018; Diamant-Cohen, 2020; Eade, 2022). In addition, researchers have investigated how to enhance libraries' engagement with schools,

health programs, welfare groups, community organizations and other agencies, as well as how to promote closer alignment between Western Australia's *Structural Reform of Public Library Services* and strategic priorities of the Western Australian state government (Chelliah, 2017).

Libraries' roles are seen to be increasing, and their influence accordingly mounting (Davies, 2017; Madureira, 2016; Mertens et al., 2018; Northern Territory Library, 2017; Pascal & Bertram, 2016). They demonstrate positive language and literacy strategies for young families (Shuey & Kankaraš, 2018), as well as connect with at-risk families, provide resources, and model pro-social behaviours (Gilley et al., 2015). It has been suggested that without this type of assistance for families, adverse social impacts may increase and an extensive financial cost of AUD13 billion be incurred for managing children who are experiencing multiple disadvantage (Cassells et al., 2020; Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2014). However, while Maas et al. (2013) advise that policy makers need current information and evidence about what libraries deliver and achieve in the early language and literacy field, such information and evidence is currently limited, with studies referencing public library use in passing or not at all (Brough, 2016; Gilley et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2015).

4.3 Library based language and literacy programs and activities for young children

Seven million young children attend a quarter of a million library based programs delivered annually throughout Australia (NSLA, 2020) with public libraries consistently developing innovative programs and formats in response to varying local conditions. Described as a "plethora of family literacy activities" (Hill & Diamond, 2013, p.1), programs encompass varied designs from language and literacy-specific sessions where overt tips are given on vocabulary development and sound-discrimination (Rankin, 2016), to social gatherings of parents/carers and babies (Lucas, 2013; Pahl & Allen, 2011; Smith, 2008).

Around Western Australia, libraries offer regular children's programs as part of their Local Government Authority's (LGA) early childhood policy environments, with the most common events being *Storytime* for toddlers and *Rhymetime* for babies. Nationwide,

names for programs vary creatively, such as *Wriggle Giggle Read* for small children in New South Wales (Horgan, 2014), *Nurserytime* for parents/carers of babies up to twelve months in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Library, 2017), *Babies who Read Succeed* in Tasmania (ALIA, 2005), *Baby Bounce* for ages birth to two years in South Australia (Libraries South Australia, 2020) and *Lapsit*, a birth to three-year-old outreach program, also in South Australia (Hill & Diamond, 2013). The Queensland State Library has been proactive in developing programs outside library walls, including *Dive into Books* held at community swimming pools, *Storytime in the Park* with a nature-themed program followed by morning tea, and *Tails and Trails* with enlarged story book pages spread along a nature boardwalk to encourage reading in an outdoor setting (IFLA Newsletter, Spring 2022). Further, an internationally developed program called *The Reading Rover* that could be helpful for remote communities in Western Australia offers an opportunity for children to gain pre-literacy skills. *Reading Rover* has a library staff member trained in early language and literacy visiting community spaces in a brightly decorated van to bring books and other resources, and to tell stories (Sullivan, 2015). Finally, at a regional library in an area of fast population growth, the meeting rooms have recently been set aside to act as a Child Health Centre, with families encouraged to explore early childhood language and literacy resources and activities when they visit for their children's regular health checks (Munday, 2022).

Storytime sessions have been described in the literature in terms of their ability to offer holistic language and literacy support, and in dedicated literacy-enhanced storytimes this support is planned, informative and deliberate. For example, storytimes can model the inclusion of singing (Joo et al., 2021; Nayak et al., 2021; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002), movement (Crisp, 2017), yoga (Scherrer, 2017) and play (Kurt et al., 2010) to promote language and literacy learning. The City of Wanneroo (2017) has built sessions with high language and literacy content through development of a package of library based activities for its youngest residents, comprising *It's All About Play*, *It's All About Rhymes*, *It's All About Stories* and *Sing With Me*. Other libraries provide bi-lingual board books to entice Aboriginal or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families (Northern Territory Library, 2017), while the State Library of Western Australia encourages *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS), science-related storytimes with language

learning based around Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) topics, and *Indigenous Storytimes* (<https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au>) using culturally appropriate language. A further example of creative efforts to encourage engagement in early language and literacy was launched in South Australia in October 2022. With the tag line *Words Grow Minds* (<https://wordsgrowminds.com.au>) the program aims to promote a simple and consistent message across a variety of agencies, of which public libraries are one.

To expand the current array of early language and literacy programs, Djonov et al. (2018), encourage libraries to collaborate with other organizations. They suggest taking storytimes to places outside the library such as ECEC centres, shopping centres and playgrounds to attract hard-to-reach families (Djonov et al., 2018). Hard-to-reach families may include those struggling financially, families who speak languages other than English, and families for whom libraries and reading are not part of their family culture. It is alternatively argued it may be the libraries that are hard to reach rather than the families (McDonald, 2010; Rankin & Brock, 2015), suggesting staff may need to reflect on how accessible or otherwise their children's services are in practice. This may include consideration of whether the library building and library staff appear intimidating, unfamiliar or inconvenient to some families.

While adverse feelings such as these remain about libraries and their staff, some persistent myths have been overcome in Western Australia through a free program that has succeeded in reaching over 90% of young children in the state. This is the award winning *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* which is described in the next section of this report.

The Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program

The *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* is an early literacy program in Western Australia that runs within library buildings as well as out in the community. The program involves gifting bags containing high quality children's books and parent-directed language and literacy information to young families, along with work carried out on a regular basis at public libraries. Local libraries deliver *Better Beginnings* in varied ways

according to needs of their communities, contacting families, Playgroups, ECEC centres and schools to offer *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* and other events. The program's provision of books and information conforms to findings of research from the USA that book-gifting needs accompaniment by extensive adult input (Neuman et al., 2017) if it is to achieve sound outcomes. In a similar manner to *Better Beginnings*, there are examples of support for community-based language and literacy developments around the States of Australia. Developments include the State Library of Queensland's *First Five Forever* program (<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/first5forever>), the Minderoo Foundation's *Thrive by Five* initiative in Western Australia (<https://thrivebyfive.org.au>), a recently completed *National Early Language and Literacy Strategy* (NELLS) (<https://earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au>) and continuing government reviews of early childhood policies (<https://www.dese.gov.au/education-ministers-meeting/resources>).

4.4 Home Learning Environments, reading and libraries

An area of both potential and challenge in children's early language and literacy learning is the home (Burgess et al., 2002). Children's homes are where the perceptual, auditory, visual and language skills needed for reading develop in the years before school (Duncan et al. 2022; Elliott, 2006; Prior & Gerard, 2007). Necessary skills include self-regulation, attention, motivation, reasoning and general cognition (Alvarado, 2022; Hoyne & Egan, 2022; Rosenkoetter & Knapp-Philo, 2006; Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2008).

Research about children's Home Learning Environments (HLEs) ranges across social, psychological, educational, health and welfare questions (Hutton et al., 2015; Neuman & Celano, 2009) and discussion is continuing around which elements of HLEs provide greatest language and literacy assistance. A sample of such elements include the attitudes and beliefs of children's carers, learning opportunities the HLE may or may not offer, adult receptiveness to a child's expressions, and involvement with language and literacy based activities (Baker & Sher, 2010; Cohrssen et al., 2018; Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Hartas, 2010; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002; Yu & Daraganova, 2014). Fikrat-Wevers et al. (2021) advise that parents'/carers' sensitivity and responsiveness are essential for effective language and literacy support, and they caution against potential adverse effects of negative experiences. Similarly, Cheung et al. (2022) describe a need

for affectionate bonds to be built between adults and the young children in their care for language and literacy learning to take place.

Along with family bonds, HLEs may include the amount of time children voluntarily spend on language and literacy activities (Johnson et al., 2008; Kaderavek & Justice, 2002), how often they are sung to and played with (ASCEL, 2015; Prendergast, 2011), effects of the influx of multi-media (Liu & Li, 2022), the number and quality of out-of-home activities, the amount of time adults and children spend watching television (Djonov et al., 2018) and the age that shared reading began (Lenhart et al., 2021). In terms of resources, HLE may include the number of children's books in the home, the number of total books in the home, the number of craft materials, writing materials, games, equipment and types of toys (Manz et al., 2010; Weigel et al., 2006). Parental knowledge of language and literacy and how it develops during children's early years may be considered, as well as practical knowledge of how to make use of free print resources in the child's daily environment (Doig, 1992; Pearson, 2016; Saxby, 1997; Tayler, 2016). Finally, use of strategies such as dialogic reading and the building of strong three-way interactions between child, books and adult may be included (Turner, 2009). Given how comprehensive this list of HLE elements is, extricating which elements most support language and literacy learning, and which elements have less effect, requires robust, longitudinal investigation.

Reading books to children is noted reliably in the literature as a core feature of language and literacy support in the home. Evidence concerning the importance of reading to children is supported by Niklas et al. (2016) who conclude that, irrespective of the family's status, reading to children when they are young is beneficial, and the sooner the better. Parents/carers were found to begin reading to their children before they turned one, demonstrating a preference as they did so for printed storybooks rather than electronic texts (Nicholas & Paatsch, 2021). Yu and Daraganova (2014) describe how reading to children during their early years positively influences reading competency, vocabulary, comprehension and expressive language skills in children as young as 18 months, regardless of family background. Finally, Yeo et al. (2014) discovered a significant relationship between HLE and reading interest, concluding that family

language and literacy activities and beliefs about reading have strong connections to children's reading skills and motivation.

While it is understood that no single context is accountable for early learning outcomes, the input of caring adults is considered essential (Edwards, 2014; Horowitz-Kraus et al., 2017; Moss, 2016; Niklas & Schneider, 2012; Robinson et al., 2016; Tayler, 2016), along with provision of good nutrition, adequate sleep and regular physical activity (Shuey & Kankaraš, 2018). An explanation of this idea was given 15 years ago when it was proposed that parental involvement in their children's language and literacy practices may be a more powerful influence than family background, family size, socio-economic status or level of parental education (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

The concept of optimal parental involvement provides rich opportunities for libraries to assist families with their language and literacy learning. growth over the past decade in research, interventions and services to support children's early years has included the implementation of family language and literacy programs (Bann et al., 2016; Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021; Hill & Diamond, 2013; Jones, 2014), the development of integrated child health programs (Pedroso et al., 2021) and the identification of risk factors (Taylor et al., 2016). Variety of provision for early childhood language and literacy support includes library based programs and interactions with children's Home Learning Environments (HLEs). Engagement with library based programs by families with young children may either be impeded by barriers perceived and experienced by the public or supported by positive factors of library services and staff, as described below.

5. Impediments to library based early language and literacy learning

When considering families' access and engagement with library based early language and literacy programs, activities and resources, a range of barriers have been identified. These include social barriers, barriers within libraries, and barriers with reading experienced by some children. These difficulties are covered next.

5.1 Social impediments

A persistent view of libraries claims they lack relevance and fail to support community priorities (Bennett, 2013; Berthiaume, 2017; Brian, 2014; Garmer, 2016; McTernan 2011; Mertens et al., 2018; Norman, 2012; Siegler, 2013). Stereotypical ideas of libraries as places that are quiet, musty and maybe also frightening are compounded by real and supposed barriers to library use (Ferens et al., 2017; Siegler, 2013). Sbaffi and Rowley (2015) cite a list of commonly experienced difficulties with libraries, involving a perception that libraries are not needed since the internet is faster, or that families lack interest, or people lack knowledge about library services, or library non-users hold a psychological distance from libraries due to negative perceptions from previous experiences. Anecdotally and popularly, libraries may be perceived as having no place in twenty-first century technologically-engaged lifestyles, as not being places families would choose to go, or not places that are comfortable or especially welcoming (Knoll, 2014; Lucas, 2013; Maginn & McKenzie, 2017; Stoltz et al., 2015; Velasquez & Campbell-Meier, 2018). Stigmas around illiteracy and consequent library anxiety may have an adverse effect on library use (Anderson et al., 2014; Dudley, 2013) and parents/carers who have struggled with reading themselves may lack confidence in their ability to support children's language and literacy through visiting libraries (Young et al., 2019).

For families experiencing adverse circumstances, library access by children may be restricted through living in chaotic and noisy households with many children, unsettled living arrangements and authoritarian or hostile parenting styles (Biedinger, 2011; Cassells et al., 2020; Evans, 2004; Field, 2010). In such homes, if parents/carers engage with language, literacy and reading, they are more likely to use didactic instruction for word-decoding, rather than informal play-based practices (Djonov et al., 2018), which may result in a negative effect on reading motivation (Anderson et al., 2014; Son & Morrison, 2010). Within such living arrangements, no energy or enthusiasm may be available for taking children to a library, which may moreover be either culturally unfamiliar or perceived as elitist (Anderson et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2008; Nalls et al., 2010; National Literacy Trust, 2011). The television may be on constantly, with statistics indicating that 96% of young children watch television for over 14 hours per week (Burns & Gottschalk, 2019). High and incessant noise levels from television, internet or many

people can interfere with children's ability to hear and understand their parents'/carers' speech, with poor consequences for their language and literacy learning (Palmer, 2015). Further, children may be lengthily entertained by digital devices, where evidence from the USA shows that 10% of under four-year-olds have their own digital device and 52% are on-line for at least nine hours per week (Bhatt, 2010). In the ten years since Bhatt's study, screen use by young children, their siblings and their parents/carers is understood to have increased substantially (<https://www.abs.gov.au>).

Further problems have been identified in homes where low value is attached to education. Parents/carers may have little motivation to listen to language and literacy messages, since this takes time, concentration and understanding which may not be available to them (MCEEDYA, 2010). A similar impact occurs in homes where parents/carers have personally low language and literacy skills, or where parents/carers consider that children under five years old do not need to learn language and literacy skills as they are too young. These families may also regard language and literacy learning as the school's role, and not the parents'/carers' role (Manz et al., 2010). Further, long-term and elevated levels of parental stress, whether emotional, social, financial, medical, legal or other form, may have negative impacts on early language and literacy learning by small children (Cassells et al., 2020; Neuman & Celano, 2011). For families living with these issues, it has been alleged that children's language and literacy skills may be improved through changes to the living conditions in which they are existing rather than through direct literacy instruction (Zukoski & Luluquisen, 2006)

In addition to this significant list of barriers, IFLA cites parents/carers who may be overwhelmed by too much information. Thus, as described in Dudley's (2013) book about libraries and resilience, they may have difficulty "finding a few needles of useful, reliable information in vast haystacks of junk" (p.29). Being over-whelmed may be as true of affluent families as of poor ones, where parents'/carers' coping capacities struggle with contemporary complexities (Tough, 2013; Widen et al., 2020). While the latest Australian data indicates that 92% of children are regularly read to by their parents/carers (AEDC, 2021) broader data is less positive. Noble et al. (2021) show that children across all SES backgrounds may not be consistently read to by busy working

parents/carers who are away from home for long hours. They indicate that whether families are poor or not poor, 17% of parents/carers of all SES levels do not regularly engage in early language and literacy activities with their children, with implications reported as follows:

While these statistics show significant room for improvement, they also represent a very promising target for intervention. Supporting families to access quality preschool programs, and to sing, talk and play with their young children is not only a widely acceptable policy goal for parents/carers and children, but is also an important step in lifting educational outcomes and thereby altering the trajectory of an important social determinant of health. (Noble et al., 2021, p.29)

Finally, many families may be struggling to manage competing priorities and busy schedules, along with social, financial and personal pressures for mothers to return to work. They may regard literacy as instruction in how to read, which they feel unable to do as it requires teaching skills that they do not have (Fong & Wade, 2017), or they may be unfamiliar with children's rhymes and songs (Parkhill, 2022). Finally, in the USA, it has been proposed that contemporary parents/carers find their parenting role much harder than they expected (<https://pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/parenting-n-america-today>) while in Australia 71% of parents/carers have been found to lack confidence in their parenting skills (<https://www.triplep-parenting.net.au>), with implications for engaging happily with their children in early language and literacy activities.

5.2 Impediments within libraries

There are a number of impediments within the structures and promotion of library services that impact on family engagement with library based early childhood language and literacy programs, activities and resources. One barrier is lack of publicity and a low profile amid the intricacies of modern life, resulting in libraries continuing to be misunderstood by the public, politicians and young families (City of Wanneroo, 2017; Lockyer-Benzie, 2004; Rosenfeldt et al., 2014; Vassilakaki & Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, 2014). Further, information about libraries may be hard to find, they may be difficult to get to, have short or inconsistent opening hours, be part of an unwieldy web

of services or be vying for attention from a rising number of community-based early childhood activities. (Djonov et al., 2018; Howard, 2013; Neumann, 2016; Rankin & Brock, 2015; Sirinides et al., 2016). People may fear paying fines if they do something they think might be wrong, be overwhelmed by too much choice, have no indication how to find what they want, or be remembering poor library experiences from their childhood.

Within libraries, lack of appropriate space for children's activities can be a concern, along with unsuitable furniture (Campana et al., 2019; Celano et al., 2018; Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018) or computers inconveniently located away from baby-friendly parts of the library (Knoll (2017). Operational difficulties may include punitive fees or fines, awkward websites, exclusionary membership practices or impenetrable cataloguing processes (Ferens et al., 2017; Medlar, 2016). Libraries may display overt or covert prejudices that contradict the idea of libraries being welcoming to all (Knoll, 2017) for example by providing textual information and signs that require a high level of reading ability. In addition, Ferens et al. (2017) point out that patron hygiene difficulties may impinge on library use by already marginalized or vulnerable library patrons.

Reports about libraries and their early childhood work include apprehensions in the USA that may have relevance to Australian library services. First, when professional librarians and non-professional library officers have dissimilar outlooks about early language and literacy learning, the dissimilarities may result in a lack of empowerment for non-professional officers (Mardhani-Bayne, 2020). Second, libraries may show disparities in services based on size (Cahill et al., 2020). Compounding these two problems, difficulties may include families feeling challenged if maintaining control of their toddlers during library storytimes is seen to be unsuccessful (Sensenig, 2012), or parents/carers may experience anxiety when engaging in the social interaction of children's language and literacy activities. Additionally, new residents may be unable to relax in a culture that is not natural for them (Chelliah, 2017; McKenzie et al., 2009; Nichols, 2011) and new mothers may find visiting a library daunting, knowing babies can be noisy, changeable and disruptive (Knoll, 2014). It may also be the case that library staff lack experience, support or qualifications to successfully help young families (McKenzie & Stooke, 2008). Staff may struggle with the variety of literacy, information and caring work that are

combined in young children's library services (Mardhani-Bayne, 2020; Ross et al., 2006). Finally, *shshing* is still remembered as a common activity of library staff even when research shows that none was seen or heard during 60 hours of observations in a large and busy Canadian library (McKechnie et al., 2006).

In Australia there are further barriers when libraries work in a patchwork or fragmented manner, with services based on the staff, policies and financial constraints of individual LGAs without reference to nearby available, or competing, facilities. Libraries may lack cohesive or comprehensive early language and literacy policies (Hill & Diamond, 2013) or may need to apply for public or private funding under competitive and possibly unsustainable conditions (Colab, 2018b; Rosenfeldt et al., 2014; Stooke & McKenzie, 2011). LGAs can suffer from higher cost demands than current levels of revenue (WALGA, 2015), while support for children's library services may be impaired if policymakers outside the children's department fail to understand children's needs (Neumann, 2016; WALGA, 2015). Rankin (2014b) adds to these issues with a list of challenges faced by children's librarians around the world, including insufficient training, professional isolation, inadequate book collections, poorly maintained buildings and lack of information and advice. Library staff not only need to manage these problems, but also need to ensure their personal manner is not a barrier to use by families with young children. In addition to these social, procedural and staffing issues there is an underlying barrier affecting the language and literacy effects of public libraries. This relates to lack of robust evaluation processes to assess children's learning (Djonov et al., 2018) which is an issue that is currently being worked on within the profession.

5.3 Impediments to reading

Taylor et al. (2016) list multiple impediments to children reading or being read to. While impediments to reading may not relate directly to library use, their influence on engagement with library learning activities is noted. Psycho-social factors may be impediments to reading and learning, including having parents/carers who do not enjoy reading (Bus & DeJong, 2006), having no literate adult as a role model (Gramling & Rosenkoetter, 2006), the child's interest and attention when being read to, the mother's educational level and mental state, family income, and Culturally and Linguistically

Diverse (CALD) or Aboriginal background (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care [SNAICC], 2019). A common factor may be a lack of time when both parents/carers work and are away from their children for many hours at a time (Gurria, 2012), while research has also identified that the child's enjoyment is important to the parent/carer and if that is absent, motivation for reading together is reduced. Preece and Levy (2020) describe motivational challenges as follows:

Parents are motivated to engage in shared reading when there is clear evidence of their child's enjoyment. However, parental perceptions of 'negative' child-feedback could be a barrier to shared reading ... Enjoyment of shared reading activity was closely related to evidence of child enjoyment, thus creating a further barrier to reading when child enjoyment was perceived to be absent.
(p.631)

Fathers, moreover, may face extra barriers to engaging with language and literacy practices with their children. These may include consistently extended time at work, living apart from their children, personally negative experiences of reading, and literacy being regarded as a female province dominated by mothers and female educators (Djonov et al., 2018). Negative values may be amplified if fathers feel insecurity or hostility (Exley, 2019), although they may alternatively be reduced when regular shared reading with their children helps mitigate the reality of long hours away from home and limited opportunities for engagement (Kruger, et al., 2017; Swain et al., 2017). In addition, it has been noted about fathers, mothers and all adults in children's lives, that there may be counter-productive responses if children who are not yet developmentally ready are forced to be read to in what has been termed the "tyranny of shared book reading" (Lenhart et al., 2021, p.3). Finally, with application to all cultures, classes, ages, backgrounds, and library users and library non-users alike, a widespread potential barrier to reading with children is being investigated. This involves the impact of mobile phone use on reading engagement which has been nominated by Neuman et al. (2007) as one potentially detrimental factor within the complex contemporary environments of young children.

6. The research questions

Synthesis of the available literature led to the formation of three research questions. The questions are:

RQ1: What language and literacy services for children from birth to age three years and their parents/carers are currently provided by public libraries in Western Australia?

RQ2: What factors support or impede the implementation of effective library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for children from birth to age three years and the engagement of their parents/carers?

RQ3: How effective do key stakeholders perceive library based programs to be in supporting children's language and literacy learning, and the interactions with their Home Learning Environment?

7. Conclusion

This review of academic and professional literature has introduced the topic of early language and literacy, its importance, its social basis, and its rapid development in children's first years of life. Information has been provided about how public libraries across the world support children's learning, with an emphasis on Australia. The review continues by examining libraries' interactions with the Home Learning Environments (HLEs) of very young children and by exploring barriers that may be inhibiting libraries from doing more in the early language and literacy field. This chapter ends with the research questions to be explored in this study. The next chapter describes the conceptual framework that underlies the study's content and issues.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the conceptual framework which forms the foundation for the study and describes the wider contexts in which the study was devised. The framework uses words and graphics to describe who and what is being investigated (Berman, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). It presents the aims of the research, describes and arranges the main ideas underlying the study, and indicates the variables that were involved during data collection and analysis. The framework shows relationships between variables, and how these relationships work together to inform the outcomes and conclusions of the study (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009; Swaen & George, 2022). Background information to support the study's conceptual framework involves information about its theoretical and professional contexts, along with information about the structure and nature of library provision in Western Australia.

2. Contextual information

The contexts in which the conceptual framework for this study was developed are threefold. The first context is the structure of library provision in Western Australia through which the topic is explored. The second context involves the theories that frame the study's conceptual thinking and the third context is the professional background of the researcher as librarian which influences what has been conceptualised.

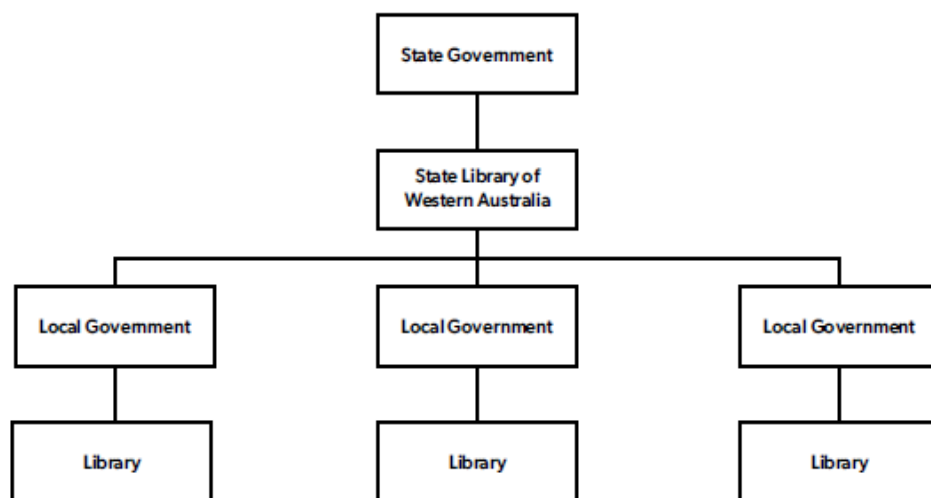
2.1 Context and structure of library provision

Libraries in Western Australia vary in size as well as in environmental and social contexts. Libraries fall into one of three categories of metropolitan, regional or rural as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and are managed through a partnership between the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in the State. Through the State Library of Western Australia, the state

government supplies library resources such as books and eResources along with professional support for LGA library staff. LGAs supply and maintain the library buildings, equipment and furnishings and employ the library staff.

Libraries are provided free of charge to ratepayers across the large expanse of Western Australia, with recent consortia arrangements delivering efficiencies through sharing of resources and library management systems between LGAs. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the structure of public library provision in Western Australia. While only three libraries are shown here, the diagram depicts the government hierarchy in which the State Government regulates and funds the State Library of Western Australia. The State Library of Western Australia in turn regulates and funds Local Governments to provide libraries in their areas. The diagram represents 138 Local Government Authorities and 233 public libraries in the state.

Figure 1: Structure of Western Australian Library Provision



2.2 Theoretical context

The theoretical contexts used to develop this research are based on the premise that early language and literacy learning is premised on social interactions and the building of sound relationships between adults and children. This study sought to investigate how interactions and relationships are supported by public libraries through daily opportunities for learning, including exposure to multiple language and literacy stimuli.

The theoretical contexts further indicate that learning by young children can occur through observation of actions and imitation of behaviours, both of which are available at library based early language and literacy sessions.

The theoretical context for this study is influenced by ~~two~~ three early learning theories. First, Vygotsky's theory of socio cultural learning (Nagel & Scholes, 2016) which describes how children's social interactions during their daily lives influences their early language learning. Vygotsky proposed that verbal interactions were imperative for children's language learning, since language is a social behaviour involving conversational exchanges between child, carer and environment. Learning processes may include the assistance of adult scaffolding of children's learning, along with biological factors that lead to development of mental functions in young children such as attention, perception and memory. These features are relevant to the ways in which public libraries support language learning in the earliest age groups, along with similar theories proposed by Clay and Bandura. Clay developed a theory of emergent literacy which focuses on language learning beginning at birth and developing through social interactions (Clay, 1966). The theory suggests that becoming literate is as an interactive and holistic process based in personal relationships and supported by learning language through daily use. The theory proposes that literacy evolves gradually through partnering of children's developmental progress with multiple opportunities, including an emphasis on collaborative relationships. Finally, the theoretical context of this study is influenced by the theory of social learning as proposed by Bandura (1969). This theory proposes that learning is socially based, with children learning skills and knowledge from observation and imitation of others' behaviour, and via modelling of concepts by others. According to this theory, children's real-world experiences are influential in building their knowledge, comprehension and use of words. Further facets of Bandura's theory illustrated at libraries in this study involve children and their families paying attention to language and literacy material that is offered, and children retaining information which they can then reproduce in some form (Bandura, 1969).

Oral language learning underlies these theories of early literacy acquisition. Children are supported by spoken language interactions with others before understanding the

symbols of reading and writing (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013). The role of libraries in children's early language and literacy learning illustrates links with Vygotsky's, Clay's and Bandura's theories, with the form and content of library activities involving elements of socio-cultural learning, emergent literacy and social learning (Rohde, 2015). Libraries' roles include encouragement of interested adults, introduction to language and literacy concepts as they relate to very young children, and language and literacy based exchanges in multiple natural settings in the library and community.

2.3 Professional context

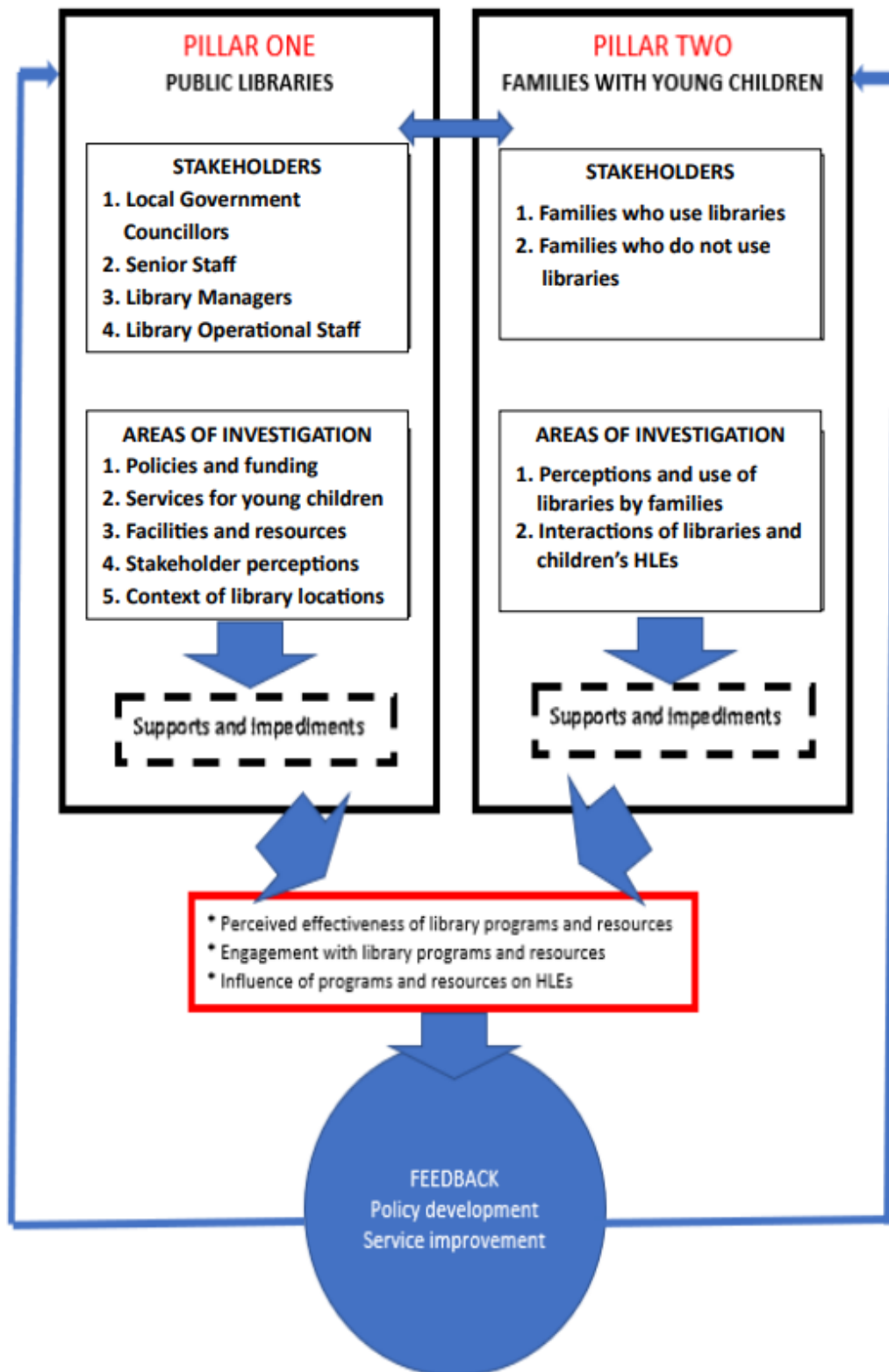
The conceptual framework for this study was also shaped by the researcher being a practising professional librarian in public libraries in Western Australia, as well as being a parent, grandparent, schoolteacher, writer and storyteller. The researcher approached the study with 30 years' experience with public library engagement in local communities, during which she built a pro-active library service with multiple outreach activities across four locations. She was involved in the creation of a co-operative library system across the regional area in which those libraries were situated, with the aims of encouraging effective use of resources and building professional networks to support innovative library programs. An interest in children being empowered through simple and inexpensive techniques to reach their personal potential in their critical before-school years has been fundamental. This interest has been exhibited through working extensively with children through provision of high-quality printed materials and providing fun and informative play-based library sessions for young families. The researcher's professional lens suggests that families' positive motivations to engage in early language and literacy learning are inherent in successful early language and literacy outcomes.

2.4. Conceptual framework

The study's conceptual framework was built with two main pillars. First, the library as an entity and as part of a larger system with different stakeholders is shown as Pillar 1. Second, multiple perspectives of families with young children from birth to age three years are shown in Pillar 2. The pillars encompass key stakeholder groups, areas of research investigation, and opportunities for change in libraries and by families.

A graphic representation of the conceptual framework is given in Figure 2. Two pillars represent strength in the study's core research subject of everyday interactions between libraries and young families. Pillars suggest sturdy relationships for building future library based language and literacy services for young children. The pillars of the graphic representation lead towards recommendations for policy change to encourage improvements to library services, aiming to increase the number of children who arrive at school with adequate language skills and ready to learn to read. Readiness includes technical language and literacy skills, as well as sound social connections and learning motivation, boosted by having fun and enjoyable experiences in their early years.

Figure 2: Graphic Representation of Conceptual Framework



Pillar one, on the left side of the diagram, describes key stakeholders, comprising Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff at policy level, Library Managers and Library Operational Staff. The first pillar also shows areas of research investigation, being library based language and literacy services for children, along with supports and impediments to these services. In pillar one and for the purposes of this study, the groups of staff stakeholders in the study's sample are people who work in the library system or have library governance capacities in local areas. Pillar one also depicts investigations into multiple areas of public library operations as they relate to early childhood activities. Areas of interest involve policies and funding of early childhood activities, services that are offered for children and their parents/carers, and facilities and resources that are provided for use by families.

Pillar two, on the right side of the diagram, describes young families with children from birth to age three years. These include families who use libraries and families who do not use libraries. Areas of investigation shown in the second pillar involve families' knowledge and perceptions of public libraries along with libraries' language and literacy programs, activities and resources. Family knowledge includes practical details about times and locations of library events such as *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*, as well as how sessions are run and what participants do at them. It involves families' understandings of the availability of language and literacy resources, and of the nature and importance of early language and literacy learning. Families' perceptions of libraries include how children may be received by library staff and customers, as well as expectations about children's behaviour and noise in the library. Perceptions may also include whether resources and services suit family needs, and whether adults' literacy skills are sufficient to enable effective library use. Pillar Two depicts investigations into the perceptions of families who make use of libraries and of families who do not make use of libraries. It also shows that the research aimed to explore interactions between library based language and literacy services for young children and their Home Learning Environments (HLEs).

Below each of the two pillars in the graphic representation are indications of how the study will investigate supports and barriers to library based language and literacy

services for young children. This information is analysed to determine engagement with programs, activities and resources by families with children in the relevant age cohort, and potential interactions of library programs, activities and resources with children's HLEs. The framework concludes with indicating feedback from the research into policy development and service improvement for libraries' early language and literacy work.

The graphic interpretation of the study's conceptual framework shows multiple connections between libraries and families as represented by arrows within Figure 2. Arrows indicate relationships between key stakeholders along with indicating areas of investigation and potential outcomes of the study. The two pillars of the framework are connected in multiple ways, including feedback loops that indicate opportunities for interaction between daily realities and formal policy.

3. Conclusion

This chapter has provided information about concepts and theories on which the study's conceptual framework is informed being Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), Clay's theory of emergent literacy (Clay, 1966) and Bandura's theory of social learning (Bandura, 1969). In addition, the chapter has explained the professional context of the researcher as a long-term librarian who has been involved in the development and delivery of early childhood programs in regional public libraries in Western Australia. The framework highlights areas of investigation along with interactions between stakeholders, topics of interest, and supports and barriers to library use. It also includes indications of outcomes and feedback from the research that could inform library policy development and service improvement. Following on from description of the study's the conceptual framework, the methodology and methods used by the researcher to investigate the topics of interest are explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical approach and the research design of the study. The following section identifies the qualitative methodological approaches taken and describes the sample sites and participants, along with tools and analysis techniques employed to explore library based language and literacy programs for children aged birth to three years and their families. Ethical implications are considered along with describing trustworthiness of the data.

Theoretical perspective

This research uses an interpretivist paradigm which is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and subjective, with multiple perspectives of participants acknowledged, along with influences from the researcher's own background. Crotty (1998) describes such a view, recognising that human perceptions are shaped by our historical and cultural positionings. This was regarded as a suitable lens through which to study the views of differing participant groups in this study so that the complexities of lived experiences could be examined.

Working with constructivist and interpretivist paradigms involves close examination of the complexities of contemporary life (Miles et al., 2014). Evidence provided through the experiences of participants under normal lived circumstances is explored in detail in this study and experiences are interpreted through individual, subjective perspectives. Use of a constructivist format enables multiple interpretations, with no single viewpoint being regarded as the correct one (Williamson, 2006). Since meanings interpreted by participants take account of their social contexts and personal reflections on life and the world, context is important. A rich description of the context and description of the selected sites is given in the next chapter, as the environment in which library programs, activities and resources are provided is seen as important to the study.

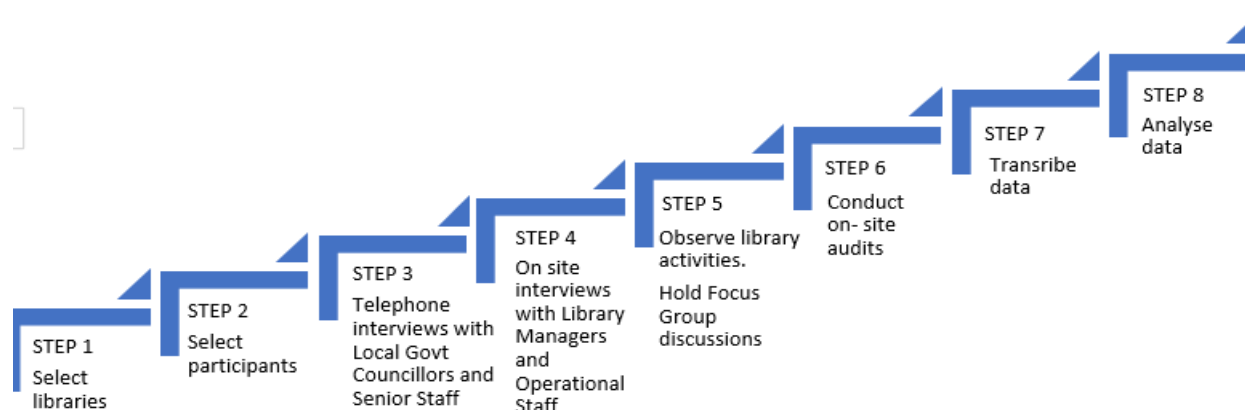
2. Research design

An interpretivist design for the study enables the researcher to concentrate on the human interest aspects of the topic. It involves examining differences between people's outlooks and their varied perspectives on the world. Using this paradigm, meanings of real life activities and situations in which participants engage are explored and described, resulting in rich and abundant data, and the opportunity for in-depth interpretations.

The design of research is influenced by being "fit for purpose" (Cohen et al., 2018, p.173). In designing this research, a qualitative methodology was selected as the aim was to investigate library based language and literacy resources, programs and activities for young children, along with families' and children's engagement with them at a particular point in time. Such methodology encourages rich and thick descriptions to be developed and interpretations of complex human behaviours to be made (Chenail, 2011). Using interviews and observations *in situ* enables the researcher to spend significant amounts of time at participating locations, and to become familiar with participants (Reeves et al., 2013). It allows for opportunities to observe uncertainties and stresses of daily life among families with young children (Reeves et al., 2013), to collect comprehensive data, to capture real voices and to create rich descriptions following intense observations. It involves taking account of unplanned events in potentially chaotic situations, with a focus on to the participants rather than the researcher (Orrmalm, 2020). It encourages study of individuals and their relationships with people, as well as exploration of specific aspects of their lives and sociocultural practices (Harwati, 2019; Siraj-Blatford, 2020).

The design of the research is given in Figure 3. The design involves a stepped approach beginning with selection of participants, and followed by data collection activities augmenting each other to achieve comprehensive evidence. Steps indicate a building of data across time. Data collection is followed by transcription analysis and interpretation of the study's findings.

Figure 3: Research Design



3. Sample

Selection of libraries

Libraries selected for inclusion in this study are part of Western Australia's state-wide public library system which is jointly managed by the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) and Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Selection criteria for the study involved consideration of library size measured by stock numbers, and location. Sample size was limited to six libraries in three different LGAs due to pragmatic concerns of time, cost, travel and logistics of the study. Information about sampling criteria for the selected libraries is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Selection of Libraries

SAMPLING CRITERIA	SOURCE	SIZE OF SYSTEM	DETAILS
Size	Library stock numbers	Large	Over 100,000 items
		Medium	10,000 to 100,000 items
		Small	Under 10,000 items
Location	Based on ABS <i>Australian Statistical Geography Standard</i>	Metropolitan	Also required to be within 3 hours' drive of the research base for practical purposes
		Regional	
		Rural	

Selection of suitable libraries took into consideration how familiar the libraries and their staff were to the researcher as a long-term practising librarian. Libraries with staff who were well known to the researcher were excluded as they may have involved subjectivity that could have impeded the study's validity. Instead, engaging unknown libraries and staff enabled objectivity in collection and analysis of the data. With more than 230 public libraries in the state, it was possible to select libraries that were largely unknown to the

researcher apart from in name only. The researcher was familiar with two Senior Staff who participated but did not know any of the other participating Local Government Councillors, staff or parents/carers.

Data was gathered from three local government areas in three geographic regions of Western Australia, being a metropolitan, a regional and a rural area as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). ABS (2017) definitions are as follows:

Metropolitan: A Greater Capital Statistical Area which has a population of 10,000 or more. These areas represent State and Territory capital cities.

Regional: A Regional area is an urban centre and locality within a State.

Rural: A Rural designation includes all areas that are neither 'major urban' or 'other urban' according to ABS structures.

Selecting LGAs with libraries of assorted locations and sizes enabled contrasts and comparisons of resource levels, policy environments and services for local families. The WALGA directory of local government areas (<https://walga.asn.au/your-local-government/directory>) was accessed to ascertain sizes and locations of LGAs and to select locations that could offer comparative data. The approach was designed to examine multiple viewpoints about how library services for families with young children work in practice, as well as to discover opportunities for change within the public library sector. There were ten available libraries within the three selected LGAs from which six were selected to offer variety of size and context as well as being geographically accessible for the researcher.

Large: A large library system with a stock of over 100,000 items was engaged within the metropolitan area of Perth. The LGA of this area provided six libraries, of which three were included in this study. These three were selected from within diverse socio-economic contexts.

Medium: A medium-sized library system with between 10,000 and 100,000 items was engaged in a regional area of Western Australia. The LGA of

this area provided three libraries of which two were included in this study. The two selected libraries were within contrasting socio-economic contexts.

Small: A small library with a stock of fewer than 10,000 items was engaged in a rural area of Western Australia. The LGA for this area provided one library in its largest town and this was included in the study.

Library size was determined by a standard metric used in the library sector of stock numbers. Numbers are available through annual statistical reports from the State Library of Western Australia and can be seen by individual location or by LGA. Industry guidelines for appropriate stock numbers are provided by operational formulae from the State Library of Western Australia which are built to embrace population size and demographics, plus weighted considerations of relative isolation in a geographically expansive state. The average number of items per head of population may appear less than in other states due to a unique circulation or exchange system in Western Australia which reallocates stock between libraries on a regular basis.

Stock numbers are counted electronically through use of unique barcode identifiers. Stock includes print materials, non-print resources such as toys and audio-visual items, and free access to electronic databases. It is noted that stock numbers are a guide only to the number of items available for use at any point in time, since numbers at each location fluctuate constantly. Numbers are influenced by continuous addition of new stock, regular removal of outdated stock, and daily movement of items between locations according to customer demand.

As the largest libraries in this study were in the urban area of Perth and the smallest was in a rural area, the effects of urban/rural differences were a potential source of contrast and comparison. Middle-sized libraries in a regional city approximately one hour from the metropolitan area straddled this divide and provided a third lens for interpretation of data. Information about size and location of selected libraries is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Library Size and Location

LGA (Pseudonyms)	CONTEXT	NO. OF LIBRARIES IN LGA	NO. OF LIBRARIES INCLUDED	NO. OF ITEMS IN STOCK	LIBRARY NAME (Pseudonym)	CODE
City of Mond	Metro	6	3	Library 1: 61,850	Swandon	L1a
				Library 2: 29,332	Sackston	L1b
				Library 3: 41,999	Venizia	L1c
City of Imbimbi	Regional	3	2	Library 1: 38,598	Igard	L2a
				Library 2: 14,303	Minster	L2b
Shire of Caxley	Rural	1	1	Library 1: 8,579	Caxley	L3

Due to the need for multiple visits by the researcher, selected library locations were within three hours' travelling distance of the research base in the southwest of Western Australia. Libraries were in diverse social and environmental contexts to provide opportunities for contrasts and comparisons. Full contextual details are given in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Details include information about the towns, library buildings, facilities, stock and opening hours, as well as financial background

The three metropolitan libraries in this study had a total of nearly 60,000 members. This was 39% of the LGA's population for these three libraries, with further members registered at the city's other three library locations. In the regional area, the two participating libraries had a total of 12,000 members. This was 11% of the LGA's population and further members were registered at the third library in the regional location. In multi-library systems, members may be registered at one library and be users of a different library. As a result, a low membership count for Minster Library may reflect the fact that this residential area is new and that library members may have registered previously at another local library rather than at this new library location. The rural library had a membership of 500, which was 12% of the LGA's population.

Statistics for junior members included children up to the age of 12 years. There was no differentiated category for birth to three year olds, and differing statistical methods used by LGAs may have resulted in inconsistencies within membership figures. At the metropolitan libraries 13% of members were registered as juniors, at the regional libraries the figure was 15%, while at the rural location separation by age groups was not available. However, it is noted that families may use a parent's card on behalf of their children, so junior membership figures may not accurately reflect the total number of junior library users.

Selection of participants

Within the library structures outlined above, the study sought to gather information from library staff who provided services as well as from families who used, or had the opportunity to use, those services. Data was collected from four types of service providers and two types of service recipients. Service providers involved Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff at policy level, Library Managers and Library Operational Staff, while service recipients involved families who were library users and families who were currently library non-users.

Three sampling methods were used to recruit voluntary participants and to enable collection of data that was comprehensive, accurate and informative. These were purposive sampling for staff and convenience or snowball sampling for families.

Staff

Library staff were selected for the study using purposive sampling. This method involves deliberately selecting participants with the characteristics required to provide thorough and correct information on the topics of investigation (Gibson & O'Connor, 2003). Staff categories included Local Government Councillors as well as employed library staff. Employed staff were found to have differing titles such as Team Leader, Library Co-Ordinator, Literacy Officer and Information Officer, and these were summarized in the study as Senior Staff, Library Managers and Operational Staff.

Local Government Councillors

Two current Local Government Councillors at each of the three participating City or Shire LGAs were selected to provide information on delivery of library services at local government level. Local Government Councillors exhibit varying credentials, qualifications, experiences and backgrounds. They are elected by popular vote from local residents and make decisions on behalf of local government through a formal meeting process, guiding policy and strategic directions. They receive an allowance or stipend for their work rather than a salary. For the purposes of this study, Local Government Councillors were included in the staff group since they work on behalf of local libraries, especially in relation to funding and focus.

Senior Staff

Senior Staff were those employed at policy level from the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Public Libraries WA (PLWA) and the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), along with a Director from a metropolitan LGA and a consultant employed by that LGA to provide research and development services for the libraries. These staff determine broad corporate priorities, manage funding arrangements, and give direction to teams who carry out the organization's objectives. They generally work in Head Office locations rather than within local library facilities. Participants were chosen for their ability to provide comprehensive information from broad policy perspectives.

Library Managers

Library Managers are professionals employed full time by LGAs to manage library facilities, resources, staff, activities, programs and finances on a daily basis. They may have library based or other professional qualifications and they work within local library buildings. They have diverse administrative duties in planning and implementation of library services and some engage directly with library customers in the delivery of *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* and other programs.

Operational Staff

Library Operational Staff are employed by LGAs on a full time, part time or casual basis to conduct practical duties for library users. Duties include circulation of books, technical

help, community activities, and delivery of regular *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* and other activities. The range of activities and duties in contemporary libraries is broad, having moved from largely book-based work to work that is related to aspects of community development. Operational Staff have mixed levels of education and experience, with some qualifications and backgrounds relating directly to libraries and others relating to sectors such as early learning, education or performance. Employers generally have no set requirements for formal qualifications among Operational Staff.

The number of staff interviewed is shown in Table 3 according to their LGA and employment location of metropolitan, regional or rural area within Western Australia. There were nine interviewees from the metropolitan City of Mond, 14 from the regional City of Imbimbi and five from the rural Shire of Caxley. Five interviewees from state-wide bodies worked in Perth or other major city and were not directly employed by an LGA.

Table 3: Interviewees

PARTICIPANTS	LOCATION	NUMBER	TOTAL
Local Government Councillors	City of Mond	2	6
	City of Imbimbi	2	
	Shire of Caxley	2	
Senior Staff	City of Mond	2	8
	City of Imbimbi	1	
	Professional bodies	5	
Library Managers	City of Mond (Library L1a)	1	8
	City of Mond (Library L1b)	1	
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2a)	3	
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2b)	2	
	Shire of Caxley	1	
Operational Staff	City of Mond (Library L1b)	2	11
	City of Mond (Library L1c)	1	
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2a)	3	
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2b)	3	
	Shire of Caxley (Library L3)	2	
Total			33

Parents/carers

Convenience and snowball sampling was used to select parents/carers for the study. This involves selecting participants from part of the population that is close to hand (Gibson & O'Connor, 2003), which in this case involved families with young children who were either visiting a library or at a community facility close to a participating library.

Two categories of parents/carers were invited to participate. One group consisted of parent/carer library users with child(ren) from birth to age three years, and the other consisted of parent/carer library non-users with child(ren) from birth to age three years.

Library using parents/carers

Library using parents/carers with a young child(ren) whose visit included accessing early childhood services were invited to participate because of their first-hand experience of library services for children in the relevant age group. It was anticipated that they would provide information, opinions and viewpoints about current language and literacy based library activities in practical, everyday terms. A single criterion for inclusion in the study was that they were accompanied by a child or children from birth to age three years.

Participants were those in attendance at a library session at the time the researcher visited, and were 35 in number. Discussions took place immediately following *Storytime* or *Rhymetime* while the children played nearby.

Library non-using parents/carers

Library non-using parents/carers with children from birth to age three years were invited to discuss their perceptions and knowledge about libraries and early literacy. It was anticipated these views could be compared and contrasted with those of library-using parents/carers. Sampling selected parents/carers who were caring for a child from birth to age three years and who had not visited a library within the past 12 months.

Information from community and LGA websites that detailed Playgroups and Mothers Groups operating near the selected libraries was accessed. This method was selected as being more likely to provide relevant information than a random sample of parents/carers from a public venue such as a shopping centre or railway station. Library non-using families with children in the required age cohort of birth to age three years were visited during regular Playgroup sessions, with a total of 27 parents taking part. Seven parents/carers were at the metropolitan location, nine at the regional location and 11 at

the rural location. All library non-users were female and although two husbands were present at one location, they declined to take part. Parents/carers had either one or two children with them, with a baby in a pram plus a toddler or older child. Two mothers had twins. Two children were identified by their mothers as having a learning disability and one mother identified herself as having learning disabilities including being unable to read.

Parents/carers who took part in focus group discussions are shown in Table 4. They are shown according to location of the Library or Playgroup they were attending when invited to take part in discussions. It is noted that since discussions took place during the time of the Covid-19 Pandemic it is possible that there were fewer parents/carers at the venues than during non-pandemic times.

Table 4: Parent/Carer Participants

PARTICIPANTS	LOCATION	NUMBER
Library users	City of Mond (Library L1a)	6
	City of Mond (Library L1b)	10
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2a)	3
	City of Imbimbi (Library L2b)	16
	Shire of Caxley (Library L3)	0
TOTAL		35
Library non-users	City of Mond	7
	City of Imbimbi	9
	Shire of Caxley	11
TOTAL		27

Data Collection

Four tools for data collection were used to provide rich and relevant information about public libraries and their language and literacy work with families and young children. First, semi-structured interviews took place with key stakeholders involving Senior Staff at policy level, Local Government Councillors, and library employees at management and operational levels. Interviews with Local Government Councillors and Senior Staff were either in person or via telephone according to the needs of participants, while those with Library Managers and Library Operational Staff took place at the library during regular working hours. Second, focus groups of parents/carers with young families were held,

including library users and library non-users. Discussion groups took place either at the selected libraries following an early childhood event, or at community Playgroups in close proximity to participating libraries. Third, observations of library use were conducted, both during regular library opening times and during language and literacy based events. Observations took place during both term time and school holiday time. Fourth, audits were carried out at the six selected libraries, including descriptions of physical features of buildings, quality and quantity of children's resources, and other aspects relevant to young children and early language and literacy.

Table 5 details data collection methods used with Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff, Library Staff and parents/carers of children from birth to age three years. Methods used for observations and audits are also shown. To accompany this information, copies of Participant Information Letters and Participant Consent Forms that were given to participants prior to data collection taking place are in Appendix B.

Table 5: Data Collection Instruments

INSTRUMENT	GROUP	SUBGROUP	NO.	DETAILS
Interview	Staff	Senior Staff (SS)	8	30-minute interview. Face to face or by telephone
Interview	Total of 31 participants	Local Government Councillors (LG)	6	30-minute interview Face to face or by telephone
Interview		Library Management Staff (LM)	8	30-minute interview Face to face, on site at their library
Interview		Library Operational Staff (OP)	9	30-minute interview Face to face, on site at their library
Focus groups	Parents/carers	Parent/carer Users (PU)	30	6 focus groups lasting 30 minutes each
	Total of 57 participants			Face to face, on site at a library, immediately following an early childhood event

Focus groups	Parent/carer Non-users (PN)	27	3 focus groups lasting 30 minutes each Face to face, off-site, during attendance at a local Playgroup
Observations	Metropolitan, Regional and Rural libraries	16 visits	Non-participant observation of activities and general library use
Audits	Metropolitan, Regional and Rural libraries	6 visits	On-site collection of data about library facilities and resources

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff, Library Managers and Operational Staff. Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection tool due to their ability to build a close rapport between the researcher and the participant and enable the topic to be explored in detail (Pyett, 2003). Interviews were central to attempting to understand participants' constructions of reality and were valued for being current, thorough, wide-ranging and multifaceted (Chenail, 2011). Interviews consisted of four questions about the content of the study, plus a fifth question asking if there was any further information that the participant would like to add. Questions were piloted with the researcher's professional colleagues and modified according to their feedback to maximise clarity and focus.

The first question for staff aimed to identify the participant's qualifications and interests, while the second question probed the participant's knowledge and perceptions of early childhood library services. This was followed by inquiry into perceived barriers or impediments to provision of, and access to, library based early childhood language and literacy services, followed by perceived supports for such services. Participants were finally asked about their understanding of how library based early language and literacy learning interacted with children's Home Learning Environments (HLEs), and whether they had any further comments to make (see Appendix C for interview instruments). While the wording and question-order of the semi-structured interviews were open to change to suit participants' interests (Wildemouth, 2017), interview questions were

consistent across the four different staff groups. The semi-structured format enabled topics to be stressed to greater or lesser levels according to the varying knowledge and outlooks of participants.

Each participant was interviewed once and a relaxed tone between researcher and participants encouraged flexibility and curiosity as conversations progressed. Senior Staff and Local Government Councillors were mostly interviewed by telephone due to being distant from the research base, while Library Managers and Operational Staff were interviewed face to face at their place of work. Interviews each took approximately 30 minutes, with this time frame enabling a suitable depth of discussion without inconveniencing the participant by taking too long out of their workday. Written and spoken informed consent was received from all interviewees for audio recorded interviews, enabling the researcher to confirm accuracy of content during transcription and to re-visit commentary as required. Interview transcripts were completed and loaded into the NVivo data analysis program as soon as possible following interviews. Audio recordings were kept securely with password protection according to regulations of the research institution. To maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of participants, all transcripts were rendered anonymous through use of pseudonyms for people and places. Any potentially identifying information was removed.

Focus groups

Focus groups were used to speak with of parents/carers, described as being library users or library non-users with children from birth to age three years. Parents/carers were defined as library users if they were present at the library when the researcher visited. Parents/carers at local Playgroups were defined as library non-users if they reported that they had not visited a library with their children in the previous 12 months. A semi-structured discussion format was used and the mood was relaxed rather than formal. Children stayed with their parents/carers in familiar and child-friendly surroundings for the 30-minute duration of discussions. Written and spoken informed consent was received from all interviewees and efforts were made to ensure the children were comfortable with the situation. For practical reasons of noise and possible parental anxieties, audio recordings were not made of discussions. Instead, field notes were

made by the researcher *in situ* and transcribed as soon as possible following the discussions. During transcription, all potentially identifying names and details were rendered anonymous to protect the identities of participants.

A similar set of questions to those used for staff participants was used for focus groups of parent/carer library users, with modifications as required. Questions were piloted with families known to the researcher to ensure mutual understanding of terms and to encourage clarity of meaning and focus on the topics. Questions involved participants' perceptions about libraries in general as well as about libraries' early childhood language and literacy activities. Discussions began with asking parents/carers about their awareness of library based early childhood programs, followed by whether they took part in such programs with their young children. Parents/carers were asked to share their feelings and opinions about these programs, whether positive or negative. General discussion was then encouraged about barriers and supports to library use that had been experienced by the families. Parents/carers were asked if and how library learning interacted with their Home Learning Environments (HLEs) and were finally encouraged to make any further comments on the topic. Appendix C shows the format and content of questions used for discussion groups with parents/carers.

Observations

A third data collection instrument involved compilation of thorough field notes during observations of regular library activities. Notes were written on-site by the researcher as a non-participant observer, and were first recorded as jottings during the events and later written up in detail (Cohen et al., 2018). Note-taking about actions and processes was completed at the venue or event, while initial researcher interpretations were written as separate notes. Notes were made about language and literacy topics delivered by library staff such as information about rhyme, sounds, letters and books, plus vocabulary and general knowledge around animals, food or other child-friendly topics that arose from books and songs. Characteristics such as the knowledge of the presenter in presenting information, friendliness and style of the presenter at library events were noted, along with how he or she made the session dynamic, interactive and

interesting. Practical strategies that were used by presenters to encourage family engagement and parent/carer-child involvement in language and literacy were of particular interest for the study (Celano et al., 2018).

Observations lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted in person by the researcher in six separate locations on 16 separate occasions. Observations were non-structured, with the researcher concentrating on observing actions and interactions between staff, parents/carers and children. The researcher spoke informally with parents/carers and staff either before or after each event to obtain additional information. For privacy and practical reasons, no photographs were taken, nor were video or audio recordings made during any observations.

As a non-participant observer, the researcher sat among the families and maintained a low-key presence in the group. As such, she was able to sense intangible characteristics such as how relaxed or anxious the families were, how happy or apprehensive they seemed, and how comfortable or otherwise they appeared to be at the library venue. The researcher maintained a friendly attitude, while remaining largely unobtrusive to prevent interference with the way activities normally proceeded. Also, as suggested by McKechnie (2006), use of just one, maternal female researcher who sat on the floor with children and their mostly female parents/carers was possibly less intrusive and less intimidating than a male researcher may have been.

Details of observations in each Library are given in Table 6. This includes observations of early language and literacy sessions or regular library opening hours five times in the metropolitan region, nine in the regional area and two in the rural library.

Table 6: Observations

CODE	LIBRARY	CONTEXT	ACTIVITY	ADULTS	CHILDREN	
OB01	L2a	Region	a) Baby <i>Rhymetime</i>	Baby: 3 mothers, 1 grandmother	4	4
OB02			b) Toddler <i>Rhymetime</i>	Toddler: 3 mothers	3	3

OB03	L2a	Region	<i>Storytime</i>	1 mother, 5 grandmothers	6	6
OB04	L2a	Region	Non-event/daytime	1 father	1	1
OB05	L2a	Region	Non-event/daytime	0	0	0
OB06	L2a	Region	General/Mixed-age <i>Storytime</i>	4 mothers, 1 grandmother	5	5
OB07	L1a	Metro	<i>Baby Rhymetime</i>	11 mothers	11	11
OB08	L2b	Region	<i>Toddler Storytime</i>	14 mothers, 3 fathers	17	17
OB09	L2b	Region	a) <i>Baby Rhymetime</i>	11 mothers, 2	13	15
OB10			b) <i>Toddler Rhymetime</i>	fathers 6 mothers, 1 father	7	7
OB11	L1b	Metro	<i>Toddler Storytime</i>	10 mothers	10	10
OB12	L1b	Metro	Non-event/daytime	2 mothers, 1 father, 1 grandmother	4	3
OB13	L1c	Metro	Non-event/daytime	4 mothers	4	5
OB14	L1c	Metro	<i>Rhymetime</i>	24 mothers, 2 fathers, 2 grandmothers	28	26
OB15	L3	Rural	Non-event/daytime	0	0	0
OB16	L3	Rural	Non-event/daytime	0	0	0
Total		5 Metro	6 Rhymetimes	93 Mothers	113	113
16 Obs		9 Region	4 Storytimes	10 Fathers		
		2 Rural	6 Non-event times	10 Grandmothers		

When visiting the six participating libraries to observe events, the researcher gathered information about the location, date, time, number of children and number of adults, as shown in Table 6. While the informal nature of observed sessions prevented the collection of accurate demographic data, the researcher made estimates of children's ages and identified family groupings. Locations were visited at suitable times within the data collection years according to the requirements and schedules of participating libraries. Efforts were made to conduct research during contrasting times such as school term times and school holiday times, mornings and afternoons, and good weather as well as bad weather. Visits took place at scheduled times of children's language and literacy events as well as during regular library opening hours.

Consistency in recording rich details during observations across multiple days and locations was assisted by the study involving a single researcher (Holliday, 2009).

However, it is understood that all verbal and visual data was implicitly mediated by what the observer chose to include or exclude, including the way information was phrased and interpreted in field notes (Hammersley, 2012; Holliday, 2009). Observations totalled approximately ten hours across ten early childhood events, including time spent interacting with families before and after events. Observations also involved six periods of one hour each during normal library opening hours when no children's events were taking place.

Details of the 16 observations in six different libraries across metropolitan, regional rural areas are supplemented by written snapshots detailing selected library events. A selection of snapshots of library based language and literacy activities are given in Appendix D, involving *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* at metropolitan and regional venues,. No *Storytime*, *Rhymetimes* or other early language and literacy based sessions were held in the rural library during the course of the study.

Audits

A fourth mode for collection of data was on-site audits carried out at the six libraries selected for the study. Questions and checklists for audit instruments were developed with reference to guidelines from ALIA (2021) and IFLA (2018) for the resourcing and delivery of public library service, along with audit information for the *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR) program in the USA.. Audits involved descriptions of buildings, facilities, layout, furnishings, quality and quantity of children's resources, staffing and other aspects that were relevant to the research topic. Furniture for babies, children and adults, baby feeding facilities, pram-parking spaces and suitable toilets were noted. Décor, free space, flooring, temperature control, light and other internal features were detailed.

While the primary feature of libraries has traditionally been book stock, for the purposes of this study, books were just one of a range of resources documented during audits. Reduced attention to printed books is a feature of contemporary public libraries and has been balanced by increased attention to multi-modal items including audio and visual formats, electronic resources and educational toys such as Lego and iPads. Nevertheless,

since the topic of this research concerns language and literacy, the availability, physical quality and type of printed books were considered sound evidential data.

External features of the selected library sites such as location within the community and proximity of the library to shops, health clinics, community facilities and schools were described. Disability access and parking availability were noted, and outdoor play areas either within the library's immediate surrounds or nearby were described. Availability of public transport such as buses or trains was ascertained, and alarms or security systems were reported. Audit lists used during on-site visits were flexible guides rather than strict schedules, allowing the researcher to identify and note aspects that were unique or specific to local contexts. Full audit schedules with collected comprehensive data are given in Appendix F.

Data analysis

Evidence from the four data collection instruments was analysed through multiple iterations and modifications across time. Re-reading of raw data continued throughout the process to ensure that information was accurately and comprehensively understood. Data analysis processes followed a modified five step outline as described by Gibson and O'Connor (2003) beginning with organising the data and ending with finding plausible explanations within the data. The five steps involve transcription, reading, coding, categorizing and explaining.

First step: Transcription (Organizing the data)

Data from audio recordings of interviews along with hand-written field notes from focus group sessions and observations was transcribed into machine readable format by the researcher at the earliest opportunity. Transcriptions and field notes were labelled, defined and organised into searchable text using the NVivo qualitative data analysis program. As data was added and multiple readings took place nodes and their relationships were modified, as described in the following steps. Consistency was achieved through having a single researcher and transcriber, and efforts were made to ensure transcripts were as close as possible to how conversations happened. Field notes of the researcher's thoughts and considerations were additionally made during

discussions and observations to enrich the collected data. These included visible observations of movements, noting of audible matters such as singing as well as intangible factors such as how relaxed or anxious the parents were, how engaged the children were, and how confident the library presenters were.

Second step: Reading (Finding ideas and concepts)

Multiple readings of the transcribed data took place to ensure thorough understanding and emergence of common ideas. Words and phrases that were regularly used were noted, including how interviewees expressed themselves. Surprises and outliers were noted, and complexities were explored. Raw data was revisited multiple times to verify accuracy of the transcriptions. During repeated readings through the data, features of the Nvivo program were engaged to assist with exploring, categorising and understanding the data. Features included help with visualising relationships within unstructured data, displaying data in multiple locations, building a hierarchy or series of hierarchies and searching for words and phrases

Third step: Coding (Building themes in the data)

Initial coding and labelling using NVivo protocols was conducted, with themes emerging as more data was accessed. Using the raw data, a first round of Nvivo nodes was created according to the different participant groups of staff and parents/carers. Within these nodes, divisions were created relating to the research questions, involving information about programs activities and resources for RQ1, information about supports and impediments to library use by young families for RQ2 and information about HLEs for RQ3. Initial codes were flexible and open to redefinition to allow modification as the project progressed and understandings developed. Inductive reasoning methods were engaged to begin building themes from within the raw data. This involved noting specific ideas, recognising patterns amongst the ideas, interpreting their meaning, and drawing a general conclusion from the patterns.

Fourth step: Categorising (Ensuring reliability)

Following use of inductive reasoning to determine general themes, deductive reasoning using logical inferences was engaged to draw themes together into meaningful categories. A strategy of constant comparison was used to determine recurrent topics

across all types of data and from all instruments (Turner, 2009; Williamson, 2006). Data was scrutinised for deviations in content and was examined for inferred meanings. Fluidity, flexibility and change were key features of the procedure.

New Nvivo nodes were developed according to categories of information, and new relationships between data were considered. For example, all commentary about HLEs was coded together, as were all references to the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* and to *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*. Codes assisted with comprehension and analysis of meanings, including subjective interpretations of participants' interactions, behaviours and events. Assessment of sight, sound, touch and smell was included when applicable, as well as intangibles such as atmosphere, mood, character and ambience. Analysis aimed to be aware of overgeneralisations and selectivity, and to include aspects of the data that may tend to be overlooked because they were commonplace (Neuman, 2009).

Fifth step: Explaining (Finding plausible explanations of the findings)

Data was coded in fine detail, including characteristics of participants, library facilities and social context. It was explored for stories of participants' lived experience, including negative and positive reactions to activities. For example, data from rural non-users was compared with data from metropolitan non-users, with similarities and differences noted. The data was compared to academic and professional literature and to similar studies. Explanations were subjected to academic supervision as well as conversations with practising library professionals. Following analysis, the research was written up summarising why the topic was important, what methods were used, and implications of the findings. Actions to bring about practical change were recommended and potential subjects for future research were outlined.

5. Ethical considerations

Parents/carers

All potential participants were provided with an Information Letter that explained the nature of the research, the procedures involved, names of the researcher and supervisors and the potential time commitment (See Appendix B). Participants were also

given a Consent Form which required their formal signature (See Appendix B). They were made aware of their ability to withdraw from the study with no adverse consequences. During observations and audits, no photographs of people were taken. If non-participant library users were present whose behaviour interacted with that of the observation target, observations ceased until they had left the venue.

The researcher took care to view all parents/carers from an empowerment perspective. All interviews and explanations were delivered respectfully, acknowledging parents'/carers' viewpoints and perceptions. Time was taken prior to group discussions to ensure that parents/carers were relaxed with the process and happy to take part. All participants engaged with interest and were thanked for their involvement and input.

Children

Procedures specified by the research institution for ethical considerations were completed before any participants were engaged or data collected. While children were a central subject of the study, it was their parents/carers who reported on their own and their children's engagement. Ethical approval for observation of their children while in a library or Playgroup was obtained from parents/carers verbally as well as in writing prior to the start of the study.

Appropriate attention was given to non-verbal babies and toddlers who could indicate lack of consent by refusing to take part, turning away, or crying. A happy face/sad face card was available to enable children to either give or withhold consent to being observed. All children stayed with their parent/carer at all times and were occupied with library or Playgroup equipment, toys and books.

Staff

The researcher was sensitive to possible difficulties associated with staff relationships with their employers or with other staff if criticisms arose during interviews. She therefore confirmed with participants that the study sought to report on library practices rather than staff's individual behaviour. The researcher was also aware of the possibility of participants saying only what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. To

minimise these possibilities, interviewees were reminded of the confidentiality of all interviews, observations, recordings and transcripts.

The researcher was aware of not taking too much time out of employees' busy work schedules, and also implemented protective strategies to ensure information was kept confidential. These included removal of all potential identifiers from raw data and providing password protection for all documents. In the reporting phase, access to data was available only to the researcher and her immediate, named supervisors. Physical documents were deposited in locked facilities at the research base and electronic documents were subject to institutional directives and a formal Data Management Plan through the research institution.

6. Trustworthiness

To satisfy trustworthiness criteria for qualitative empirical research, four aspects of sample selection were considered. First, credibility was established via the selection of libraries of different sizes, locations and contexts. Second, transferability was developed via data comparison across the six locations and four data collection instruments. Third, confirmability was achieved through transparency in decision making along with continual examination of codes to ensure they followed from the raw data. Fourth, dependability was attained through collection of data which could potentially be compared with data in future studies.

Reliability in the data was achieved via frequent checking that it was answering the questions posed, while multiple close re-readings of data aimed for consistency of interpretation. Negative instances were considered on an ongoing basis, and the role of researcher bias was recognised.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation of sources, concentrated engagement with participants, and supervisor briefing (McKechnie, 2006). Since there was only one researcher at each data collection event, an awareness of what was included or excluded was possible, and consistency was a goal. Descriptive notes were written to achieve transparency in data collection activities and information was

transcribed at the earliest opportunity to maintain depth, richness, clarity and accuracy. Since the study did not involve value judgments but was instead aimed at describing and gathering practical information and individuals' perceptions, negative impacts on participants were found to be minimal. During all phases of the project the researcher endeavoured to encourage free comment by maintaining an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Participants were requested to give their time and energy to the study on a voluntary basis, with no coercion and no extrinsic reward.

According to practices outlined by Satu et al. (2014) analysis ensured that all relevant material was considered, that iterative procedures were used, and that contrasts and comparisons were checked regularly. In addition, the researcher sustained a reflective process to endorse a suitable level of objectivity in interpretation (Chenail, 2011; Pyett, 2003). Use of the NVivo data analysis computer program enabled large quantities of qualitative data to be ascribed to multiple nodes, to be structured and re-structured according to new developments, and to be searched in numerous ways. Outputs available from NVivo included charts, diagrams and word clouds, used as required during analytic activities. By investigating information, opinions and perceptions of these groups, the study aimed to understand how early language and literacy support by libraries was framed and understood by stakeholders. Data was described, compared and contrasted multiple times to provide information for policy discussions and potential future service improvements by public libraries in the early childhood language and literacy field.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has described the theoretical framing, design and methodology of the research. How participating libraries were selected is related as well as methods for the selection and number of participants. The methods used to gather the data through observations, interviews, focus groups and audits are outlined as well as the ways in which the data was organised and analysed. Ethical considerations were detailed along with the trustworthiness of the data and its analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

DETAILS OF SELECTED LIBRARIES

This chapter provides details of the selected libraries as a context for the study. While libraries have many common features, the location and setting in which they are situated influences their presentation, activities, resources, policies and user demographics. These settings need to be described so that the lived experiences of library participants (children, families, Local Government Councillors and library staff) are placed in context. Details include financial and SES environments, regional characteristics, and physical aspects of library buildings and interiors. Details also include information about staffing, stock, , opening hours, and the provision of early childhood language and literacy events.

1. Financial and legal context of libraries

Working under the Library Board of Western Australia Act 1951 (Government of Western Australia, 1951), libraries in Western Australia are a free service, funded through local government rates and the state government. The total annual national cost of public libraries to the Australian population in 2018 was AUD1.3b, an increase of 8.6% in three years according to the Australian Public Libraries Statistical report, 2019-20 (NSLA, 2020). This is an average of AUD50 per head of population, or approximately AUD1 per head per week.

In the past decade, differences in library provision across Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Western Australia have arisen due to policy changes in the partnership between state and local governments. While all public libraries in Western Australia are part of a common partnership arrangement, differing library delivery styles, LGA resourcing policies and social contexts resulted in differing library service provision. For example, libraries in the metropolitan area serviced large numbers of young families and multicultural residents with varied income levels. In comparison, libraries in the regional area embraced a mixed context of young families and older retirees, serving both

financially disadvantaged and affluent residents. In the rural area, libraries provided services to a thinly populated district with generally low SES among its residents. The rural area's primary industry background of farming and forestry has recently been supplemented by Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) employment in the mining industry which has brought social change, an increase in the transient workforce, and a growing divide according to income (Caxley Shire, 2011).

2. Socio-economic context of regions

Libraries exist within differing social contexts according to comprehensive data gathered to build the ABS Socio-Economic Indexes For Areas (SEIFA). The SEIFA Index for Relative Social Disadvantage (IRSD) ranks areas according to 17 socio-economic factors, with scores under 1,000 having relative disadvantage compared to those with scores of 1,000 or above. IRSD information includes elements such as low levels of income, employment and educational attainment, high domestic violence and high housing stress. IRSD scores calculated by the ABS for areas in which participating libraries were located are shown in Table 7. Pseudonyms for towns are used throughout.

Table 7: Context of Participating Libraries

CODE	PSEUDO-NYM	CONTEXT	SOCIAL ISSUES (ABS)	No. of FAMILIES	IRSD SCORE	HOME INTERNET
L1a	Swandon	Metro	High unemployment High housing stress	1,316	897	81%
L1b	Sackston	Metro	High No. new migrants High child vulnerability	2,403	969	89%
L1c	Venizia	Metro	High domestic violence High postnatal depression	5,996	1053	93%
L2a	Igard	Regional	High unemployment	1,455	1023	84%
L2b	Minster	Regional	High unemployment	1,316	1042	89%
L3	Caxley	Rural	High domestic violence	763	945	76%
Total: 6 Libraries		3 metro 2 regional 1 rural				

Metropolitan area

The metropolitan locations in this study were all in the City of Mond (pseudonym) in Perth. This city comprises nearly 20% of the whole metropolitan area and covers an area of 1,000 square kilometres. Selected libraries were in three different suburbs out of a total of forty-two suburbs in the city.

Swandon (Library L1a)

Swandon (pseudonym) is the oldest area of the City of Mond, being built around the railway industry from the late 1800s. By the 1960s the town was the commercial and administrative centre for the city, but disadvantage grew as the original railway industry declined. Analysis in 2015 indicated high housing stress, high unemployment, and the highest number of low income residents in the city (Community Asset and Gap Analysis, 2015).

Swandon's population of 160,000 includes 1,316 families, and these households have relatively low levels of home internet access at 81%. Unemployment in 2021 was 6% and the number of residents with non-English speaking background was 19% (<https://www.Swan.Wa.gov.au>). In 2016, the area's SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) score was a low 897 (ABS, 2016).

A classical federation style Town Hall which was established in 1907 provided council services for more than 50 years and is a feature of the current streetscape. Its dark brick buildings were renovated in 1996 to include a contemporary public library within a civic precinct. Further renovations to modern standards were completed in the early 2000s, resulting in spacious and light facilities. The current two storey library building has a panel of full height, street facing windows which provide natural light for the interior, as well as offering an opportunity for people outside to see what is happening within the library.

Sackston (Library L1b)

The part of the city of Mond now known as Sackston (pseudonym) began as land allocations for settlers in the 1830s, followed by becoming a residential subdivision 40

years later. By the 1960s, high numbers of public houses built in the post-war era were producing some social difficulties and deliberate reductions in house numbers were implemented. This enabled contemporary developments in the 1970s, resulting in a current local population of 14,000 (ABS, 2016). Of these, 44% were born outside Australia and 35% speak languages in addition to English. In 2016, 15% of children were vulnerable on two or more domains of the AEDC. 89% of families had home internet access and the area's SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage was 969 (ABS, 2016).

Sackston Library was opened in 1995 and is located about five minutes' drive or bus ride from the town's local shopping centre. The library is part of a Community Hub and Recreation Centre which includes a swimming pool, gym, café and adjacent playing fields. The library building is contemporary in style, with a young and busy vibe. It is spacious, with curved windows along the length of the building to provide interior natural light, as well as views out to recreation areas.

The children's area of the library is large, colourful, well defined and located away from quieter adult-focused facilities. It contains many hundreds of books in differing formats, displayed face out where possible for ease of use by young children.

Venizia (Library L1c)

Residential development in Venizia (pseudonym) began in 1993, with the new suburb being one of the fastest growing in Perth. A 2016 population of 22,000 included 10% in the birth to four age group and a birth rate of 75 babies every month (ABS, 2016). 93% of homes have internet access and the area's SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage score of 1053 is better than some other areas in this city (ABS, 2016). Nevertheless, 9% of the population is classed as low income and there are elevated levels of postnatal depression and domestic violence. Development of both universal and targeted 'soft entry' early intervention programs has been encouraged to alleviate these problems (Swan Alliance Communities for Children, 2015).

After working from a temporary location during construction of a new building, the library moved into new premises in 2008. It serves a community with 5,996 families, of which 93% have home internet access. In an imposing building of contemporary style, the library is located adjacent to a large new shopping centre and services the attached secondary school as well as the community. Public areas of the library are reached via a grand entryway and natural lighting is provided by tall windows which face out onto broad public open spaces. The library is spacious, modern and family friendly, welcoming large numbers of children and migrants on a daily basis.

Regional area

The regional area of the City of Imbimbi (pseudonym) is 75 kilometres south of Perth and covers 170 square kilometres. Selected libraries were in two different suburbs out of a total of eighteen suburbs in the LGA.

Igard (Library L2a)

The suburb name for Igard (pseudonym) was gazetted in 1968 when it was a seaside fishing village. It has since become a strong residential growth corridor south of the regional city of Imbimbi, with fishing shacks remaining among large new residences. Among the population of 9,000 people, the unemployment rate is a high 11.6%.

However, the area's SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) score is relatively high at 1023 (ABS, 2016). and only 2% of children are classed as vulnerable by the AEDC (2018). 84% of families have home internet access.

Built in 2006, the library was commissioned to serve the area's rapidly growing population. It is freestanding, of modern design and called an eLibrary to identify its inclusion of eResources. Built as part a local Community Centre, the library interior has well-spaced and light-coloured shelves, with integrated lighting and comfortable furnishings. The striking building has large windows along both sides and is clearly visible from a major through road. This road separates the library from a regional shopping centre which is about five minutes' walk away.

Minster (Library L2b)

Minster(pseudonym) is a new suburb north of the City of Imbimbi, with a current population of around 5,000, 36% of whom were born overseas. The suburb houses families of all ages, has two high schools and two primary schools, and has home internet access rates of 89%. While the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage stands at a reasonable 1042, Minster has a high unemployment rate of 9.9% (ABS, 2016).

The Library and Community Centre is situated in leased space at a new commercial shopping centre which houses more than fifty shops. The library backs onto a large K-Mart store and has a high profile location, being close to both the town square and the main carpark. Large windows enable activities to be viewed from the outside, as well as light to be received inside. The interior is spacious enough to accommodate the many prams, pushers and buggies that visit every day and the children's area is comfortably furnished with robust and child friendly furniture.

Rural area

The rural area of Caxley (pseudonym) is 110km south of Perth, covers 830 square kilometres and includes both farming and beachside communities. It has a population of approximately 5,000, with a density of less than five people per square kilometre, and 2,000 dwellings spread across seven different towns or localities. The participating library is in the biggest town of Caxley which, with 3,000 residents, contains 75% of the LGA's population (ABS, 2016).

Caxley (Library L3)

The town of Caxley was founded in 1895 as a railway town, while in present times employment is largely in the beef, dairy and forestry industries. During the Great Depression, growth was encouraged by engaging unemployed people to build a large dam, but unemployment rates over 7% have returned in the current era. The town has 763 families, of which 76% have home internet access. A low IRSD score of 945 places this area within the bottom 30% for disadvantage of all Western Australian locations (ABS, 2016).

The public library was initially housed in a building constructed in 1933 as a Road Board Office, but library services are now offered from a low brick building which is attached to the LGA administrative centre. Looking like a comfortable home, the library is set in a small, grassed area one street back from the main thoroughfare and shopping street of the small town. Inside the library, the small space is tightly packed with well filled shelves of books along with two public computers and a table for studying. There is a colourful area for children including a grand storytelling chair. Staff work from behind a high desk near the front door.

3. Buildings and library interiors

Library buildings in Western Australia are constructed according to APLA-ALIA Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries (ALIA, 2021). The six libraries in this study displayed varied building configurations, with one stand-alone building, four connected to other facilities and one within a commercial facility. Buildings were all solid brick or concrete structures, with four being single storey and two having an upper storey or mezzanine. All libraries had climate control and were in good condition, with an atmosphere suggesting care and attention.

Four of the buildings had large picture windows for provision of natural lighting, and in all libraries the children's area was near to the windows. Two of the metropolitan locations (L1a, L1c) and one regional location (L2a) had colourful murals painted on the windows of their children's areas.

Motion sensor doors were installed at entries in the metropolitan and regional libraries, allowing ease of access for parents/carers with prams. At the rural location, heavy push-open doors to both the foyer and the library resulted in parents/carers leaving prams outside under the eaves of the library building.

All metropolitan and regional libraries had expansive public areas housing books and other resources, along with tables, desks, varied seating, and technological facilities. Their designs offered open spaces for communal use, as well as enclosed meeting rooms for study or other activities. These rooms were available for appointments with the

Community Child Health Nurse or other health or social workers as required. The libraries had clean and modern gender specific toilets with baby change facilities available, as part of the library itself or within the same building. While none had dedicated baby feeding facilities, all had comfortable chairs where this could take place. The rural library had a no free space, meeting rooms or baby change facilities at the library or close by. It was necessary to ask staff before using the single toilet which was within the staff area.

All locations were easily accessible by foot, bicycle or car. All had sufficient parking space including disabled bays and a bicycle rack, with parking at rural location L3 and regional location L2a being well shaded. Metropolitan and regional libraries were accessible by public transport, including the three city locations being landmark destinations on the Trans Perth Journey Planner system that details exact routes and times of public transport availability.

Locations varied in terms of their proximity to shops, schools, child health centres, playgrounds, residential areas, bus stops and community facilities. Three were central to retail areas of their towns (L1a, L1b, L2a), while one regional library (L2a) and the rural library (L3) were approximately five minutes' walk from their nearest shops. One metropolitan library was about twenty minutes' walk or five minutes' bus ride from the local shopping centre and was integrated with a recreation centre (L1c). Information and maps of library locations were given on websites of the cities and Shires, and directional street signage was evident from nearby road junctions to enable libraries to be found by new and visiting customers.

All libraries were attractively presented inside and although the rural library was cramped, it was nevertheless welcoming. An overall ambience of spaciousness was evident in the metropolitan and regional libraries, replacing the confined spaces and rows of heavy shelving that were the norm in earlier libraries. Spaciousness was especially evident at regional library L2b that acted as a Community Centre, with more than half of its considerable space free of shelving and furniture, and available for use by residents when attending community activities and events.

In the regional and metropolitan locations, where libraries were big enough to do so, children's areas were located away from quiet adult areas, with furniture used to delineate these different uses. Children's areas had both carpeted areas for comfort and 'wet' areas for messy activities such as painting or craft. They had an atmosphere of relaxation and security that encouraged children to sit, lie or play in what was easily identifiable as a location designed especially for them.

Directional signage was sparse inside all libraries, relying on relatively open sightlines to enable customer navigation without the need to ask staff. Customer service points were clearly indicated, either with a single desk located immediately inside main entries (L1b, L1c, L2a, L2b, L3) or with small staff pods distributed in strategic locations (L1a). The aim of recently developed pods was to enable staff to be out in the body of the library where the customers were, rather than confined to one formal, and perhaps intimidating, area.

Shelving at metropolitan and regional locations was well lit, of modern, modular design and spaced to allow prams or wheelchairs through the rows or curves. Shelves were head height in adult areas and child height in children's areas. Children's areas had movable floor-level browser boxes with picture books facing outwards to enable children to access books independently without adult help. Board books for babies were shelved and labelled separately as were DVDs, CDs, MP3s, kits, puzzles, games and toys. Special display shelving in a variety of configurations was evident at metropolitan and regional locations, and professionally developed visual displays were evident on large wall mounted display boards. Information about the interiors of the six participating libraries is given in Table 8, including Wi-Fi availability, climate control, toilets, and dedicated facilities for babies.

Table 8: Library Interiors

LIBRARY	PSEUDONYM	CONTEXT	WIFI/ COMPUTERS	CLIMATE CONTROL	TOILETS	BABY CHANGE	BABY FEEDING
L1a	Swandon	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
L1b	Sackston	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
L1c	Venizia	Metro	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

L2a	Igard	Region	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
L2b	Minster	Region	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
L3	Caxley	Rural	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Total: 6		3 Metro					
Libraries		2 Region					
		1 Rural					

4. Staff and stock

Staffing numbers for public libraries are flexible and include allowances for the number of library locations within an LGA, extent and configuration of opening hours, local contexts and the need for professional qualifications. Variations in staff numbers across localities are related to the policies and requirements of the LGA in which libraries are situated and customer service staff numbers vary according to different days of the week, times of the day and activities or programs.

Staff at all libraries were observed to have time to converse with customers, help with their questions, provide them with technical information and listen to their concerns. It is acknowledged, however, that visits did not necessarily encompass peak busy times when staff may have been under pressure that precluded these activities.

Selection of new items was made by qualified local library staff for the metropolitan and regional libraries, while staff from the State Library of Western Australia made selections for the rural library. Selections took account of local demographics in determining content and format, enabling areas with large numbers of children to stock larger numbers of children's books. LGAs were additionally able to purchase their own stock to supplement that provided by the state. Stock included items in small and large print, audio-visual titles and free access to digital resources and multiple data bases.

Children's stock included concept books, picture books, story books and nonfiction books for all junior users. Board Books especially for babies were made of sturdy cardboard or durable plastic and had a small number of pages each showing a simple picture of interest to the age group. Accompanying words were in large, clear fonts and surrounded by ample free space. Pictures were suitable for looking at, pointing to, being

identified in words, and sometimes engaging the senses through tactile aspects such as being furry, soft, bumpy or smooth.

While all libraries allowed customers to bring in coffee, only one regional library provided coffee on site, with a vending machine in a dedicated refreshment area. Another regional library had an agreement with shopping centre managers not to supply coffee in the library, but instead encouraged families to use the centre's retail facilities. In return, centre managers encouraged library events to be part of their customer activity schedule. One metropolitan library was located within a recreation centre that had the centre's commercial café available to it.

General statistics relating to library stock, staffing numbers, visits by customers and population of the LGA are shown in Table 9. Statistics are available in comprehensive annual reports from the State Library of Western Australia (slwa.wa.gov.au). Libraries and their LGAs are labelled with pseudonyms.

Table 9: General Statistics

LIB.	PSEUDO- NYM	CONTEXT	POP. SA2	STAFF FTE	HRS.	MEMB.	TOTAL VISITS	VISITS PER FTE
L1a	Swandon	Metro	10,765	10.5	47	22,062	99,387	9,465
L1b	Sackston	Metro	45,981	8.8	45	12,962	92,857	10,552
LGA Total			148,222	29.7		58,161	301,006	
L2a	Igard	Region	9,607	6.2	55	7,788	94,466	14,533
L2b	Minster	Region	21,088	4.7	44	4,341	54,670	11,632
LGA Total			105,362	10.9		12,129	149,136	
L3	Caxley	Rural	4,267	2.5	30	500	5,035	2,014
Total: 6 Libs.		3 Metro 2 Region 1 Rural						

Table 10: Junior Statistics

LIB.	PSEUDONYM	CONTEXT	JUNIORS	JUNIOR STOCK	JUNIOR MEMBERS PER FTE
L1a	Swandon	Metro	1,941	17,430	185
L1b	Sackston	Metro	1,749	15,080	199
L1c	Venizia	Metro	3,898	17,721	375
LGA Total			7,588	50,231	
L2a	Igard	Region	946	11,724	153
L2b	Minster	Region	895	8,125	190
LGA Total			1,841	19,849	
L3	Caxley	Rural	n/a	2,599	n/a
Total: 6 Libs		3 Metro			
		2 Region			
		1 Rural			

Metropolitan and regional libraries were open five weekdays plus Saturdays, including evenings. The rural library was open four weekdays plus Saturday mornings. Weekly opening hours averaged 44 to 55 hours across larger locations and were 30 hours at the rural location. Permanent residential details for library members were not required by the metropolitan LGA's where anyone could become a library member, including temporary residents and visitors. The rural library was part of a larger consortia which enabled access to library resources throughout the southwest of Western Australia.

5. Conclusion

The details given in this chapter of the geographic, physical and socio-economic contexts in which selected libraries were located indicate contrasting features between the rural area and the urban areas in which libraries were situated. The rural library was substantially different from the regional and metropolitan libraries in size, resources and services offered and staff characteristics. It was physically cramped, had fewer items available for use, offered no early childhood programs, and had no qualified Manager or Operational Staff. Further, the area from which it drew its members was sparsely populated, geographically extensive, and distant from major facilities. These

differences may have been influential in the low levels of engagement with the library by parents/carers and their young children in this location.

In comparison, differences between the metropolitan and regional libraries were less obvious, with each of the five libraries having similar programs, activities and resources, along with management support from qualified personnel. Although their social contexts were diverse, with ABS information indicating high housing stress, high unemployment or high numbers of migrants in differing areas, great distinctions were not observed among families who participated in the study. Thus, library using parents/carers offered similar commentary across regional and metropolitan libraries, and library non-using parents/carers offered similar perceptions across the regional and metropolitan libraries.

CHAPTER SIX

LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT

1. Introduction

This chapter details early childhood language and literacy programs, activities and resources that were provided in the selected public libraries in Western Australia during the study period between 2019 and 2021. The chapter describes findings in answer to Research Question 1:

What language and literacy services for children from birth to age three years and their parents/carers are currently provided by public libraries in Western Australia?

Early childhood language and literacy services at public libraries comprise the delivery of programs and activities, the provision of comprehensive resources for young children and the assistance of library staff. Findings about the early childhood services were informed by data gathered from interviews with Local Government Councillors (coded LG), Senior Staff at policy level (coded SS), Library Managers (coded LM), Library Operational staff (coded OP), parents/carers of young children, coded PU for parent library users and coded PN for parent library non-users. They were further informed by observations of library based language and literacy events and of informal library use by parents/carers and children

Data related to buildings and physical resources was collected from audits of six different library facilities in the selected locations in Western Australia. Libraries are coded L1a, L1b and L1c for metropolitan facilities, L2a and L2b for regional facilities and L3 for rural facilities. Observations are coded with OB followed by the number of the observation between 1 and 16. Observations were carried out during early childhood sessions and during regular library opening hours at the metropolitan and regional libraries. However, at the rural library (L3) they were carried out during regular library opening hours only as no early language and literacy sessions were held at that library during the study period.

Analysis of data revealed three key findings. First, libraries were found to deliver a diverse array of early childhood language and literacy programs, although it is noted that the rural library did not have any programs or activities on offer during the study period. Second, libraries were seen to provide comprehensive printed and other resources to assist with language and literacy learning by young children. Third, it was revealed that individual libraries had different emphases within their language and literacy services for young children, varying in aims of different events and according to local policies and practices of different staff. These findings are detailed next.

2. Key finding 1: Multiple library programs and activities support early language and literacy learning

Multiple language and literacy programs for children from birth to age three years were offered consistently at all five metropolitan and regional libraries. Programs included regular *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*, along with the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* and outreach activities that extended beyond the walls of the library into the community. *Storytimes* involved sessions lasting from 30 to 40 minutes for parents/carers with toddlers and young children. They comprised songs, rhymes, fingerplays, games, two or three short stories, craft and time for socialising. *Rhymetimes* were offered for parents/carers with babies and comprised shorter sessions of around 20 minutes to accommodate babies' shorter attention spans. *Rhymetimes* consisted of songs, rhymes and time for socialising. Outreach services included off-site *Storytimes* along with visits by library staff to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres, Playgroups, schools and community locations.

More than 20 different early childhood language and literacy based programs were detailed by library staff during interviews for this study. They included regular programs held daily or weekly, along with occasional programs held during school holiday times, or according to customer demand and local arrangements. The *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* is a state-wide program delivered by the State Library of Western Australia in conjunction with LGAs and Community Child Health Nurses from the Western Australian Department of Health. *Better Beginnings* delivers free bags with high quality books to parents/carers, and provides training in early language and literacy to

library staff. Apart from *Better Beginnings*, all programs were planned, created and delivered by library staff in response to policy direction, public need and staff abilities within the three different participating LGAs. While underlying language and literacy aims were consistent across programs, their provision and emphases were dynamic and flexible. Programs were found to have differing names, target groups and content according to local conditions. These programs are listed in Table 11.

Table 11: Library based Early Childhood Language and Literacy Programs

PROGRAM	METRO LIBRARIES	REGIONAL LIBRARIES	RURAL LIBRARY
Regular programs			
Mixed-age Storytime	✓	✓	
Baby Rhymetime	✓	✓	
Toddler Rhymetime	✓	✓	
Toddler Storytime	✓		
Toddler Time catch-up program	✓		
Learning English Through Storytime (LETS)	✓	✓	
Storybite (online)	✓		
Rhymebite (online)	✓		
STEM for Toddlers (with language)		✓	
State-wide program (annual)			
Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program	✓	✓	Partial
Occasional programs			
Community Storytime	✓		
Community Rhymetime	✓		
Intergenerational Storytime	✓	✓	
Indigenous-led Storytime	✓		
National Simultaneous Storytime	✓	✓	
Information Program	✓		
Mothers' Group	✓		
Community Book Project	✓		
Raising Literacy Program	✓		
Storydogs		✓	
Pilot Programs	✓		
TOTAL	19	9	<1

Within this list of programs, *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* were found to be the most widespread language and literacy based programs for young children. They were mostly accompanied by resources provided through the state-wider *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program*. These are described next, followed by information about other programs delivered by libraries in this study.

2.1 *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*

Storytimes and *Rhymetimes* were regularly held across all five metropolitan and regional locations, with multiple sessions provided each week at each library during school term times. Eight types of regular programs were held in the metropolitan libraries, seven in the regional libraries, however none in the rural library. In the metropolitan region, Senior Staff member Philippa (SS06) reported that the LGA's six libraries provided 544 individual sessions in the previous quarter, including ten *Storytimes* each week at each branch. Staff indicated that sessions varied in size from two or three children (OB01, OB02) up to 40 or 50 babies and toddlers plus their parents/carers (LM07, SS04). While sessions were targeted and promoted to different age groups, for example with *Toddler Storytimes* for two to five-year-olds and *Baby Rhymetimes* for birth to two-years-olds, these categories were fluid. In practice, any age child could attend any session according to family needs. In addition, *Mixed-Age Storytimes* were held on demand during term time and holiday time to enable siblings of different ages to attend together.

Diversity in *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* across all the libraries accommodated varied requirements of babies, toddlers and young children, with activities catering to the needs and interests at differing ages and stages in their development. These requirements were described by Library Manager Martine (LM03) in the metropolitan location who acknowledged that children learn in different styles and at different times, and that the libraries adapted to that as much as they could. This resulted in language and literacy activities differing across sessions, with multiple observations revealing program variations within the same LGA as well as between different LGAs (OB02, OB11, OB14).

In contrast to variations explained by staff in the delivery of early childhood language and literacy programs, observations of library *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* illustrated similarities in provision or delivery. For example, *Storytimes* involved a basic format of reading two simple stories, using traditional songs, rhymes, fingerplays and games, repeating words and songs, and encouraging interaction between the presenter, the children and the parents/carers. All sessions lasted up to 40 minutes (OB03, OB06, OB08, OB11). Showing a similar format, commonalities in *Rhymetimes* involved all libraries using well-known rhymes and songs, repetition of content across multiple sessions, inclusion of actions with the rhymes and songs, and sessions of around 20 minutes in duration (OB01, OB02, OB07, OB09, OB14). A typical session delivered at metropolitan library L1c was described in field notes for OB14:

The *Rhymetime* session started with an acknowledgment of country in a child-friendly format, followed by *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* sung in Noongar. The leader went through a list of ten rhymes at pace, energetically showing hand and finger plays. The songs and rhymes were a mix of traditional and new and included onomatopoeic words such pop, ouch, squish, sizzle and clap. The *Babyways* book was shared halfway through the session, another ten rhymes were presented, and families were encouraged to imitate actions such as clapping, roly-poly with hands, tossing, tickling, cuddling and kissing. All the babies were quiet and unfussy during the singing and many of them smiled and laughed the whole way through. (OB14)

This session was delivered by an unqualified but well-experienced member of the library's Operational Staff team (OP07). Operational staff in all five metropolitan and regional locations were found to be encouraged by their Library Managers to engage proactively with early language and literacy through common practices such as having a welcoming atmosphere, being friendly and not requiring children to be quiet (LM05, LM06, LM08).

Field notes describe how staff worked with the families at *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* in an informal and non-didactic manner. Staff were found to make it clear they were not there to teach skills, but rather to suggest and model suitable activities for

parents/carers (OB08). For example, chatter, distraction and freedom of movement were common during sessions. Staff were flexible in approach and accommodated differing attitudes of library users, as illustrated in a regional library session. At this session, one grandmother who was familiar with *Storytime* seemed comfortable knowing that her grandchild was loudly voluble and ran around a lot, while another grandmother who was new to *Storytime* was apprehensive her grandchild might embarrass her by not sitting still (OB03). Staff balanced an awareness that some parents/carers wanted children to learn to sit still before they went to school (PU05) with the practicalities of typical toddler behaviour.

Library based language and literacy programs for young children were observed to vary across locations according to local aims, age groups in attendance, session topics, staff skills and social contexts. Library Managers in regional and metropolitan locations described how they promoted diversity across libraries and over time to remain relevant to disparate and dynamic demographics in their catchment areas. For example, Library Manager Martine (LM03) advocated flexibility to ensure there was always something interesting and new for children to do at the library to pique their interest. Programs changed in name, content and availability according to expressed needs of families, innovative ideas, formal training, new staff and changes in demographics of attendees. However, one high profile language and literacy program for young children was common across all libraries. This was the state-wide *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* which is described in the next section.

2.2 The *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program*

The *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* is available to all LGAs throughout Western Australia. The program is known by practitioners as *Better Beginnings* and provides gift bags for families, early childhood language and literacy training for library staff, both in person at the State Library of Western Australia and online, and encouragement for language and literacy based programs such as *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* to be delivered at libraries. However, the data shows that while the name *Better Beginnings* was familiar to interviewees, detailed knowledge of the program among stakeholders was piecemeal.

Data from Local Government Councillors indicates that five of the six interviewed participants mentioned that *Better Beginnings* involved bags and books being delivered to young children, although one Local Government Councillor confused *Better Beginnings* with *Storytime*. This Councillor (LG01) inaccurately described how her LGA had previously offered *Better Beginnings* but this did not occur anymore. Among Senior Staff, knowledge of *Better Beginnings* was more detailed, with all eight Senior Staff describing the language and literacy rationale of the program. Four Senior Staff also noted that the State Library of Western Australia was involved with *Better Beginnings* through provision of resources and training (SS01, SS04, SS05, SS07). Senior Staff member Patrick (SS02) described using the program as a strong focus for library services and as a helpful outreach tool, and added that *Better Beginnings* was facilitated by having healthy budgets, sufficient people and ample resources. In a similarly positive vein, Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) regarded *Better Beginnings* as valuable in what she termed 'wrap-around' family services that contemporary public libraries provided for young families. Senior Staff member Joanne advised that *Better Beginnings* had helped with developing connections between the local library and local schools which included library staff becoming recognised by children and parents/carers (SS07). Joanne (SS07) further advised that *Better Beginnings* had encouraged a stronger language and literacy focus for *Storytimes*, while Senior Staff member Ellen additionally reported about *Better Beginnings* as follows:

The model that Western Australia has in terms of *Better Beginnings* is held in very high regard interstate. I can tell you that from my dealings with the Australian Library Association and APLA [Australian Public Libraries Association]. What Western Australia does is really good. (SS08)

Among library employees, six of the seven Library Managers and three of the nine Operational Staff in the study spoke of the *Better Beginnings* program unprompted, with depth of knowledge and understanding varying between individuals. While Library Manager Fran (LM02) had a problem with staffing and distribution of *Better Beginnings* bags, she was nevertheless positive about the program's value. She described how the *Better Beginnings* budget was huge, but since there were 43 schools in her area there was insufficient staff time to provide the necessary input. Fran worked proactively with

her community and changed books in the gift bags to reflect local culture, especially at localities with many Indigenous families or other ethnic groups (LM02). With a correspondingly positive outlook, Library Manager Caitlin in a regional library advised:

Better Beginnings trainings are the ones that we make sure they (Operational Staff) have done. Our literacy program is based around *Better Beginnings* and having a program that you can fall back on like *Better Beginnings* can help support you with ideas. *Better Beginnings* has been going now for about 15 years I think now. 15 years ago, *Rhymetimes* started to pick up. (LM04)

Among Operational Staff in the metropolitan and regional areas there was a similarly positive outlook concerning *Better Beginnings*. Staff valued the program and were able to modify its delivery to suit the needs of their differing communities. For example, Operational Staff member Colette (OP01) elaborated on the importance of the program, including telling a story of a customer who came to the library to collect a *Better Beginnings* bag. When Colette told the customer about activities offered by the library Collette said the customer was amazed at how much the libraries did for literacy development. In the metropolitan region, Operational Staff member Billy (OP07) described how her library had a stock of *Better Beginnings* bags to give out to families who had not yet received them through Health Department channels, and they also offered additional encouragement by giving out *Better Beginnings*' 'Sing With Me' music bags to two-year-olds. Further, they offered a collection of *Better Beginnings* backpacks for loan containing books, puppets, games and activity sheets that were well used by inquisitive users (OP07).

The high profile that *Better Beginnings* had with library staff, however, was not evident among parents/carers who were recipients, or potential recipients, of the program. Only one of the 57 parents/carers participating in this study made unprompted reference to *Better Beginnings* (PU05). This participant was a Community Child Health Nurse who was familiar with the program through distributing *Better Beginnings* bags when she conducted babies' eight-week health checks at her infant health clinic. While *Better Beginnings*, *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* were offered at most libraries, some programs

were specific to one location or one LGA. Extra programs offered at participating libraries are described in the next section.

2.3 Other language and literacy programs

A variety of additional language and literacy programs for young children were offered at metropolitan and regional libraries that participated in this study. For example, library L1a offered a special *Toddler Time* as a bridge between *Rhymetime* aimed at babies and *Storytime* aimed at toddlers. Library Manager Fran (LM02) explained that *Toddler Time* was an intensive, highly structured five-week program to build appropriate language and literacy behaviours in young children who were new to *Storytimes* and who were not sure what to do. She said the program worked with the children until they “know how to behave” (LM02). *Toddler Time* sessions were constructed by qualified or experienced staff and delivered either by the Library Manager or a member of library Operational Staff. Library Manager Fran described *Toddler Time* as follows:

We run it a few times ... if we have enough people like ten or 12 expressions of interest then we might be able to run it ... if we see the need. Usually, I talk to the staff who are running *Storytime* and they say ‘Oh, the kids are getting younger and the message not gets through (*sic*) and what should we do?’ (We) encourage children to be able to sit and listen long enough so that when they go to school, they have the fine motor skills that they need, they have the ability to sit and listen. And of course, the language skills that come from listening to stories and sharing stories and learning rhyme. (LM02)

This same library also offered regular two-hour long information sessions including providing early language and literacy information, which Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) described as targeting specifically vulnerable people and diverse multi-cultural communities. This library furthermore offered regular *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) sessions to assist new migrants and help them become more confident with speaking English (LM02). *LETS* sessions were delivered by trained staff and offered planned language and literacy content targeted towards young children whose first language was not English.

In the metropolitan libraries, online *Storybite* and *Rhymebite* sessions were recorded in-house at libraries for viewing by families in their homes, starting during Covid-19 lockdown periods and continuing afterwards due to their popularity (OB07). These sessions consisted of regular *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* experiences as they took place live, recorded by library staff using mobile phones or iPads and made available to families through social media. A second additional activity at these large libraries was a new project in which families were taking part in making a Community Book, as described by consultant Joanne:

Supporting what libraries are doing around literacy and reflecting. What libraries do is then use these books in their own *Rhymetime* and *Storytime* so that the children actually see themselves. They love that. And then I've kept the language very simple with the view that they can start trying to read along and they've got a copy of the book themselves. (SS07)

In a corresponding manner to the metropolitan libraries, libraries in the regional area offered specialist sessions according to local demand. Library L2a held regular Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) sessions for toddlers where they learnt some physics concepts, practised counting and engaged in reading, talking and conversation (LM03, OP02). Library L2b in the regional area offered language and literacy enhanced sessions called *Learning with Storytime*. These were provided for families who had expressed an interest in language and literacy, and they offered a structured program with clear and deliberate language and literacy messaging (LM07). Finally, library 2b was building a regular sequence of intergenerational events to boost the language, literacy and social development of the babies, toddlers and adults involved (OP06).

Special *Storytimes* and some intergenerational events were provided outside the physical walls of library buildings. These events were encouraged by Senior Staff and Library Managers, including pop-up libraries, displays of resources, visits to early learning centres, and supplying language and literacy information at commercial venues and shopping malls (SS04, SS08). Staff advocated for outreach that could reassure families who lacked confidence as library users by offering *Storytimes* at places where families gathered such as community festivals (SS01) plus going to Playgroups to contact parents

who may be isolated in their homes and not able or confident to take their children out (SS04). Library Managers Fran and Monique (LM02, LM06) confirmed that inter-generational outreach and special events had benefits in reaching library non-users and improving awareness of the importance of early childhood language and literacy learning. Library Manager Monique described reinforcing this learning through her library's promotional off-site activities as follows:

What we do is go out to a lot of community events and do a lot of outreach. So, for this area as well there are school events, so we went out there. And we're always trying to engage people 'Did you know, did you know, did you know.' We have an outreach kit with a gazebo and lawn chairs, and we take out books and activities. (LM06)

Similarly, Operational Staff member Noni suggested that to increase awareness of libraries and their role in early language and literacy, libraries needed to plan as much outreach as possible (OP06). Noni detailed how outreach could be conducted, promoting library staff visiting the Child Health Nurse, holding *Storytimes* in the shopping centre, planning inter-generational activities, and modifying programs to ensure they were held at suitable times for the families and suitable age groups of children. Noni's colleague Bethany further commented about outreach activities with underlying, although unexpressed, language and literacy benefits:

I think outreach is a really good thing. Get out of the building. Get out there and do things. Let people know that we're there and we do it here. And to know that we even exist. I think things like shopping centres, wherever there are big crowds of people you're going to get them. I really do think getting out is the way to get them in. (OP04)

In the metropolitan libraries, Library Managers regularly reached out to Community Child Health Nurses, requesting their presence at *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* and other arranged events or opening hours. This resulted in early language and literacy sessions being supplemented by immunisation clinics and Nurse appointments on library premises, including completing children's health check-ups and referring them to further health or social services as required.

In addition to outreach activities, library based language and literacy programs were expanded through partnerships with educational facilities and linking in with the Education Department. According to Senior Staff member Patrick (SS02) his city worked in partnership as follows:

Our LGA has a focus on strong linkage with the schools. The libraries have built strong relationships over 15/20 years with some of the harder schools ... The early years' focus for me is the partnerships ... with education services, early learning providers, Mothers' Groups, community groups and more. (SS02)

In the metropolitan and regional areas, staff created opportunities with local schools to engage with pre-literacy and school readiness activities, and made efforts to build personal contacts between local libraries and nearby schools. This included libraries offering *Storytimes* on school premises to engage parents/carers when they were taking older children to school (OP01) and to establish greater library awareness (OP04).

Library based language and literacy services were delivered with the legal and financial backing of facilities by the State Government, and by provision of facilities and staff to run them by LGAs. While there was consistency across the state in provision of funding for library books via the State Library of Western Australia, models and levels of resource provision for staff, buildings and facilities varied between LGAs. This is discussed in the next section.

3. Key finding 2: Comprehensive library resources support early language and literacy learning

A range of resources are required to provide library services to support language and literacy learning by young children. Resources involve legal and financial backing of library services, provision of library staff and facilities, and the book and non-book items that are the core feature of public libraries.

3.1 Legal and financial resources

For public libraries to provide programs, activities and resources to support the learning and development of language and literacy by young children, legal formalities and

sustainable funding are required. Libraries are legally required to be a free service, with no charges to the user other than through municipal rates (SS08). Funds are distributed from the state to LGAs through the State Library of Western Australia. State-supplied funds are accompanied by LGA rates income along with philanthropic and sponsorship funding (SS01). New funding models have been developed across time to sustain the state-wide library system (SS04, SS09), including modifications to the proportions of funding provided by state government and local government according to economic conditions and political stance.

Library staff proposed that transparency in the use of financial resources was essential for adequate and sustainable funding to be provided for libraries' early language and literacy role. Without transparency and an understanding among funding bodies of how funds were used, Senior Staff member Julia (SS04) proposed that sufficient funds may not be forthcoming. With a similar outlook, Senior Staff member Ellen (SS08) described how transparency could be improved by keeping libraries actively present in ratepayers' minds through staff and services being out in the community at ECEC centres, schools, commercial venues and retail centres (SS08). Senior Staff member Roma endeavoured to boost transparency of funding allocations within her LGA in a different way by encouraging all library officers to participate in corporate strategic planning processes (SS05). Library Manager Martine additionally suggested that funding levels could be helped by ensuring her Director was kept informed, as well as through the actions of satisfied customers. Martine relayed how local families who were enthusiastic library users were, in marketing terms, 'Library Champions' who turned up to multiple library events and told everyone how great the libraries were (LM03).

One element of the funding mix for libraries is ongoing financial input from LGAs. All Senior Staff acknowledged the need for healthy funding for language and literacy services for young children, while Library Manager Monique described how strong funding from her LGA had enabled the recent development of a new staff position dedicated to early language and literacy. Monique explained:

(We receive) a lot of support from our managers and from Local Government. We have funding specifically for children's programs so are able to

purchase craft materials and all of our children's collection that we use and rely on. And we also have positions like myself and also we have a Children's Librarian. (LM06)

An alternative viewpoint was, however, provided by Library Manager Martine (LM03). Martine proposed that library staff achieved a lot even without strong financial backing. Nonetheless, in contrast to this suggestion by Martine, some staff described how they endeavoured to ensure they did not have to do without funding. Senior Staff members Roma and Philippa (SS05, SS06) suggested when Local Government Councillors knew about libraries' early childhood language and literacy work, such knowledge helped to push relevant funding and policy matters up LGAs' agendas. Senior Staff member Roma offered the following explanatory viewpoint:

I get very frustrated with people when they say: 'I don't get any support.'
Well, how have you approached, how have you developed a business case, how have you lobbied ... (What) impact do you have on the community? How can you expect your decision makers to understand that? (SS05)

Councillor Janelle likewise proposed that Local Government Councillors who received clear messaging about the importance of early childhood language and literacy services at libraries were better able to advocate for ongoing funding. She advised that when clear and correct messaging occurred, funding was usually available since libraries were facilitated as a priority (LG04). Janelle continued to explain that libraries in her city sat solidly in budgets and forecasts of the LGA's strategic community plan, having value in the promotion of health, wellbeing and connectivity in addition to literacy (LG04). With a similar outlook, Senior Staff member Philippa (SS06) advised that providing qualitative stories was one method of enhancing Local Government Councillor backing of continued provision of financial and other resources. Philippa advised that it was helpful for Local Government Councillors to know and tell stories about library activities since this was good for the libraries as well as showing the public the good work neighbourhood Local Government Councillors did.

Financial and policy foundations for early childhood language and literacy services were described by all nine Senior Staff and five of the six Local Government Councillors. Although dollar amounts were not nominated, libraries were described by these stakeholders as well-resourced. For example, Senior Staff member Nicole noted that library projects were mostly funded wherever they took place (SS01) while Senior Staff member Marin (SS03) alleged that positive advocacy had enabled libraries to have a clear path through financial processes with both sides of state government. These resources are described in more detail next.

3.2 Facilities and staff

Facilities

The availability of good quality contemporary library facilities is necessary for ongoing in-house provision of language and literacy services for young children. Findings from audits of six library facilities in selected metropolitan, regional and rural areas indicate that early language and literacy work is achieved within purpose-built libraries which are of sound structure, well-maintained, accessible for those with disabilities, and climate controlled. Libraries are in reachable locations within communities, with regular and cost-effective public transport available except at the rural library. To appeal to young families and encourage them to stay when they visit, library facilities are furnished in modern fashion, with dedicated children's areas delineated by colourful furnishings, suitable décor and low book-browser boxes. Except in the rural location, families are further assisted by all libraries having toilet and baby-change facilities, comfortable seating suitable for breast-feeding, and safe spaces for pram or buggy parking.

Staff

At the five participating metropolitan and regional libraries (L1a, L1b, L1c, L2a, L2b), staff used a portion of their time to work on early childhood language and literacy duties. However, at the rural library (L3) a limited number of staff were required to cover all duties, with no specific allocation of time for early childhood services. Among staff working in the early childhood field, findings indicate that effective interpersonal communication skills were perceived to be of benefit more than formal qualifications (SS07). Library staff were observed to consistently show pleasure in being with children by smiling, making eye contact, laughing, chatting with the parents/carers and offering

personal thoughts (OB02). Staff who delivered *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* as performers or storytellers (SS05) showed further competencies in how to use their voice effectively, manage large groups of adults and children, and actively interpret the audience (OP01, OP07). They engaged adults and children by changing voice inflections, exaggerating their tone and manner, and encouraging parents/carers and children to join in (SS08). They required confidence to stand in front of a crowd, deal with restive audiences, be heard above the noise, and manage multiple interruptions (SS05). They dressed up in unusual outfits and were comfortable being silly when talking with young children (Jacobson, 2017). Having skills to make the events fun were inherent characteristics of most *Storytimes*, and were found to be fundamental in the successful delivery of language and literacy information to parents/carers and children from birth to age three years.

Implementation of early language and literacy programs and activities in the metropolitan and regional libraries included employment of staff according to program skills rather than traditional library skills such as cataloguing and collection development. Senior Staff member Roma advised that staff needed to know how to engage intergenerational audiences, as well as having the skills and confidence to bring distracted audience members back to the activity when ringing phones intervened or children's short attention spans drifted (SS05). Accordingly, Roma described how her LGA had proceeded with this:

(We) had the opportunity to develop up some position descriptions for people who are not library people, never want to be a library person, but want to deliver our programs and activities. They don't want to talk to people about rates payments, they are performers, or they are storytellers or whatever. (SS05)

With newly created staff positions that assist families with young children, a child-friendly atmosphere was evident at the metropolitan and regional locations. Library staff in all observations were found to encourage families to interact by demonstrating songs and associated actions in lively ways and showing activities for parents/carers and their children to play together either in the library or at home (OB01, OB07, OB14).

Senior Staff member Joanne (SS07) advised that while employees needed well-developed relationship-building and interpersonal skills, this was not a given among contemporary library staff. Joanne alleged that staff needed deliberate and ongoing training in what, why and how to deliver early language and literacy information. For those staff who thought they had to just read a story, Joanne recommended teaching them how to help parents/carers learn to share books with their children, and how to add value to a family's experience of visiting the library (SS07). Having staff who were prepared to learn, grow and actively engage with families was regarded by Library Managers Martine, Monique and Seringey (LM03, LM06, LM08) as essential.

Similarly, Senior Staff member Ellen (SS08) wanted employees who worked every day with young families to be committed to their early language and literacy role, and have competent practical skills in offering learning opportunities. These skills include unobtrusively demonstrating language and literacy behaviours through reading, playing and talking with children and asking them for their ideas (SS07), encouraging parent/carer and child book sharing (SS01) and ensuring that storytimes had positive language and literacy outcomes (SS08). Staff were seen to require a systematic approach to program development (SS08) and to be able to integrate into their library work skills learnt through working in non-library arenas such as early childhood, education, community development, performance and retail fields (SS07). Senior Staff member Roma advised that library staff needed to manage a variety of administrative, corporate, technical and community routines, as well as be equipped to deliver effective and enjoyable programs (SS05). Library Manager Fran further noted that experienced library staff were able to provide language and literacy training to other practitioners, such as metropolitan staff training Aboriginal Elders in delivery of culturally relevant storytimes for Indigenous groups. Metropolitan library staff also assisted with training early childhood staff in language, literacy and storytelling at the children's agency Ngala in Perth (LM02).

To build staff's language and literacy skills, training was received by library Operational Staff on-the-job (OP04). This was necessary since all interviewed Operational Staff members except Noni (OP06) were unqualified in early childhood development,

beginning their child-based library roles by offering only individual personal skills. For example, Colette (OP01) completed a two-year traineeship, Lindy came to the library as a volunteer and subsequently became a paid Library Officer (OP03) and Bernice was a customer service officer from retail who said she had “moved to libraries for the love and certainly not the money” (OP06). For most staff, then, training in how to deliver *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* was necessary, and was available from the State Library of Western Australia on site in Perth or online. This helped to build understanding among Operational Staff of the value and significance of libraries’ early childhood language and literacy events (SS07).

Library based language and literacy programs were implemented in line with the policies and requirements of their LGA. Audits indicate that staff numbers to assist young families vary according to the day of the week, time of the day and planned activities or programs. Those staff charged with early language and literacy activities completed these as one part of their general library duties, with no set number or schedule of hours put aside for this purpose. Ages of staff ranged from young adult to senior, with concerns expressed about an impending need to replace a high number of experienced staff now approaching retirement age (OP09). To manage this, metropolitan libraries were promoting the employment of “young staff who are kind of funky and come with exceptional customer service” (LM08), as similarly described by Professor Neuman (Neuman, 2018). A different staffing situation was found in the rural library, however, where Operational Staff worked by themselves with each staff member covering multiple roles. This library had no qualified library staff nor a professional Library Manager position. The library was instead overseen by the LGA’s Finance Manager who worked from a separate building, in another department and in a dissimilar role. Rural Operational Staff members Linda and Helen noted they had been offered *Storytime* training but did not attend as they had not felt the need to go to Perth for a full day to learn (OP03). Linda remarked that between herself and Helen they “know how to read a child’s story” (OP03). These staff also advised they had insufficient staff to run *Storytimes*, saying:

We don't have a reading time as such, only because our staff levels aren't high enough at the moment ... If you're here on your own you can't do it (*Storytime*). You've got to come back and serve, come back and serve. (OP05)

Variations in staff characteristics and numbers between the large metropolitan and regional libraries and the small rural library were mirrored by variations in book characteristics and numbers between the different libraries. Section 3.3 below describes the book and non-book resources that were available to promote early language and literacy learning at the six libraries of different sizes, locations and contexts.

3.3 Book and non-book items

Language and literacy learning in young children requires interactions with books and other materials. This section of the report describes an audit of these resources in participating libraries, with full details given in Appendix E.

Audits of the six participating libraries in this study gathered information about free availability of large numbers of relevant materials to nurture children's reading readiness and reading skills (AU01, AU02, AU03, AU04, AU05, AU06). To supply these resources, new stock was consistently selected, processed, and made available to customers. In the metropolitan and regional libraries items were selected on a continual basis according to dynamic community profiles. These were developed and regularly modified by qualified library staff to ensure items were relevant for the local population and available in sufficient numbers. Development of profiles took place according to local procedures, based on population details, loan statistics, publishers' information, staff insight and other relevant measures.

Stock numbers of books were determined according to State Library of Western Australia guidelines, with consideration of population numbers and growth rates, and with weightings for isolation and local demographic characteristics. LGAs purchased local stock items to supplement those provided by the State Library of Western Australia, with larger LGAs having healthy discretionary funds for this purpose. However, in the rural

area, local stock funds were limited and staff advised that extra books were obtained through using money collected by selling discarded items (OP03).

Audits revealed that all libraries provided resources called Junior Kindergarten (JK) books that were aimed directly at very young children. These were generally large format picture books, shelved face-outwards where space allowed to promote ease of use (AU01, AU02, AU03, AU04, AU05, AU06). JK books offered stories of interest to babies and small children including tales of families, friends and common activities like shopping or catching a bus. Some stories covered special situations such as going to hospital, having a new baby in the family or moving house. JK titles were additionally offered in audio formats of CDs, MP3s or digitally (AU01, AU02, AU03, AU04, AU05, AU06) with some accompanied by a print book for children to look at while listening to the story being read. Others had Quick Response (QR)-code links to online versions (AU01). Non-fiction books in large format with a strong focus on pictures were available, with topics including animals, vehicles, food, children, colours and shapes. Additionally, the metropolitan and regional libraries had a small and varying number of books ($n \leq 50$) in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) such as Italian, Russian and Arabic selected by staff to fill local requests.

Book resources were seen to be in physically good condition with publication dates mostly within the last five years (AU01, AU02, AU03, AU04, AU05, AU06). While paper-based stock at the metropolitan and regional venues was observed to be well used, none appeared to be damaged, shabby or grubby. At the rural library, paper-based stock that had been provided by the State Library of Western Australia was in good condition, while some local stock items had broken corners, faded covers and dirtied edges (AU02). According to long-term Senior Staff member Julia (SS04) libraries' stronger language and literacy focus in recent years had resulted in the provision of toys, games, puzzles, puppets and craft kits to augment traditional printed items. However, at the time of the study's audits, resources such as toys and Lego that were normally available for use in publicly accessible areas of the libraries (AU01, AU03, AU05) had been removed due to mandated Covid-19 health requirements.

Since families' practices affect children's language and literacy learning, field notes include the description of resources that were observed to be used by parents/carers when visiting the library with their children during regular opening hours. Magazines and daily newspapers available at the metropolitan and regional locations were sometimes used by parents/carers while their children played nearby with other library resources (OB09, OB13) while in the rural location there were no daily newspapers (AU02) and no parents/carers were seen to be reading in the library during observation periods or audit times (OB15, OB16). When discussing the use of newspapers and other library resources, Operational Staff member Bethany (OP04) was keen to advise that some customers expressed a preference for paper-based rather than digital formats as they found hard-copy items better for using with young children. Bethany was blunt about this, commenting that when management provided digital rather than print formats this was unhelpful because it was not what people wanted (OP04).

Children's areas in the metropolitan and regional libraries had adjacent *Parent Information Centres* (PICs) offering curated collections of materials related to parenting, education and children's language and literacy learning (AU01, AU04, AU05, AU06). *Parent Information Centres* had comfortable seating and the ability for personal laptops to be used while parents were with their children. In addition, metropolitan library L1a expanded their services for parents/carers with a *Library of Things* that included board games and popcorn makers, while libraries L1b, L1c, L2a and L2b had *Better Beginnings* back-packs for loan. Finally, regional library L2a offered take-home *Make With Me* kits designed to develop creativity and language by providing sets of books, craft materials and instructions for parents/carers and children to complete together.

Senior Staff members Nicole, Patrick and Roma (SS01, SS02, SS05) made a variety of comments about digital library resources being helpful for language and literacy learning. These included information about a recent copyright agreement with the book industry that allowed presentation of storytimes outside libraries (SS01), social media being used to promote language and literacy services (SS02) and a *WhatsApp* group being created for storytime parents/carers during Covid-19 shut downs (SS05).

With the diversity of language and literacy resources and programs on offer at libraries there was a significant amount of information for stakeholders to digest. As a result, it was found that the level and content of stakeholder knowledge of library resources and programs was mixed. This is described in the following section.

4. Key finding 3: Varied focus is given in library based support of early language and literacy learning

The focus of library based early language and literacy programs and activities was found to vary across presenters, sessions and locations. The focus also varied according to the number, age and make-up of participants, as well as to the intent of the activity.

Language and literacy intent was often found to be implicit rather than explicit, with some sessions focussing on social aspects while others offered language and literacy information in unplanned and informal ways. However, some sessions were planned by qualified staff, were structured in their content and were delivered with intentional language and literacy aims. These variations are described below.

4.1 Sessions with intentional language and literacy content

Intentional language and literacy content was seen to be offered at five observed *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions (OB06, OB07, OB08, OB09, OB11). Observed strategies for delivery of early language and literacy content included demonstrations of reading behaviours to parents/carers and encouragement of listening behaviours among children. General knowledge topics were presented, new vocabulary was explained, and information was provided about sounds, letters, words and rhymes. Strategies involved playing with sounds such as alliteration and onset-rime, encouraging thinking skills through careful questioning, stimulating predictive skills and narrative abilities by listening to each other, and building print motivation through having fun. Children were engaged in serve-and-return conversations, and prompted to follow directions and co-operate. They were involved with talking about books and reading in dynamic exchanges between the presenter, the child, the parent/carer and other families. Children's natural curiosity was harnessed through games and interactions to boost comprehension, develop imagination, enhance a sense of wonder and promote creative ideas. While delivery of language and literacy material was planned, deliberate and intentional at

these sessions, it was achieved in light-touch, unobtrusive and non-judgmental ways, rather than in overtly educational or didactic tones.

Despite a suggestion by a Senior Staff member that *Storytimes* were now delivered with a stronger language and literacy focus than in the past (SS01) staff were aware of not overwhelming parents/carers with technical terms such as ‘auditory discrimination’, ‘phonological awareness’ and ‘dialogic reading’ (LM06). Instead, language and literacy tips for parents/carers were given by staff in everyday language, offering discreet comments that did not interrupt the flow of the story or take attention away from the children. Staff asked rhetorical questions, made story-related inquiries, offered personal statements, provided interpretive comments, pointed to written words and described pictures or actions (OB03, OB06, OB08, OB11). When a story contained a possibly unfamiliar word, staff briefly interrupted the reading of the story to ascertain children’s understanding and to explain as necessary. Staff provided information of interest to children as it arose during stories or songs such as explaining words that described non-concrete concepts such as fast and slow, loud and quiet, up and down, side to side and around. Information involved vocabulary related to the body, numbers, nature, clothes, transport, space, shapes, Christmas, sun-smart behaviour, relationships and feelings (OB03, OB08, OB11). Positional vocabulary such as lifting up, going down, falling in a hole and zooming into space was illustrated, as well as clapping hands, opening and shutting hands, and shaking hands. Children were encouraged to attempt sounds such as roaring like a dinosaur, shouting at a crocodile and loudly stamping their feet, along with actions such as walking in a circle, first one direction and then the other (OB09).

To illustrate these strategies two regular *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions are described below. Descriptions include interactive conversational elements as they occurred during the sessions to encourage family engagement and to develop children’s language and literacy skills:

OB06: During the story the presenter made the following observations and statements and posed the following questions:

1. Asked story-related questions: ‘What has Max done?’ ‘Where did Max go?’
2. Made interpretive comments: ‘Oh, he’s naughty!’; ‘I don’t think he likes it.’

3. Described one of the pictures using new words and colours.
4. Explained what 'destroyed' means.
5. Gave information about the difference between weeds and flowers.
6. Made the repetition of the words 'No Max' clear and dynamic.
7. Pointed to the written word 'Max' on the dog bowl.
8. Asked the children if they liked the story.

OB08: The presenter engaged constantly with the children, especially by describing concepts, building vocabulary and inviting participation through oral language. She asked the following questions in a curious and non-challenging manner:

1. Who knows where the sun is? Does it come out in the day or the night?
2. What shape is the moon? Yes – sometimes it is round and sometimes like a fingernail like this.
3. What else can you see in the night sky that twinkles?
4. In this story we hear about star dust and moon magic. What do you think that might be?
5. How do you feel at night-time?

After stories and rhymes, families at participating metropolitan and regional libraries were provided with on-site or take-home craft activities. This provided an opportunity for staff to supply extra information and model for parents/carers how to engage children in conversation, with information varying according to the skills and confidence of the staff member. For example, field notes describe how, when making a picture of the moon in the sky, library staff spoke about the topic of the sky, and about the importance of encouraging children to use scissors, coloured markers and glue (OB08). At libraries which provided take-home craft, instructions were included which enabled parents/carers to build their own and their children's language and literacy skills, as well as fine motor skills and imagination (OB07).

Explanations were given in language appropriate to the children's ages, with informal conversations between staff and the researcher advising that an ability to talk with

children was learnt more through personally being a parent/carer rather than through formal training (OP04, OP06). Library Manager Marget (LM07) described the way she ran her early childhood sessions as follows:

I kind of talk to them along the way. So, with each rhyme I will explain what we are doing, and we will do it in stages. So, we start with the sitting down, sitting still rhymes and the ones where the babies are on laps. Then it gets a little more bouncy and I always tell the mums that they can do that as much as their baby is comfortable and things like that. So, it is about them tailoring it to their child as well. And then we amp up to some faster rhymes and we do some exercise type ones together and things like that.

Throughout the whole time you are explaining what you are doing, how it is beneficial to the baby and learning, so I always give a lot of praise and ... I say that you mums are doing fantastic at singing and they might think, 'Oh those messages are really good for me to do at home'. (LM07)

Delivery of language and literacy messages across locations was enhanced by the general atmosphere and ambiance of the libraries and their staff. Characteristics included ensuring staff were friendly (OP05), and could talk to everyone (LM06), meet their needs (OP04), acknowledge people for who they were (LM03), and were skilled enough to build connections (SS07). Libraries were described as non-judgmental and open to people of all ages (SS04) and, together, these features were understood by library staff to be accommodating of families and their young children's language and literacy learning.

4.2 Unplanned language and literacy learning opportunities

At the metropolitan and regional libraries, a standard playlist of songs, rhymes, games, fingerplays and activities was created by Library Managers or specialist staff for repeated delivery at regular early childhood events. This strategy aimed to strengthen language and literacy input by Operational Staff and provide some consistency in sessions delivered across locations within each LGA. Nevertheless, the way that sessions were delivered appeared to relate to the temperament and skills of the presenter more than

to format and content that may have been provided by management. At these times, language and literacy-related comments delivered to parents/carers appeared to be casual or unscripted rather than planned by the presenter (OB01, OB02, OB03, OB05). Instead of following prepared plans, presenters in these groups responded to the reactions and interactions of the days' participants, including adapting their presentation to the size and composition of the group and their levels of concentration or distraction. Library Manager Seringey described her *Rhymetime* strategy as modelling how to interact with the children by talking through the rhymes and sharing them (LM08), while Library Manager Monique described it this way:

So, we're modelling. Think about what you are doing so that the parents can repeat it at home ... One way is modelling with the stories: a lot of parents don't realise that you don't have to finish the story, or you don't have to read it word for word, or just read it front to back, word for word, might not be the best way to engage the child. (LM04)

The format of informal *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions was relatively consistent across metropolitan venues, including the stories and songs being followed by craft at sessions for children of around two years and more. Staff modelled how and when to include repetition in songs and stories, which sounds within words and at the start of words could be explored, and how craft opportunities could help develop children's fine motor skills. They showed parents/carers how to read with their children and demonstrated ways to talk about the stories and songs as they were being delivered. Nevertheless, formats were seen to be malleable as presenters responded to groups in real time by adapting their running sheet and their personal level of exuberance according to responses from the group in front of them (OP07). It was observed that the extent of this malleability tended to vary according to the experience, disposition, confidence and skills of the presenter.

At sessions that delivered unplanned learning opportunities, Operational Staff described how they endeavoured to ensure that families had fun, more than they endeavoured to offer language and literacy information. They specified that in their opinion "I don't teach people this" (OP07) and "*Storytime* is not school" (OB08). While the qualities and

characteristics that staff's concepts of teaching and school might embody were stated but not discussed, the notion of *Storytime* being different from school was clearly reported. Operational Staff alleged that their role was not to teach and that maintaining the fun aspects of sessions was essential (OP01, OP04).

An understanding of the unplanned learning opportunities in library storytimes such as this was described by grandmothers in three different library-user groups (PU03, PU04, PU05). These groups included a grandmother who said she came to re-learn songs and nursery rhymes as it was 30 years since she had sung them with her own children, and she wanted to be able to sing them with her new grandchildren (PU03). Second, a grandmother planned *Storytime* as a treat for the child, beneficially building the child's knowledge of the library as an enjoyable place to visit (PU04). Third, at library L2a two sets of grandparents were getting to know each other and make new friends (PU05). These grandparents were conscious of having more time available for the children than the parents themselves, with visits to the library offering language learning opportunities as well as essential social interactions. One grandparent gave her opinion that "it is actually just making time for them (children), and you come here and you do ... and hopefully their (mothers') phones aren't on" (PU02).

During the sessions attended by these grandmothers as well as other informal sessions, language and literacy information was offered in ways that were impromptu, non-intrusive and non-judgmental. According to staff, their actions in *Storytime* sessions often arose from being a parent themselves and they continued at the library what they did with their own children at home (OP01, OP04). Perhaps due to this light-touch and somewhat oblique approach it was apparent that parents/carers were mostly unaware that language and literacy for their young children were being reinforced at these times. With children's language and literacy learning being soundly based in social interactions, these sessions were beneficial through providing low-key modelling of language and literacy along with social opportunities.

4.3 Social element of library based early language and literacy learning

While the focus of some *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* was intentionally language and literacy based, the focus of other sessions was mostly social, such as metropolitan and regional sessions OB03 and OB14. Library staff at these sessions produced a social atmosphere by smiling, talking with apparent personal interest, and being proactively and happily engaged with the children and parents/carers. Field notes from library L1c (OB14) describe how the atmosphere was a combination of being busy with lots of children and being calm d because families were in a familiar and child-friendly place. Parents/carers spent time relaxing and conversing together while their children were occupied, remarking that *Storytime* offered an opportunity to make new friends (PU01), time to catch up with friends (PU02), or the social aspects of children having interactions with other children (PU01).

Consultant Joanne (SS07) confirmed the importance of socialisation for both adults and children for children's progress with language and literacy skills. This included opportunities for new mothers for whom social engagement was currently restricted by the demands of their infants (OP02). *Rhymetimes* were seen by parents/carers to offer easy, short length opportunities for mothers to go out with their infants between feeds or sleeps, and it was suggested that for some mothers talking with staff at the library may improve their mental health (SS04). Senior Staff member Roma proposed that suitable social activities could be promoted by expanding current programs and activities, developing innovative programs and activities, and making all programs and activities transferable across locations (SS05). She suggested this could assist families to make face-to-face connections, give people confidence as parents/carers, and provide cultural sensitivity in a safe space (SS05).

Snapshots of early childhood language and literacy sessions are given in Appendix D. Snapshots include sessions of three different types, being those with planned language and literacy intent, those with unplanned language and literacy content and those with a mostly social focus.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has reported on key findings about the provision, diversity, aims and focus of language and literacy services for young children currently provided by Western Australian public libraries in this study. All participating libraries provided in some way for young children's language and literacy learning, yet the provision differed in and across LGAs. Stakeholders had different levels of knowledge about the programs, activities and resources and different views about the focus of what and how they provided for language and literacy learning for young children. The next chapter describes factors that either supported or impeded provision and use of these library based early childhood language and literacy programs, activities and resources.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FACTORS AFFECTING LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT

1. Introduction

This chapter describes information from library staff who were actively engaged with the provision of library services, along with the experiences of families when accessing these services or when choosing not to access these services. Data is described which answers Research Question 2:

What factors support or impede the implementation of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for children from birth to age three years and the engagement of their parents/carers?

Two key findings were evident in relation to this question. Key finding one describes supportive aspects of library services in Western Australia that involve early childhood language and literacy programs, activities and resources, and the engagement of families with young children. These include being free, friendly and diverse. In contrast, key finding two details impediments to library use and engagement with language and literacy programs, activities and resources as perceived and experienced by families. Impediments include outdated perceptions of libraries, as well as poor resourcing, communication and marketing.

2. Key finding 1: Supports include friendliness, diversity and free availability

Evidence collected from interviews, focus groups, observations and audits indicates that libraries support family engagement in early language and literacy in a variety of ways. These include all libraries in the study being welcoming and friendly, and the metropolitan and regional locations offering diverse early language and literacy programs, activities and resources. Being free to users was also found to be significant for the language and literacy support of young families. Supports are described in the following sections.

Friendly atmosphere

A friendly and nonjudgmental atmosphere was described by staff in this study as essential to supporting library use by families with young children (OP02, OP04, OP09). This was accompanied by the mantra that libraries should always be welcoming (OP06) as well as staffed by enthusiastic and engaged employees. Encouraging outlooks among Operational Staff appeared to be born of personal motivations, with descriptions of their work including the words “delight” (OP01), “brilliant” (OP01), “passion” (OP02), “great job” (OP04) and “love it” (OP05). This was illustrated by Operational Staff member Collette commenting that she loved doing *Storytime* because she felt energised by the activity and understood why she was doing it when families showed how much they enjoyed the sessions (OP01). Operational Staff member Bethany (OP04) noted the value of being welcoming and engaging remained even on occasions when there were only a small number of attendees at events. Senior Staff members Marin, Roma and Philippa (SS03, SS05, SS06) spoke of the impact of libraries offering an encouraging atmosphere to engage families with language and literacy learning and argued that the passion of library staff who worked daily with families fuelled success in the early childhood language and literacy field,. Marin reported as follows:

It’s a really passionate area, be it early years’ networks, be it through professional librarians, there is a sustained culture of actually willing and wanting to be in that space and that has primarily put a lot of the success of the early years’ sector ... I think what mostly supports on the ground success ... is the will of the workforce. The will and want of the workforce. (SS03)

Library employees were described as educated, dedicated and tight knit (SS05, LG03, OP06). Library Manager Monique (LM06) suggested that even inexperienced staff who were nervous at first soon understood both how important *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* were and how much fun they were for staff and families. These characteristics were consistently noted as essential for early childhood activities, including working towards the engagement of families who did not currently use libraries for their children’s language and literacy learning.

The importance of positive staff attitudes to attract children and parents/carers into the library was likewise commented on by three of the six Local Government Councillors, who praised library staff for the work they did in their communities and the way they did it. Inspiring families to visit the library was seen as a necessary first step towards accessing language and literacy assistance for children in their years before school. For example, Local Government Councillor Stewart (LG03) noted staff's politeness and helpfulness, while Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) proposed that library staff proactively lead the way with energy and creativity, offering libraries as a place to foster language, literacy and other early learning skills. Additionally, Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) spoke favourably of library staff's championing of the importance of language and literacy on behalf of young families. Interview recordings with Local Government Councillors provide the following comments:

Local Government Councillor Lindy: The staff have to appreciate and understand the importance of it (literacy). But then again, I can't imagine any library staff not appreciating that. To work in libraries that's probably a given. I think there has to be a genuine belief of a need to get it out there, which I believe is happening. (LG02)

Local Government Councillor Janelle: Staff (are) connecting with community to help make these programs really valuable and on top of that there is some flexibility and ability to be spontaneous. They (parents) have just spoken really highly of it and have really communicated part of that value. (LG04)

Libraries being more comfortable and welcoming than in earlier times, as well as being more social and offering broader services, were characteristics commended by Local Government Councillors as supportive of early learning. For example, Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) suggested that libraries were a home away from home for some residents and were more accessible than previously. Lindy commented that contemporary libraries encouraged people to come in and try some of their many activities. Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) likewise spoke of library services developing a love of literacy and suggested parents/carers looked to some of the library programs to take direction from. Offering a similar viewpoint in different words, Local

Government Councillor Stewart (LG03) advised that libraries encouraged parents/carers and children to choose suitable books and read them together, which he suggested may not otherwise take place in families' busy contemporary lifestyles (LG03).

To achieve continuing high levels of friendliness and to expand contemporary library roles as learning centres, Library Manager Marget (LM07) advised that newly recruited staff were selected from varying non library backgrounds. She explained that only one person in the team that had come from another library, while others from non-library backgrounds brought in different ideas and information. She suggested this successfully contributed to programming through using staff's personal qualities.

Ongoing training was offered to ensure staff from these varying backgrounds were warm and responsive to parents/carers and children for the benefit of their language and literacy learning. Training could include learning nonjudgmental strategies to use when working with inattentive children and parents/carers drifting on mobile phones (SS05), or when groups were so large that it was difficult to manage chattering and distracted parents/carers (LM08). It could involve learning how to project your voice, how to start a conversation with an anxious parent/carer, or how to promote language and literacy content in pre-prepared packs for families to take home (LM08). Senior Staff member Joanne (SS07) advised that this training needed only to be simple information sharing about children and reading rather than being unnecessarily complex or in-depth.

Staff were observed to display personal characteristics that encouraged families with young children to feel comfortable and to return to the library. For example, Operational Staff member Billy (OP07) advised that she was happy for the children to run around as much as they wanted, and she would continue with the session without comment. Operational Staff member Bob (OP08) proposed that investing time in children and early learning was valuable for managing today's social complexities, especially among anxious families. He commented that all the staff at the library where he worked were friendly and he had never seen any library visitors uncomfortable there. Operational Staff member Colette (OP01) similarly regarded it as beneficial to children's learning when families felt at home at the library, met friends there and stopped for a chat. She cited

friendliness of library staff as a factor that encouraged this type of constructive social engagement that forms a basis for the social activity of language learning. Among parents/carers, library friendliness was important to a new resident who attended *Rhymetime* as it encouraged a feeling of belonging to the community and enabled friendships to bloom (PU02) along with offering social language opportunities for the children.

Simply having good staff at the front desk (OP03) was seen as helpful for young families and their language and literacy learning through the building of enduring relationships between employees and customers. These relationships included long term library employees being remembered fondly by families as they grew up (OP01), empathic employees being a listening ear for parents/carers who needed to talk (OP01), proactive employees identifying new families and introducing them to others (OP02), and regular employees building connections with regular library-using families (OP06). Staff advised that relationships were enhanced by offering a safe haven for all (OP03), by allowing children to do messy things at the library that parents/carers did not want to do at home (OP01) and by encouraging parents/carers with similarly-aged children to meet with each other (OP02). Creation of long term, and sometimes intergenerational, relationships was seen to champion families' engagement with language and literacy.

With these factors in place, all 30 participating library users gave positive endorsements to library visits with their families. They found visits to be fun and friendly, with the library helping them socially, emotionally and personally. Parents/carers in three of the user groups specified benefits of having a break, meeting with friends, or just doing something (PU01, PU02, PU03). Library Manager Seringey (LM08) reported that one mother said that she knew the rhymes but needed the structure of making a commitment to come to a session as she did with Yoga classes. Two other mothers built their days around attending *Storytime* together first and then going on to the gym at the same location (PU03). Mothers in three of the user groups spoke of arranging to meet friends at *Storytime* or *Rhymetime* and going for coffee afterwards, finding it helpful to be with families, babies or children of the same age and stage (PU01, PU02, PU05). While these parents/carers did not specify connecting with language and literacy

services as a reason for attending the library, their visits nevertheless introduced their children to relevant opportunities and stimuli through engagement with free events and resources. Positive comments were further made by a mother who found that *Rhymetime* sessions were a suitably short length for a baby's concentration span (PU02), while another mother liked to have time with younger child while her older child was being looked after elsewhere (PU02).

A first step in language and literacy learning was encouraged by staff even when children were restless and there was a lot of general noise (PU04). For example, user group PU04 included families for whom English was a second language and *Storytime* was a friendly place for the young child to hear it spoken. It also included a family in which their daughter was an only child who was isolated at home with little interaction with other children. Her parents wanted her not to be shy around them, and to learn how to talk with them. For another family, library visits were part of a family's regular routine with two small children and a baby, and finally one *Storytime* participant appreciated that different presenters demonstrated different parenting skills (PU04). Library events were spoken about with pleasure, even by those who had a noisy toddler (PU01), for example, "We love coming to the library ... It's fun and energetic" (PU01), "It's a very special time here," (PU02), "The children can learn socialisation and songs. I recommend it definitely" (PU03), "I come each Thursday ... It's lovely ... I do craft stuff with her" (PU05), and "It's getting them involved with books" (PU04). Although only this final comment makes specific mention of books, comments suggest that social aspects are important for learning in children's early years.

In addition to the face-to-face benefits of regular sessions when Covid-19 lockdowns prevented visits, families maintained children's learning by accessing online *Storytimes* that could be viewed on multiple occasions and at times that suited individual circumstances (PU03, PU04). Three parents/carers in user group PU04 agreed together that watching library based online shows was a beneficial use of screen time for their children, and although they did not specify language and literacy learning, it was nevertheless being accessed through these means. Libraries' role in boosting language

and literacy learning through these and other direct means are described in the following section.

Diversity of library based language and literacy support for young children

Language and literacy contributions for young children were found to be provided through a variety of library based programs in five of the six participating libraries, as described in Chapter Five. Diversity of programs was seen to be a support for children and families using library early childhood services. The variety of programs on offer at libraries meant that families could find a program that suited their needs, whether or not language and literacy learning for their children was explicitly referred to. Senior Staff worked proactively to foster early literacy as described by Nicole (SS01), Roma (SS05) and Ellen (SS08):

Senior Staff Nicole: Literacy is one of our most critical areas of work and within that, early literacy is a primary focus ... Anecdotally, there are more *Storytimes* in libraries and they are delivered with a stronger pedagogy than in the past ... (The) focus is on gaining political support for a national early language and literacy strategy and to this end we have formed a coalition. (SS01)

Senior Staff Roma: Simple information sharing about how kids learn to read, how we need to be doing simple things and how do we get the parents in? ... (We need to ensure staff are) confident in achieving the broader outcomes of what a good *Rhymetime* or a good *Storytime* look like. (SS05)

Senior Staff Ellen: We have really focused on the libraries being about literacy and learning. Our unit is called 'Libraries and Lifelong Learning.' In there we have made sure to position the libraries as the place that looks after literacy ... It's our main reason for being. It's about literacy. (SS08)

Some parents/carers described feeling encouraged by libraries that offered learning through play (LM03), including appreciation of different styles of activities that catered for all children. For example, one mother (PU05) described how sessions at one library were large and overwhelming, while those at another were quieter, which she preferred.

Two parents/carers had tried *Rhymetime* sessions at different libraries and with different presenters to find which suited them better in relation to time of day, length of sessions, numbers of children, manner and skills of the presenter and general atmosphere (PU01, PU02). Variety in the types of language and literacy stimuli offered by libraries appeared to empower families to engage with early learning, offering their children opportunities to develop skills to optimal levels before starting formal schooling.

Diversity in early language and literacy services was enhanced by the services also being culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental, and by libraries being a safe space for learning. Senior Staff member Roma described high quality library programs as follows:

We are trying to educate and engage ... without being too judgmental. Doing it in a culturally sensitive way in a multiple pronged delivery and really having an understanding of who are your collaborators ... and how we can work with them to get the right program to the right child and the right family at the right time in the right way. (SS05)

The data also indicates that library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources can provide extra benefits for families whose first language is not English (SS08, SS09). For example, Operational Staff member Colette (OP01) described a regular library participant who spoke Polish with her mother and English with her father, and who had learnt many rhymes at the library. The input of library programs into this family's language and literacy learning was clear to the library staff who worked with them.

Programs, activities and resources being free to the user was regarded by staff and families as beneficial for the language and literacy learning of young children since it encouraged engagement. Whilst not everyone was aware that libraries and their facilities, resources, programs and activities were free, effects of the lack of cost are considered in the next section.

Free library based programs, activities and resources for young children

Libraries' provision of free programs, activities and resources supports children's language and literacy learning. This was commented on by multiple staff (SS02, SS08, LM02, LM05, OP08) including the following:

Senior Staff Patrick: It's all free through library services. And we were saying if you have a library card and a bit of training there is nothing you can't get. You can get the Sydney Morning Herald through the State Library, there is so much available free, and who knew? We do have a strong role that the libraries are free. (SS02)

Library Manager Fran: Speaking of the free service ... you know how vulnerable the kids (are) and how they are changing through the Better Beginning program, and through the assessment before school, and beside childcare, we are the one providing free service for them. (LM02).

Library Managers Sally, Monique and Seringey (LM05, LM06, LM08) and Local Government Councillors Lindy and Rosabella (LG02, LG05) spoke of libraries being free, as a cornerstone of early childhood language and literacy services for young families. This was noted particularly for families who were struggling financially on one income, or who were recent migrants building new lives. Library Manager Sally (LM05) argued that because everything at libraries was free there was no need for families to go elsewhere where they had to pay, while Library Manager Monique (LM06) described how staff consistently reminded, or informed, families that library programs, activities and resources were free because many people were unaware of that.

Operational Staff regarded libraries' comprehensive resources being free of cost as a core element of supportive practices for children's early learning (OP02, OP04, OP08, OP09). Senior Staff (SS02) noted that being free was a strong aspect of libraries' enhancement of social engagement and community connection by young families. Finally, Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) described libraries' free provision of resources as current, relevant, accessible, cutting edge, a priority and priceless, and supportive children's early learning in conjunction with their health and wellbeing.

Positive comments were made by library-using parents/carers about libraries having free books and other resources to enjoy, and comfortable surroundings in which families could spend time together (PU01, PU02, PU03). Parents/carers appreciated being able to look at books while in the library or borrow them to use multiple times at leisure and no cost to the user (PU02, PU03, PU05). Although evidence was not available concerning the amount of borrowing by families with young children or resultant measurable effects on their language and literacy learning, parents/carers appeared happy for their children to engage with free books at the library (PU05).

Social elements of library visits assisted parents/carers with their children's language and literacy learning and were observed during families' informal use of facilities and resources during regular opening hours (OB04, OB12, OB13).. Children played freely with whatever interested them such as blocks, Lego, toys, puzzles and crayons, although it was noted that few books were seen to be read by parents/carers and their children in the library during daytime visits (OB05, OB07, OB09). Since language is embedded in social interactions, opportunities for families to engage socially by visiting public libraries may boost children's learning in informal, relaxed and universal ways. Nevertheless, while libraries were perceived by library users as offering these benefits, there were different perceptions amongst library non-users and these differing viewpoints are described below.

3. Key finding 2: Impediments involve poor perceptions, marketing, communications, operational processes and resourcing

Despite libraries' promoting their friendliness and free availability of resources, impediments to family engagement with library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources are numerous. These include perceptual barriers among families and process barriers in libraries, with libraries seen as old fashioned, stressful and unnecessary places to visit with young children. Library based impediments involve poor marketing of their services and resources, and poor communication by libraries within the workplace as well as between libraries and schools, communities and other agencies. Some libraries also had unhelpful operational practises.

Finally, a physical barrier inhibiting library access by families was found at metropolitan location L1c, where access to their local public library involved lengthy bus trips with multiple changes. The husband of a migrant family reported that as his wife did not drive, she and their child could only go to the library when he was not at work and could bring them (PU04), thus limiting access to early language and literacy services.

Libraries perceived as outdated, unimportant and not welcoming

Perceptions of parents/carers about the nature of public libraries differed between users and non-users. While the former viewed libraries as suitable places to visit with their small children, the latter thought otherwise, with commonly held views of libraries as outdated, unimportant and not welcoming.

Libraries perceived as outdated

Outdated perceptions of libraries were a common theme deliberated upon by parents/carers and by all levels of staff in this study. Perceptions involved outdated characteristics in two ways. First, outdated perceptions from library non-users who described library memories from their childhoods, remembering libraries as silent places with strict rules. These perceptions had not changed since that time. Second, it was the libraries that were perceived as outdated by being seen as low-tech, daunting and irrelevant to modern living. Staff were aware that among parents/carers who had not recently visited a library, libraries were regarded as noiseless and sombre places that required children to be quiet and still out of respect, because that was proper library behaviour (PN03). For example, when a mother suggested that other library users frowned on children when they made a noise and that it was uncomfortable for everybody, other mothers in the library non-user group nodded in agreement (PN02). Another mother said when she had once visited a library with her toddler a staff member had walked past and “looked a bit cross” (PN03). Although nothing had been said by that staff member, the mother felt uncomfortable and had never returned to a library, thus limiting the child’s exposure to the setting’s language and literacy assistance.

Library Manager Seringey (LM08) who worked at a busy metropolitan library recounted how she often reminded or informed parents/carers that quietness for children, parents/carers and staff was unnecessary. Seringey said that *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* were the noisiest thing in the library as they were presented by a particularly loud staff member (LM08). Library Managers described the idea of needing to be quiet in a library continued to be misunderstood (LM03, LM05, LM06) particularly among library non-using families who were unfamiliar with contemporary library services (PN01, PN02, PN03).

A disconnect between what parents/carers told their children about being quiet in the library and what happened in libraries was evident in multiple observations of *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* (OB06, OB08, OB12, OB13) and examples of this disconnect were consistent. At no time during observations were families or children told by staff to be quiet in the library (PU05). Children's natural exuberance and noise appeared acceptable to all observed staff across the five metropolitan and regional libraries in the study. Nevertheless, in four of the five parent/carer groups, participants were anxious that their toddler would make a noise, run around, annoy people, pull books off the shelf and not sit still (PU01, PU02, PU03, PU05). One mother said that she did not think of a library as a suitable place for a noisy baby (PU02) and other mothers nodded in agreement. Another mother (PU05) described how she taken her boys to the library a few times but they were too busy and active to sit still, while a third mother (PU05) reported that she did not go to the library often as it was too hard with two children. In contrast, one mother noted that children being noisy or running around had never been mentioned by other customers or staff. She suggested it was a uniquely parental anxiety and that libraries were set up to be comfortable and to avoid unnecessary stress (PU01). Information about how much these perceptions may limit families' access to language and literacy resources and stimuli remains to be robustly investigated.

Parental anxieties were exacerbated by long standing perceptions of libraries as old fashioned, with Senior Staff member Julia (SS04), Library Manager Sally (LM05) and Operational Staff members Lindsey and Bethany (OP02, OP04) commenting on this. Lindsey said people regarded libraries and their staff as not up with the times (OP02).

Bethany remembered that “The lady with the grey hair and the glasses would give you the evil eye if you made any noise. And people still think it’s like that if they haven’t come in themselves” (OP04) while Julia spoke of the stereotype of “the horn rimmed glasses and the shshing...which is so far from the truth” (SS04). Sally (LM05) remarked that people still thought that they had to be quiet in a library.

Anxieties were found to be heightened among mothers who experienced difficulties within library activities themselves, thus impacting opportunities for language and literacy learning by their children. Concerns included low levels of enjoyment or fun (PU01, PU02), groups that were too small, a presenter who was not confident, or sessions that were short, inconsistent or cancelled without notice (PU01). Nodding of heads indicated that other participants agreed with these opinions but did not voice them. In addition, two new mothers had not made use of libraries’ language and literacy services for their babies until being made aware of opportunities by a Community Child Health Nurse. For these mothers, *Rhymetime* at the library became a place to meet with other new mothers and their babies once First Time Mothers’ Group had ceased.

Negative perceptions were most common among library non-users in this study. They were based on a parent/carer understanding that going to a library would be stressful because their children were especially noisy and hard to handle in public. All seven mothers in the metropolitan non-user group and all nine in the regional non-user group identified that their children were especially difficult to handle, would not sit still (PN02) were difficult to take out (PN03) or would annoy other library users. A mother whose child was autistic (PN02) said she would not visit a library because his behaviour was too unpredictable, as similarly found by Prendergast (2016) and Kaeding et al. (2017). A second mother (PN03) said it was hard to get out with three children, especially boys who were noisy and energetic (PN03), while a third mother who had one-year-old twins found it hard to run after them when they went in opposite directions (PN02). These factors prevented some non-using families from making use of libraries’ opportunities.

Only one of the mothers in the regional non-user group said that when she had taken her first child to the library he had loved it (PN02). In contrast, three other mothers who

had taken their older children to the library said they did not want the strain of going again with their youngest child (PN02, PN03), and mothers who heard these comments nodded in agreement. A mother who had been to *Storytime* once (PN03) said she would never go again as her child was too noisy and the room was not enclosed so he kept escaping. Another mother (PN01) advised libraries were not places where children could run round outdoors and get tired so they would sleep, and that libraries did not offer the opportunity to make a mess somewhere rather than home. It was a problem for some families that libraries did not offer sand pits, playgrounds or outdoor equipment (PN02), and lastly a light hearted and well received comment was made that instead of utilising the library, having activities at the pub may be better attended (PN01). While multiple barriers were noted by the researcher during interviews and observations, their potential adverse effects on young children's language and literacy have yet to be accurately or richly described.

Libraries perceived as unimportant and not welcoming

A view among parents/carers that libraries were not an important part of their lives was consistently illustrated by statements of busy schedules and overcrowded timetables that left no room for library visits. Even parents/carers who visited the library with their children found it hard to fit library visits into congested daily or weekly plans (PU01, PU02, PU05). Family activities included having an appointment at the same time as *Storytime* or *Rhymetime* (PU01), having a rough night with a baby (PU05), needing to accommodate nap times for one or more children along with older children's school drop off times (PU01, PU02), having other activities arranged such as Playgroup or Kindy Gym (PU05), managing complex Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) arrangements (PU01), or having part time work and tight schedules (PU05). Under these circumstances, endeavouring to fit in library visits to encourage children's language and literacy learning was perceived as a stressful chore.

In a similar vein, parents/carers in all three of the library non-using groups said they did not visit the library because there were other things to do (PN01, PN02, PN03). At the metropolitan location, for example, families had a plentiful children's activities available to them locally, including a low fee, five days a week, facilitated Playgroup adjacent to

the local shopping centre. The Playgroup offered targeted services for young families, offering parenting programs, healthy cooking workshops, food assistance and free community transport. One parent/carer commented that Playgroup offered fun, and she could learn things there too, which she suggested would not happen at a library (PN03).

At the regional location, one mother advised that now she had more than one child she had too much to do (PN02) while two mothers relayed how they were fully occupied with an activity every day of the week. In addition to Playgroup, these families had available to them Playcafé, music group for toddlers, commercial Kindy Gym and a Messy Mat group. Finally, at the rural location, mothers described how they had access to a well-resourced Playgroup on four days a week, along with an alternative Centrecare Playgroup, a special Indigenous Playgroup, a Mother's Group, Kindy Gym and respected crèche at the adult gym. In contrast, these same mothers said there were no children's programs at their local library to encourage them to visit (PN01), and language and literacy activities for children were not mentioned.

Parents/carers who did not use the library described not wanting to be pressured, and not wanting to feel obliged to engage in language and literacy activities, which they mostly perceived as teaching children to read with their young child(ren). They did not want to add attending a library as an extra chore in their highly scheduled lives (PN01). They advised that they knew all children, including their own, would learn to talk without instruction, so there was no need to push it (PN03), advising that libraries were unnecessary for language learning because children learned to speak from family and from television (PN03) or from Google, friends or Playgroup (PN01, PN02, PN03). Parents agreed together that their child's language learning was obviously fine because the child did not stop talking from when they got up until they went to bed at night (PN02). There was widespread laughter in agreement with this story.

The birth to three years' age cohort was seen by some of the library non-using families to be too young for language and literacy learning or for books and reading. Since children in this age group were unable to read, mothers advised there was no need to visit a library (PN03). These parents/carers tended to define literacy as learning the

technical decoding skills of reading text and advised that it had no relevance to their children as these skills would be taught once they started formal school. It was additionally noted that these parents/carers believed they did not have the required competencies themselves to teach their children to read, and that this was the role of school teachers (PN03).

Library non-using parents/carers had further reasons for their lack of interest in libraries. Among these was their suggestion that libraries were unwelcoming for small children. Visiting libraries was inhibited by feeling stressed because children could be noisy and frowned upon in what was seen to be a quiet place. These parents/carers avoided this stress by getting any parenting information they needed from the internet, or friends and family (PN01, PN02). Further reasons for non-engagement with library activities given by the 27 participating library non-users from groups PN01, PN02 and PN03 include:

1. It was not worth making all the effort to get there for just half an hour.
2. Children need to be outside rather than inside.
3. Libraries are elitist.
4. It is better to buy op-shop books in case the books get damaged.
5. There are plenty of books at home.
6. Mothers did not want their child to touch second-hand books.
7. The selection of children's books at the local library was modest.

The data also indicates a lack importance of libraries in families' lives through low use of library facilities and resources during regular library opening hours. For example, at the metropolitan and regional libraries, six hours of observations revealed that only nine children estimated to be in the birth to three years' age group visited (OB04, OB05, OB12, OB13, OB15, OB16). At the rural location, two hours of daytime observations conducted at contrasting times and days of the week revealed that no children of any age visited (OB15, OB16). Lack of importance of libraries as well as of children's language and literacy learning that was described by parents/carers, was also commented on by Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) and Senior Staff Nicole (SS01). Lindy and

Nicole suggested Australian culture did not embrace the importance of education and that families regarded *Storytime* as entertainment rather than education. Library Manager Marget (LM07) was aware of this entertainment viewpoint when she spoke of not aggravating parental feelings when communicating language and literacy messages. She was concerned that messages may be poorly received under these circumstances, reporting her thoughts as follows:

Sometimes people can get offended a little bit and think that you are preaching to them ... although I love the *Better Beginnings* program, I had heard that sometimes *Storytime* figures had dropped a little bit ... and you don't want to scare the parents off or have it be 'preach-y.' You want it to be approachable ... making sure people don't feel they are going to be judged ... It's really important that we don't alienate those parents as well, because it is probably those parents that we need to [unclear] the most. (LM07)

The persistence of poor perceptions of libraries, along with a lack of understanding of their language and literacy role, were found to have been facilitated in part by limited marketing activities and ineffective communication strategies by the library sector. Moreover, poor understanding of libraries was seen to be compounded by unhelpful library procedures and these are described in the next section.

Poor marketing, communication, operational processes and resourcing

Findings indicate that impediments to families' engagement with library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources were of four main types. First, libraries were seen to have poor marketing strategies to promote their services to families, and second libraries were regarded as having poor communication channels within staff groups as well as between libraries and young families. Third, some library operational processes were described as unhelpful and discouraging for young families, and finally there were some issues with suitable resourcing levels to support library based early language and literacy for young families.

Poor marketing

A key concern among library staff was that libraries were unable to effectively market their language and literacy role due to restrictive corporate marketing requirements. Staff were required to adhere to formal marketing processes for branding and consistency reasons, despite these corporate requirements being seen to adversely impact the promotion of services in a timely, widespread, attractive and family friendly manner (OP01). The unease caused by LGA directives and protocols was described by Senior Staff as well as Operational Staff. Senior Staff members Patrick and Ellen called corporate marketing restrictions “a real frustration” (SS02), “a massive impediment” and “very problematic” (SS08). Operational Staff member Colette and Senior Staff member Patrick had comparable stories, saying:

Operational Staff member Colette: We don’t have the ability to promote whenever and wherever we want. I can’t even create a flier. It’s got to all be approved and the right people have to be involved in it. Often with Marketing it doesn’t quite get out in time ... I had basically free reign with like fliers and stuff, and I loved doing that. And now it’s not and it has to go through Marketing. (OP01)

Senior Staff member Patrick: The marketing employee is a real gatekeeper ... We have a very controlled environment in terms of social media in Local Government, particularly in this Council. So, the library services aren’t allowed to have their own *Facebook* page, they’re not allowed to have their own *Instagram* and they’re not allowed to *Twitter* and do things live from the library, which really impedes people in this age and younger demographic now ... To get it online you’ve got to do a media request which might take three or four days to get it and by the time it goes online it (the event) is over. (SS02)

Patrick (SS02) focussed on the underutilised potential of social media. He suggested that it was effective to post a story live from events on the day, with photographs of families in attendance encouraging information to ripple out to hundreds more. Library Manager Sally (LM05) observed that she would like to see greater use of social media to change the way that people looked at libraries (LM05) while Operational Staff member Noni (OP06) similarly reported that not having a *Facebook* page removed an important source

of information for families. Senior Staff member Ellen proposed a social media role for peak professional body Public Libraries Western Australia (PLWA) which could take on marketing on behalf of the state to publicise busy and technologically upmarket libraries (SS08). This may then help to prevent situations where people only discovered libraries for the first time when paying a bill for their LGA. This was described by Operational Staff member Bethany (OP04) when she spoke of people who came to the library to pay a bill or a fine for the LGA. When they saw the library for the first time they often commented that they had not known it was there and that it was a lovely place.

Senior Staff members further made personal observations on problems with the marketing of the high profile language and literacy-focused *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program*. For example, Senior Staff member Frederick (SS09) described how a large marketing campaign paid for by a corporate sponsor was beautifully presented, but the words *Better Beginnings* were tiny on it. Frederick suggested that the campaign lacked impact for *Better Beginnings* as a result. He was concerned the public was unaware of the time and money public libraries supplied within the program, with their considerable input of staff time and effort, their daily teaching of families and their contributions of many thousands of dollars (SS09). He went on to describe the situation with branding and sponsorship as follows:

I think one of the challenges with the marketing campaign is that it is very (sponsor), and State Library focused. It does not really have a very strong mention of the very significant contribution that local government actually pay ... I would guarantee that the amount of work and contribution, both financial and in kind, from local government would far outweigh what (sponsor) donated ... The challenge is to get the word 'libraries' and 'local government' in that top message. (SS09)

Frederick proposed that *Better Beginnings* could be promoted more effectively, saying he was personally frustrated that not everyone knew about it. He additionally reiterated that the message about *Better Beginnings'* role in promoting language and literacy for families with young children was not getting out to the public. Finally, along somewhat different lines, long term librarian Roma criticised the State Library of Western

Australia's marketing of *Better Beginnings* above other activities. She exclaimed: "if we wait for State Library all we will get is yet another championing of *Better Beginnings* that everybody can hang their spurs up on!" (SS05). Thus, Roma and Frederick were both concerned that *Better Beginnings* overshadowed language and literacy work consistently carried out in public libraries through initiatives of local library staff and financial backing of individual LGAs.

Poor communication

Along with advocating for improved marketing, library staff advocated for improved communication between internal stakeholders to expand library, language and literacy engagement by families. For example, Operational Staff member Bethany (OP04) alleged that matters relating to family use of libraries were dismissed when regular library staff meetings were discontinued by LGA directors. Staff felt unable to speak or talk about practical topics such as sharpening pencils, managing people who damage books, and reasons for the daily collection of statistics. In addition, Bethany (OP04) regarded Library Managers as too busy and too powerless to modify practical procedures within complex corporate structures, while Lindsey (OP02) alleged that communication between staff was adversely affected by corporate hierarchies. Participants indicated that sub-optimal implementation of library based early language and literacy activities may be a result of these poor communication structures.

The rural library had distinct communication problems that impacted library use by families with young children. Here, there was minimal contact between LGA management staff and the library. This resulted in unqualified library employees working by themselves, with little practical or organizational input either in general terms or in relation to early language and literacy services (OP03, OP05). This experience was illustrated by rural Operational Staff member Helen (OP05) who relayed how the CEO of the LGA had visited the library just once in ten years, saying to the staff that if they had time to read, they could not have much of a life. He had never borrowed a book. Operational Staff felt unheard by the LGA and the community, suggesting they were forgotten and left to their work by themselves. This was described as follows:

We don't complain. We're not a squeaky wheel ... We're not ones who will demand people to come and ask a lot of questions or demand this or that, we just do our thing. We're just nice little old ladies from the library. We're pretty undemanding. And we're probably just seen to be benign, harmless ... We just rock up, open the door. (OP03)

On a broader scale, unsatisfactory communication between colleagues was expanded to a concept of unsatisfactory communication between libraries and external groups. This included communication with families, schools and Community Child Health Nurses. First, communication with families was seen to be compromised by staff having little opportunity to speak to them outside the library building. Staff therefore only spoke to families who came to the library and already valued literacy (OP04). There were difficulties with how to find and encourage non-attending families (OP01, OP06) and how to tell people about contemporary libraries which had changed so much compared to those in earlier times (OP04). Second, communication with schools was said by Senior Staff member Ellen (SS08) to be problematic because many schools had no teacher librarian so contacts could easily be lost (SS08). Similarly, Senior Staff member Patrick (SS02) advised that schools in his region had said they were overwhelmed with work and too busy to talk to libraries. Third, poor communication with Community Child Health Nurses was described by Operational Staff member Linda (OP03) who said library staff did not interact with Nurses even though they worked in an adjacent building. Linda did not know who the Nurse was, her name or what she looked like. Operational Staff member Lindsey (OP02) suggested even if a busy Nurse made time to come the library to interact with families there would be difficulties. Lindsey noted a lack of privacy in the library and was also unsure what Nurses and families would talk about.

With these communication difficulties, opportunities for families to engage in language and literacy programs, activities and resources were reduced. In addition, along with persistent poor perceptions, poor marketing and poor communication, library use by families was found to be adversely impacted by some poor operational processes, as described next.

Poor operational processes

Poor or unhelpful library operational processes were found to create barriers between libraries and families, impeding libraries' assistance with children's language and literacy learning. For example, in the regional area, Operational Staff members Lindsey and Bethany (OP02, OP04) identified difficulties with punitive fees for overdue items, as well as awkward relationships developing when payments were required from customers for damaged or lost books. Staff knew that such fees had been discarded by other libraries. They suggested the problem had worsened recently when strict rules about slightly damaged books required payment by the borrower before they could borrow again. Bethany (OP04) related a story about a new library user whose child had damaged a book and staff had to issue a charge for the book. Bethany was concerned that this would put off the family from coming back. Regulations in some libraries meant that because of a risk of children scribbling on books or damaging them, Operational Staff and parents/carers were anxious about children using them, thereby inhibiting engagement with books and literacy by young families. For example, Operational Staff member Bethany was of the following opinion:

It's got ridiculous lately. There was a time when we checked the books, yep, a bit of wear and tear, we clean off the books, bit of sandpaper to rub this off. Let's go. But now we do NO repairing and we've been told we have to charge for stuff, and you can't let that out again with that little stain. And I'm thinking 'It's not interfering with the book. You can still read the book.' What a waste. That's a barrier straight away. Absolutely. So, we've gone from being, I thought, quite reasonable about it, to being very anal. (OP04)

Relegation of personal service behind corporate rules was identified by regional staff as another problem constraining family engagement with early literacy (OP01, OP04), for example when corporate processes only allowed advertising on the LGA's website and not in printed hard copy of newspaper or flyers. This was a barrier for some families, especially those who had no home internet access due to technical issues or personal financial problems, or who lacked confidence or time to successfully navigate multiple digital sources to find the required information. Additionally, use of the *Eventbrite* booking program during times of Covid-19 restrictions was identified by metropolitan

staff as having unintended consequences. *Eventbrite* was used as a method of managing attendance numbers, but there were some unforeseen outcomes, as described by Library Manager Marget:

Even though it is a free ticket that became a bit of a barrier for some of them ... They really do prefer just to be able to come in when they can ... We had some eager beavers who booked for every session, and they never showed. They never cancelled their ticket. So that could have prevented other people coming. So, if parents are checking and they see it is sold out or go on the waiting list, they just don't. (LM07)

Compounding these difficulties, a problem had arisen around copyright requirements for live performances when the Covid-19 pandemic encouraged delivery of activities online rather than in person. Operational Staff member Billy (OP07), for example, now had the time consuming task of working through a lengthy list of *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* songs and rhymes to determine whether they conformed to copyright rules. If they did not conform, different songs and rhymes needed to be sourced, approved for online use, integrated into programs and practised by presenters. This may have resulted in fewer songs, rhymes and stories being available for presentation at early childhood language and literacy sessions.

Outside times of Covid-19 restrictions, staff offered views about other practical difficulties with delivery of early childhood language and literacy services. In the metropolitan locations in which she worked, Billy described being restricted by needing prior management approval for children's activities, or paying personally for items to use at *Storytimes* because of refunds not happening or taking too long (OP07). In the regional area, Lindsey (OP02) spoke of difficulties when inconsistencies in the presentation of *Storytimes* could make it challenging for parents/carers, with each staff member having their own way of singing songs. Finally, in the rural location there were problems when *Storytime* had been tried and the presenter would find that the children had run off and she was just reading to the parents/carers (OP03). In comparison, there were distinct problems in libraries where early childhood language and literacy sessions were busy and well attended. For example, if mothers tried to hold children still on their

laps this could lead to screaming, with the same result when staff were instructed not to touch children if they came to sit on a staff member's lap (OP07). These issues were challenging for both staff and parents/carers, resulting in negative consequences for families' interactions with language and literacy programs, activities and resources.

In some situations, it was staff themselves who were described as an impediment to family engagement. For example, Library Manager Martine alleged:

The biggest deterrent to people who come into the library and who may never come back again is our attitude towards people. If we are not embracing everybody for who they are, if we look down our nose at people, if we think we are better than everybody, then we're not going to get anybody into our services and that's not what libraries are for. (LM03)

Martine additionally described an unhelpful attitude for young families when some library employees did not put out the Lego because it made a mess, it did not stay in one place and people could trip over it (LM03). There were also difficulties when staff had insufficient information, or access to information, to be fully supportive of young families. This was illustrated by Operational Staff member Lindsey (OP02) whose responses to all interview questions were the answer 'no.' She had no relevant language and literacy knowledge, no early language and literacy experience, no information about her LGA's early childhood policies, no details of the LGA's children's services budget, no familiarity with feedback or evaluative processes, no contact with Community Child Health Nurses or schools and no opportunity to select and purchase items for children at the library.

Since having suitable and knowledgeable library staff was seen to be implicit in libraries' language and literacy work with young children, Senior Staff were additionally disturbed when development of staff's early language and literacy skills did not improve following training. This included staff not being confident to impart the necessary language and literacy information to parents/carers, or not being able to cope with rapid change, or not being competent in the many roles required of them. Senior staff alleged that Operational staff were expected to be book people, technical people and presentation

people (SS07), as well as to understand child development and language and literacy growth, have an ability to stand in front of an audience with confidence and visit schools even when the schools were not highly engaged (SS05). To manage these expectations, Senior Staff member Roma advised that regular training in language and literacy awareness was essential, saying that if you needed library officers to behave in certain ways one-off training was insufficient (SS05). However, despite being offered training, Roma alleged that some staff were resistant to new ideas and processes, preferring to stay with what they knew. Among the large cohort of library staff in her LGA she described some staff displaying an attitude of “It’s Tuesday. I do this. This is my job. I don’t want to do that” (SS05). This was unhelpful for libraries endeavouring to provide flexible and responsive programs, activities and resources for young families. Library Manager Seringey agreed that staff may be cautious about taking on changes, especially when they were under skilled (LM08), while Consultant Joanne (SS07) reported that staff consistently made it clear that they were not teachers. While it was asserted by Senior Staff member Nicole that library staff may be better prepared if they understood the pedagogy behind *Storytime* (SS01) it was nevertheless acknowledged that learning new skills required time and effort. This was described by Senior Staff member and library Consultant Joanne as follows:

Staff need to know why they are delivering a program and that it’s not just occupying someone’s time ... It is sometimes down to the individual and there were some library staff who attended training, had been able to apply it straight away, were very enthusiastic about working with families and working with young children ... Then at the other end of the scale there were staff who had been to training and virtually just gone through the motions and come back into their library and just kept the status quo. (SS07)

Training to ameliorate some staff problems that were an impediment to families’ engagement with early language and literacy was proposed by Library Managers. For example, it was recommended that specialist preparation strategies could assist staff who were required to deliver *Rhymetime* for the youngest babies. This included working with babies’ short attention spans along with their lack of familiarity with the meanings or use of words, or with the way stories and songs worked. Library Manager Caitlin

(LM04) alleged that personality was involved with delivering *Rhymetime* because you had to draw the children and adults into the story, change the inflection in your voice, and maintain high levels of energy to keep everyone involved. It was suggested by several Operational Staff that working with young children may be more challenging for staff who were not parents themselves and staff suggested their own parenting had benefited them in the workplace when working with young children (OP01, OP03).

Senior Staff member Frederick (SS09) related different operational problems, in particular with the *Better Beginnings* program. He suggested that procedures could be improved through providing different books in the *Better Beginnings* bags so that parents/carers of siblings did not receive repeat titles. There were also difficulties with *Better Beginnings* in the rural area where the LGA paid for resources according to the number of babies likely to be born in the region, but distribution of these resources was problematic. Rural library staff advised that bags were issued on an irregular basis via the Community Child Health Nurse (OP03, OP05) and described how the awkward distribution processes resulted in their library constantly having an excess of bags. Rural Operational Staff further advised that while *Storytimes* were a feature of the *Better Beginnings* program elsewhere, local families in their community went to a bigger library where someone had been hired specifically to deliver *Storytimes*. This was something that their small library could not afford (OP03).

Inadequate resourcing

Resourcing has become restricted in the past decade, with tight government policies on the funding of public libraries. Differences in library provision across Local Government Areas (LGAs) have also arisen due to policy changes in the partnership between state and local governments. While all public libraries in Western Australia are part of a common partnership arrangement, the original 50:50 basis of financial input from the two partners has gradually changed to a current situation of 10% state funding and 90% local government funding (WALGA, 2015). This has resulted in library financial backing being subject to finances and policies of individual LGAs, with subsequent variability in staffing numbers, programs implemented and resources available to library users.

While the large metropolitan and regional libraries were funded sufficiently to provide a range of early childhood language and literacy programs, they nevertheless found their finances over-stretched. For example, Library Managers Fran (LM02) and Sally (LM05) described how their libraries were short staffed and unable to visit all the schools or offer language and literacy sessions during school holidays. Similarly, Senior Staff member Ellen (SS08) in the metropolitan area explained ongoing difficulties when staff had insufficient time to plan programs and activities due to “limited resources, and customers with high demands. In the regional area, Senior Staff member Patrick (SS02) noted that although libraries in his city were well resourced, the amount of money was never enough and so staff did whatever they could with the funds available.

The study found that resourcing varied between well populated areas in metropolitan and regional locations, and the sparsely populated area in the rural location. Whilst metropolitan and regional locations provided multiple programs and activities supported by staff allocated to children’s services, the rural location had no programs or activities on offer to support early childhood language and literacy learning. The part-time staff at the small library continually had to return to Customer Service duties (OP05) and found it impossible to conduct *Storytime* or other activities at the same time. These staff were required to undertake all library duties, with no direct allocation of time for children’s services, resulting in a lack of library based early language and literacy support for their community.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has reported on supportive aspects of library based early childhood language and literacy services such as offering a welcoming social atmosphere, providing diverse programs, activities and resources, and being free. It has also reported on impediments to library use by young families including outdated perceptions of libraries as old fashioned, stressful and unwelcoming, as well as irrelevant within families’ busy lifestyles. Also, poor library marketing processes, unhelpful library procedures and inefficient communication between stakeholders were found to be barriers to early language and literacy learning. Finally, limited resourcing for the library sector and its

early childhood services was seen to be an underlying problem impeding family engagement with language and literacy programs, activities and resources.

The next chapter describes the findings to Research Question three concerning stakeholders' knowledge of the educational role of libraries, and of the effectiveness of library based early childhood programs. It also describes stakeholders' perceptions of libraries' interactions with children's language and literacy learning in their Home Learning Environments.

CHAPTER EIGHT

KNOWLEDGE OF LIBRARY BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORT

1. Introduction

This chapter describes findings for Research Question 3 concerning stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of library based language and literacy services' interactions with children' Home Learning Environments (HLEs). The Research Question was:

RQ3: How effective do key stakeholders perceive library based programs to be in supporting children's language and literacy learning, and the interactions with their Home Learning Environment?

Data was gathered and analysed from interviews and discussions with stakeholders , observations of families at libraries, and audits of library facilities. Analysis of data has resulted in three key findings. Key finding one indicates that stakeholder knowledge of libraries' role in supporting children's early language and literacy learning is mixed, therefore limiting stakeholders' perceptions of how effective language and literacy programs, activities and resources are for supporting young children's literacy learning. Key finding two explores a current lack of evaluation of library based language and literacy programs aimed at young children's early language and literacy learning, again resulting in gaps in stakeholders' knowledge. Finally, key finding three shows that knowledge of libraries' interactions with children's language and literacy learning within their homes is limited.

2. Key finding 1: Stakeholders' knowledge of library based early language and literacy support is uneven

Evidence shows that knowledge of libraries, and their role in supporting children's language and literacy varies among different groups of stakeholders. It was important to first ascertain what stakeholders knew about library based programs, activities and resources in order to for them to answer questions about their effectiveness. It was found that some stakeholders had knowledge from personal experience or from work

experience, while others had knowledge from formal studies. Others expressed limited knowledge of libraries and of early language and literacy. These differences are discussed next.

2.1 Local Government Councillors

Local Government Councillors had the most disparate views among stakeholders regarding libraries' role in assisting young children's language and literacy learning. For example, Local Government Councillors Lindy (LG02) and Stewart (LG03) suggested that Local Government policy focused on sports at the expense of education, while Local Government Councillor Rosabella from the metropolitan area proposed that language and literacy education was nothing to do with local government. Rosabella said:

I don't believe they would be considering that as a Shire issue ... There would still be quite a few kids turning up at school with perhaps not good literacy. But it's not a Shire issue ... It's someone else's job ... It's part of the education area ... They (Council) don't tend to get involved in the community side very much. (LG05)

Data was unable to reveal whether LGA policies did or did not support libraries' early childhood language and literacy role, with Local Government Councillors appearing to be unfamiliar with their LGA's explicit library policies or literacy policies (LG02, LG03, LG05). Without background knowledge of early language and literacy, or of libraries early childhood services, their ability to assess effectiveness was compromised. Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) suggested that library or literacy policies were not in the forefront of most Local Government Councillors' thoughts and were not something that had been investigated recently.

Notwithstanding limited policy knowledge, Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) was well informed about early childhood needs because of her employment in ECEC. Lindy advised that there were significant impacts on future lives of children who did not get literacy assistance in the first few years. Similarly, Councillor Janelle (LG04) spoke with familiarity of multiple library based language and literacy programs provided across the LGA that she represented which she described as follows:

(We have) a large Indigenous community as well as multi-cultural ... high numbers of Vietnamese, Asians, African now and Middle Eastern, so a really nice mix ... At any given time, you've got groups and Playgroups and children with story hours and different sessions and multi-cultural groups ... We are kept up to date with a really good range of programs for parents with younger children, babies and toddlers ... Libraries are definitely facilitated and we're seeing some good stuff. (LG04)

Councillor Janelle (LG04) proposed that libraries could help with developing a love of literacy and how parents/carers might be encouraged to promote a love of books and reading. Although lacking detail, other Local Government Councillors spoke positively and with pleasure of library based language and literacy activities, indicating they had some knowledge of libraries' early childhood services on a personal level related to their parenthood, children and grandchildren.

All six Local Government Councillors representing metropolitan, regional and rural LGAs were aware of generic *Storytimes* for children, either from personally viewing them or from hearing about them. Regional Local Government Councillor Stewart, for example, described his knowledge as follows:

There are a number of activities taken on in the Igard Library, because I have witnessed it on many occasions. Children in there doing all different things. They have been doing colouring in or making things. They have *Storytime* there where someone comes in and reads a book to them. (LG03)

Except for Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) who was employed in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, Local Government Councillors' perceptions of children's library services were spoken through reminiscing about when their children were small rather than through their current Council or employment roles (LG01, LG03).

2.2 Library staff

Senior Staff knew of children's programs and activities in detail. All nine Senior Staff cited the provision of *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* in libraries and two referred to early

childhood Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) programs with inherent language elements. Seven out of the eight Senior Staff spoke without prompting of the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* by name while the eighth spoke of it in passing. Other library based language and literacy programs specified by Senior Staff comprised *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) by two staff (SS07, SS08) and *Lego Storytime*, *National Simultaneous Storytime* and *Dads on Saturdays* by one member of staff each. Philippa spoke of an early childhood language, literacy and community information program that was unique to her LGA (SS06), while Patrick spoke of *Arty Kids* (SS02) and Marin spoke of *Tiny Tots* (SS03), although it is unclear whether these last two were library based language and literacy programs.

Senior Staff were consistent when speaking about language and literacy and their importance in children's learning. Their comments displayed strategic, educational and professional awareness of relevant services in Western Australian libraries. For example, Senior Staff member and long term professional librarian Ellen (SS08) proposed that it was essential for libraries to have good outcomes in terms of literacy and lifelong learning. She explained that library events were not casual but were carefully prepared to have a literacy focus. Senior Staff member Joanne (SS07) advised she had witnessed strong progress with early language and literacy learning through the steady growth of targeted programs over many years, and alleged that libraries were now more visible than before in the early language and literacy scene. Library Consultant Joanne described how programs developed language and literacy skills through working with both the children and the parents/carers. For example, she described showing parents/carers how to recognise literacy aspects such as alliteration and advised them why alliteration was important for young children when they started to read. Joanne explained how she had seen language and literacy assistance provided by libraries change over the years:

Literacy. It's about helping parents learn how to share books with their children. Learning rhymes ... Going to the literacy forums and seeing program after program coming out and listening to people and the fact that it was all embedded in 'we're here to develop literacy skills' and 'we want the parents to interact with their children.' (SS07)

In contrast, experiences of long term practising librarian Roma (SS05) displayed less confidence in stakeholders' awareness of libraries' educational input into young children's language and literacy learning. Roma recounted a story of blank looks when libraries were mentioned at a high level committee that was considering the provision of early childhood education in her locality, including language and literacy assistance. She relayed the following story:

Public libraries, of which we have six amazing ones, were not even considered as necessary to be sitting at this round table where everybody from across multiple government sectors and private sectors was discussing this. It was my director who said, 'I think we should have someone here from the public libraries.' And the blank looks around the table ... that the public library would have any role or responsibility in a first five years' program to support literacy outcomes. (SS05)

Citing a similar concern about low awareness of libraries' increasing educational input among policy makers, Senior Staff member Marin (SS03) alleged that poor awareness could affect policy makers' backing of libraries into the future. She advised that greater clarity in policy settings across the three tiers of government was required. Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) likewise spoke of poor policy settings that could affect libraries' potential to influence positive childhood literacy outcomes. She alleged that early language and literacy were not appropriately discussed until an industry wide summit was conducted around core literacy outcomes for communities in her catchment area. Roma asserted that suitable policies could be adversely impacted by low stakeholder understanding of what libraries did, as well as lack of leadership in the library sector, a history of libraries being pushed down the priority rankings for policy change, a persistent negative perception of libraries and library work being trivialised. She proposed that libraries' early language and literacy work needed to be promoted by considering both families in the community and decision makers in the hierarchy, so that decision makers had information from multiple perspectives (SS05). In a similar vein, Senior Staff member Nicole (SS01) noted a lack of awareness of the role of public libraries in early literacy in Departments of Education at state and federal levels (SS01),

while Senior Staff member Julia (SS04) spoke of examples of smaller libraries around the state about which there was little corporate awareness (SS04)..

Senior Staff members Ellen (SS08) and Roma (SS05) described connections between stakeholder awareness and the provision of funds, for example suggesting that when libraries had limited resources, limited capacity to go out and do things and overworked staff this situation was aggravated by library funders not knowing the work in which libraries were engaged (SS08).. Senior Staff member Marin (SS03) advised that this could be assisted if libraries and local government were both moved up political funding agendas. However, Marin uniquely argued that while emphasis on financial measures such as Return On Investment (ROI) could help funders' acknowledgment of libraries' educational roles, this was unlikely to be effective because people did not complain about libraries. She suggested that since people loved going to the library and loved the service they got there, libraries were not seen as a problem that required fixing or funding. Marin proposed that funding bodies interpreted these positive viewpoints to mean the sector was "obviously over serviced" (SS03) and not in need of greater funding or political involvement.

Senior Staff's levels of understanding about the importance of early literacy, and about how libraries are aiding families with their children's learning, were found to be at a high level, and this was largely mirrored by Library Managers. For example, Library Managers Caitlin and Monique (LM04, LM06) asserted that proactive steps for extended language and literacy activities were backed by newly created Literacy Development Officers within Western Australia's larger LGAs. They detailed how incumbents of these innovative positions planned library based early language and literacy curricula, promoted the language and literacy role of libraries, and offered information and training on the topic to library staff. They made professional inputs to formal Literacy Strategies through The State Library of Western Australia and ALIA. They assisted with building external partnerships between libraries and schools, Community Child Health Nurses and other relevant professionals, with such partnerships regarded as vital for libraries' role in the language and literacy learning by children in their years before school (LM04, LM06, LM08).

Offering a similarly sound level of knowledge, all seven Library Managers provided particulars of diverse early childhood language and literacy programs and activities within their libraries. They explained the content and aims of more than 20 different programs across metropolitan and regional locations, and advised that innovative activities were trialled and adapted as required. All Library Managers described how they planned activities, provided language and literacy information, encouraged multi-modal delivery of appropriate messages and engaged Operational Staff to present regular sessions. They spoke at length of age-targeted versions of *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* offered at their libraries throughout the year, as well as *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) on demand. Metropolitan Library Manager Fran (LM02) told of a specialist *Toddler Time* program and an information program that were held as required, and that aimed to reinforce early reading, language and literacy among families in an area of rapid population growth and many new migrants.

Library Managers indicated that libraries presented a strong focus on early language and literacy within their diverse services. For example, Library Manager Sally (LM05) hoped that people in the community would start realising that libraries had always been, and continued to be, engaged in literacy. Additionally, Library Managers Caitlin and Monique (LM04, LM06) affirmed that early language and literacy was the purpose and core work of local libraries. Library Managers described in detail how their local libraries offered multiple regular, or requested, language and literacy based programs, and their comments were unequivocal about their importance. They focused on early language and literacy learning in practical ways, implementing structured and content specific events, and preparing suitable messages for families. Library Manager Monique (LM06) explained from having completed personal studies that she had a good understanding of language acquisition and the six early literacy skills. Through her personal knowledge of literacy learning, language acquisition and the skills children need before they go to school she was able to develop and support library-based programs.

However, while managers were eager to pass on language and literacy information to families, Library Managers Fran, Martine and Monique (LM02, LM03, LM06) alleged that

the importance of early language and literacy learning and how libraries could help was not well understood among families. Library Manager Marget (LM07) was concerned library sessions should not get overloaded with jargon which might be objectionable either for individual parents/carers or for schools, including those with identified language and literacy challenges. Library Managers further found that delivery of language and literacy information could be compromised by the practices of Operational Staff members. For example, content constructed and supplied by a specialist consultant was not necessarily being used in practice (OP07) as confirmed by Operational Staff members Colette, Bob and Belinda (OP01, OP08, OP09).

Nevertheless, the 12 Operational Staff who were interviewed were as aware of early childhood programs as the Library Managers, although less aware of programs' underlying language and literacy aims. Knowledge of Operational Staff was practical and direct, offering full information about daily schedules of programmes delivered by the libraries in which they were employed. In the metropolitan LGA, Operational Staff members Billy, Bob and Belinda (OP07, OP08, OP09) knew details of children's programs across all six of their LGA's library locations. They described how *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* for differing age groups were offered each week at each location, with one *Rhymetime* aimed at babies and crawlers, another at toddlers and another at mixed-age groups due to the regular presence of siblings. They knew that some sessions were streamed live to involve families who were unable to visit the library in person. In an equivalent manner to Library Managers, Operational Staff in the metropolitan LGA described unique family information sessions and *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) offered on demand.

In the regional library system Operational Staff members Colette, Lindsey, Bethany and Noni (OP01, OP02, OP04, OP06) were similarly aware of multiple children's programs at their city's three libraries. They knew the days and times of each library's sessions, including Saturdays and during school holidays. Operational Staff were familiar with *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) sessions which focused on early language and literacy, and knew that STEM for toddlers was being trialled. With the backing of their Library Managers, they aimed to have something for young families to do every day, and

they were proactive in offering information about children's programs whenever they were talking with customers (OP02). Operational Staff were eager to point out to those who may not know that no one had to pay for library programs (OP01). They also consistently stressed family enjoyment more than language and literacy aspects, with Operational Staff member Bethany relaying a common view of Operational Staff that visiting the library was regarded consistently as a fun activity (OP04).

Operational Staff suggested that any language and literacy information for families that happened to be offered during *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* tended to be given instinctively and in unplanned ways, rather than intentionally. Operational Staff member Lindsey (OP02) advised that without being consciously aware of it, or setting out to do it, she was probably providing conversation and talking opportunities for families. Billy (OP07) concurred that while language and literacy learning tips may be given during sessions, they were not necessarily deliberate or noted as tips by the families. She said that since none of her colleagues were confident to deliver literacy messages, this did not happen, and further advised that the word literacy was not used by Operational Staff for library *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* at her current location. Billy described the leader of her libraries' children's team as having no background experience in children's language and literacy learning, despite her role planning children's programs across all six libraries in the system.

Operational Staff member Colette (OP01) had a contrasting perspective to Billy (OP07). Colette, who had attended ongoing training through the State Library of Western Australia about children's language and literacy learning and early childhood program delivery, said she had learnt to appreciate and value the language and literacy aims of *Storytime*. She advised she now understood the importance of even singing one song, as there was so much a child could learn through just one song. Operational Staff member Bob (OP08), who had comparable understandings of the importance of language and literacy learning and of *Storytimes* to Colette, offered personal views rather than those learnt through training. Literacy and reading had been important to him when he was growing up and he said he regularly went to the library as a child because he wanted to read. Since it was impossible for his family to buy enough books for the level he was

reading at, he went to the library enthusiastically every week. With this background, he said he was concerned when other people did not see the value of libraries and their literacy aims, and he sensed that people were reading less than before (OP08). In response to Bob's concern, Operational Staff member Belinda at the same library suggested since there was a gap between parents/carers who valued hearing language and literacy messages and those who did not, libraries needed to attend to these differences in varied and responsive ways (OP09).

2.3 Parents/carers

Among the study's 57 parent/carer participants, 30 knew from experience about *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* at their local libraries, citing attendance at such programs as a reason for visiting the library with their babies or toddlers (PU01, PU02, PU03). All knew the times and routines of events that were relevant to the current age of their child(ren), including the availability of online *Storytime* during Covid-19 lockdowns (PU02). One mother outlined her awareness of library events by describing: *Rhymetime* for babies, *Storytime* and *Lego Club* and said that her daughter also liked just going to the library and reading (PU05). Another mother was reminded about *Storytime* by her two-year-old who had seen it when borrowing books and repeatedly asked her mother if she could go (PU02).

In a different manner, all 27 parents/carers who were library non-users had a general but non-detailed awareness of library *Storytimes* (PN01, PN02, PN03). One regional and one metropolitan library non-using mothers knew of *Rhymetime* (PN02, PN03) but commented that because *Rhymetime* continually had the same songs it was boring (PN03). Another metropolitan mother spoke of a Dad's *Storytime* on Saturdays (PN03), although it was not clear if this was a library event or held elsewhere. In the rural area, library non-using mothers knew that *Storytime* at the local library had been provided in previous years but understood currently there were insufficient library staff to deliver it (PN01). It was found that little information was voiced by families who were not current library users about times, content, target audience or purposes of *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* or other library services.

As with Local Government Councillors and staff, parents/carers of young children varied in levels of language and literacy awareness, and displayed limited understanding of libraries' role in their children's early language and literacy learning. Nonetheless, library-using parents/carers held more positive values around libraries in general than did library non-users and these differences are described below.

Among library-using parents/carers, five out of the 30 who took part in this study appreciated the role of libraries in assisting their young children's language and literacy learning. In library-user group PU05, for example, one parent/carer noted how the interactions and opportunities for her child, along with drawing, listening and watching were helpful for her language learning. In user groups PU01 and PU03 two mothers who had teaching backgrounds promoted the importance of reading and language for young children. They noted that *Rhymetime* was good for children's language learning (PU03), and that *Storytime* and library activities offered opportunities for children to practice sitting still and enjoy books (PU05).

Four of the library-using parents/carers appreciated a helpful role with behaviour and motivation ahead of more technical language and literacy skills that would be learnt when the children were older. A member of library user group PU04 noted that as her daughter was enrolled in kindergarten next year, she wanted to get her used to sitting and listening. Another mother explained that the library helped school readiness by getting children involved with books. One parent/carer had a personal interest in literacy as she was unable to read herself and wanted to make sure this did not happen to her child (PU02). Finally, a grandmother who was also a Community Child Health Nurse advised the benefits of encouraging children to make eye contact as that was how they learned in their first three years (PU05).

Library-using parents/carers were found to be receptive to learning from library staff. Participants in early childhood events were observed to respond positively by nodding and smiling when it was pointed out that *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions had included presenting unfamiliar words, using numbers, naming body parts and copying actions. Field notes describe how parents/carers said it made *Rhymetime* even more

worthwhile when this was pointed out to them by the presenter (PU01). In illustration of their appreciation, parents/carers who attended library activities offered informative stories and anecdotes about how their children engaged with language and literacy learning when not at the library. One grandmother gave an example about her grandchild that she used the left-handed scissors, loved the glue, and looked forward to coming because she knew it was about books and other children (PU05).

However, in contrast, the study found that among the 27 parents/carers who were not library users the concept of literacy learning by young children either seemed unfamiliar or was interpreted as describing the technical skills required when learning to read (PN03). As such, library non-users considered library programs as an early extension of formal education, describing literacy as something for older children that their children were currently too young to engage with (PN02). Parents/carers in library non-user groups PN01 and PN02 also reported they had no need for parenting information available through libraries, and field notes from discussions relate family experiences that may have informed these viewpoints. For example, one mother described how her child would not look at a book or listen to a bedtime story. He just turned over the first page then threw it down and ran off. The mother said the child had learned to speak mainly from his grandmother and from the television (PN03).

Two out of a total of 20 mothers in library non-user groups PN01 and PN02 spoke of their attempts to read books to their children. A mother in non-user group PN03 suggested that attending language and literacy activities was not a consideration since mothers stayed at home using devices rather than managing toddlers' unpredictable behaviour in public. It was also noted each of the seven participants in group PN03 reported that their child would not sit still and that was why they chose not to attend library activities. When one mother said it was too hard to read a nightly story because she needed to get the children in bed and asleep, the four mothers who heard her nodded with understanding (PN02). A mother of twins noted her husband worked away on a Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) roster and neither of the children's grandmothers could help as they worked. She received sympathetic nods of the head from other mothers when she

said she had to manage by herself and that it was too hard to read to two disinterested toddlers (PN02).

While three parents/carers suggested, hesitantly, that they might have heard of a special Playgroup for Indigenous children (PN01) and a *Dads' Storytime* (PN03), little knowledge or enthusiasm for these activities was evident among either the speaking or listening parents/carers. One mother said with a shrug that her partner would not want to go on a Saturday because he was busy doing other things (PN03). Finally, despite being experienced and trained, the professional Playgroup facilitator of PN03 found the children too distracted to read them a story. In the rural group of library non-users field notes indicate that parents/carers made no comment when asked about their engagement with language and literacy activities for their children (PN01).

Parents/carers who did not visit libraries with their young children were found to make this choice because their needs were met elsewhere. Playgroups, for example, were seen to offer benefits such as getting out of the house, away from chores, doing something, meeting friends, talking to adults, feeling safe, having coffee, not being judged or not worrying if their child was noisy or fussy. Mothers described children being able to play with other children, make a mess and run around so they got tired and would sleep (PN01, PN02). Despite libraries being able to similarly fulfil these functions, libraries were not part of their lifestyles and families did not regard them as doing so, even when recommended by the Community Child Health Nurse (PN02, PN03). While Community Child Health Nurses' educational role meant that they were consistently enthusiastic about libraries, parents/carers did not necessarily remember the language, literacy or reading information they were given by Nurses. For example, three out of six library non-users in the metropolitan area remembered being given leaflets about sleeping but none about reading. Lack of knowledge about libraries, language and literacy e among families was found to be a significant problem.

3. Key finding 2: Stakeholders' knowledge of effectiveness of library based early language and literacy support is limited

Libraries were found to conduct limited formal evaluations of the impact of their language and literacy learning programs for children, apart from the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program*. For the *Better Beginnings* program, researchers from Edith Cowan University had fully investigated the outcomes of this project for over five years (Reports are at <https://www.better-beginnings.com.au/about-us/better-beginnings-making-difference>), but for other programs collection of real time evidence was mostly limited to session attendance numbers at *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* or other literacy based events (SS05, SS08). Robust and long term evaluative practices were only recently being strategized and developed. For example, recent evaluative work was described by Senior Staff member Roma who engaged a consultant to complete a comprehensive evaluation at her libraries, and to assess programs for their quality and their potential to support early literacy (SS05). Roma noted she was able to budget for this consultant due to the large system in which she worked in a metropolitan LGA and suggested that such research may not be possible in LGAs of smaller size.

Although young children were observed to engage with library programs enthusiastically and consistently (OB01, OB06, OB10), it is not known if this engagement had measurable language and literacy outcomes, as no outcomes were described by either staff or parents/carers. Participants offered optimistic opinions such as noting their child's learning over time (SS04) and saying that the library was well used and empowering for their children (OP08). Evidence of constructive links between library engagement and children's language and literacy learning, however, was not clearly shown.

3.1 Local Government Councillors

Among Local Government Councillors, the notion of effectiveness of the programs, activities and resources mainly came through first hand experiences as there were no effective evaluations completed by the libraries in their LGAs. Councillors described their personal experiences at libraries as a parent or grandparent, consistently portraying them as positive and joyous (LG01, LG03). However, no direct evidence of children's language and literacy learning following library use was provided by these participants.

Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) offered a more informed opinion through her role outside Council as an early childhood educator, although she likewise had no direct evidence of the impact of library based programs. Nevertheless, Janelle expressed a professional understanding that library events were valuable for encouraging children to build their language and literacy skills, and her knowledge was enhanced by views she heard from other Local Government Councillors, as follows:

We've got a real diversity on Council. We've got women who are mums, who've got young children, who understand that's an important aspect and the other Councillors who might be fathers or grandfathers who think it's really important, so I think there's a good range ... they see that value (but are) probably not completely as aware as we might be about how far reaching it is or how foundational it is, but they do understand the value. (LG04)

In an endeavour to measure this value, Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) suggested programs could helpfully be assessed for financial return by using statistical evidence (LG02). Lindy gave her opinion accordingly:

Nothing beats the raw evidence of the number of children that are coming that fall below what should be the normal threshold on the measurements. And if your community is falling below that, there is really a need. Why would you not assist? (LG02)

3.2 Library staff

Senior Staff were able to offer their perceptions of effectiveness of language and literacy programs, activities and resources, but had minimal data or statistical information to reinforce these perceptions. Despite substantial use of numbers for planning and reporting purposes, Senior Staff were aware of a need for more robust and holistic evaluative tools than the current sole strategy of collecting attendance statistics. Senior Staff member Patrick (SS02) spoke of inadequacies of attendance statistics for exploring programs' effectiveness, advising that counting the number of attendees did not demonstrate that those attendees learnt anything. Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) commented that broad and rich evaluation was necessary without overwhelming parents/carers with long and complicated evaluation surveys. Similarly, Senior Staff

member Philippa (SS06) cited inadequacies with quantitative approaches to assessment of program outcomes, reporting that she encouraged library staff to remember anecdotal stories as they were more useful. Philippa advised that while numerical data was interesting, Local Government Councillors preferred to be made aware of good news stories, concluding that it was only when stories were added in with statistics that people started to take notice.

In the contemporary corporate world where calls to assist require measurable outcomes, Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) and Library Managers Fran and Martine (LM02, LM03) advised that absent or poor evaluative practices adversely impacted stakeholders' understanding of libraries' place in children's educational journeys. They advocated for improved evaluative processes to provide information about program outcomes, and to enhance acknowledgment of libraries' proactive role in children's years before engaging with the formal education system. Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) recommended staff needed a comprehensive assessment structure for their early language and literacy work, advocating for development of suitable key performance indicators. While staff in larger LGAs were beginning to do this (SS05, SS08), no long term evaluative strategies had yet been put in place to provide evidence of measurable or other outputs of library based language and literacy programs for young children.

Senior Staff member Frederick (SS09) expressed a different concern about a need for suitable evaluative processes. Frederick commented as follows:

I think that it is possibly an area that state government may like to look at in the future, which is actually assessing the social impact of the literacy programs. So that might be initially in the first sphere of change, or impact, that might be about connections, social cohesion, family bonding, early mental health etc. bringing about health and wellbeing in a family setting ... and then in its second sphere of impact it might be about early literacy. (SS09)

A comparative viewpoint from Senior Staff member Philippa (SS06) was that while libraries were excellent at providing literacy programs, assessment of their effects was poor. She proposed it was necessary to get away from asking whether children had fun

or families were satisfied with library events. Instead, information was required about the extent to which the programs met literacy outcomes. Senior Staff member Marin (SS03) similarly spoke of a need for strong data to reinforce libraries' language and literacy role.

On a different and related topic, Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) alleged that the effectiveness of libraries' early childhood services may be compromised by a lack of library undergraduate courses. This resulted in the quality of children's librarians currently being poor (SS05) and she proposed that staff may have little understanding of the pedagogy of children's learning in their early years. Roma was of the opinion that this may diminish positive literacy outcomes. Consultant Joanne (SS07), who worked alongside Roma, further advised that developing assessment procedures could be challenging for library staff when teachers with professional backgrounds were brought in to enhance the educational nature of libraries' programs.

Practical challenges to the effectiveness of libraries' early childhood services included a further observation by Senior Staff member Roma (SS05) that neither the word literacy nor literacy content that had been constructed and supplied by Consultant Joanne (SS07) were necessarily used by local Operational Staff (SS08). Roma moreover understood that while general tips may be given during *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions, they may not be noted as language and literacy tips by either staff or families. Consultant Joanne (SS07) proposed that unless staff understood they were delivering a high quality educational program, libraries' language and literacy learning role would not advance. She advised:

When they (staff) have seen that they are actually adding value to someone's experience of coming into the library ... Linking it with the AEDC (and) the Early Years Learning Framework, ... Recognising that you are developing early literacy skills ... I am keen to try and bring them (staff) into line so that they are aware that it is more than just reading a story. (SS07)

Nevertheless, Library Manager Fran had considered at length, how language and literacy messages were sent and received. She reported:

Is the message, literacy and language message, is it going through? What is the message that we want to come across? ... For the normal *Storytime* you always know the kids and you can say 'do you remember that last week's story,' or we are still singing the same song every week and hopefully now the kids know it ... Every time you actually use the literacy outcome ... you might say, 'at my *Storytime* I want the kids to know three words,' and then we keep repeating for the next one. (LM02)

Library Managers, along with a number of Operational staff, made use of anecdotal and personal knowledge to suggest practical ways for improving or beginning evaluations of library programs. For example, in addition to using the *Culture Counts* program, Library Manager Fran advised that nonjudgmental practices such as engaging in self-reflective techniques and building peer mentoring skills could be effective in acquiring relevant information on program effectiveness. She additionally advised that the State Library of Western Australia was now starting to ask how libraries evaluated their programs (LM02). Fran promoted staffs' observations of the development of participating children, while Library Manager Seringey offered her similar reflections with the following example:

You see the progression through repeated visits. There's one particular family when you see, wow she's really listened to that one, or she's waiting for the next ... We always read a book (at *Rhymetime*) like *Let's Go Baby* or *Babyways* and they get home and recognise that one and when we sing it, they know it. (LM08)

In a similar manner to Local Government Councillors, Operational Staff offered a number of workplace stories as evidence of children's learning through library activities to gauge effectiveness. Operational Staff member Billy (OP07), for example, suggested that with more than 40 families regularly making the time and effort to come to *Rhymetime*, it was supposed the sessions were beneficial. She suggested the regular program format and reiteration of rhymes each week built confidence among children through familiarity and repetition. Operational Staff member Colette (OP01) likewise commented about a young *Storytime* participant with whom she worked, describing a child who was singing rhymes

at home, in the car and at *Storytime* and she loved it. Colette said that while the child used to leave *Storytime* to go off and play, she was now more engaged. Colette's colleague Lindsey (OP02) similarly advised that families were wanting to learn the songs and sing them with their children, maybe on car trips or at night-time. Staff sensed on a personal level that children who consistently attended *Storytimes* or *Rhymetimes* were growing, changing, learning and improving, although specific language and literacy learning was not measured or formally noted in any way.

In comparison, qualified ECEC Operational Staff member Noni (OP06) displayed deeper knowledge of early language and literacy learning, and expressed her opinions about how libraries assisted families. Noni was conversant with capturing language and literacy outcomes in professional ways and suggested libraries had more opportunities than ECEC to spend time on language and literacy with children and parents/carers (OP06). She saw benefits in library programs being more flexible than ECEC programs which had a prescribed curriculum-based education brief. She appreciated libraries not being required to complete onerous amounts of paperwork, where such tasks in the ECEC sector could take time and attention away from the children themselves. In a similar manner to other Operational Staff (OP01, OP02) Noni relayed how she used her own parenting skills with families in the library, using personal experience related to her own children to understand other children's progress when she saw it. Noni was unique among participating Operational Staff for also displaying professional performance skills which were effective and appreciated by families in her presentations of *Storytimes* or *Rhymetimes*.

Finally, an underlying problem with evaluation of library programs was found to be lack of evidence around the dose effect of once-a-week, 20 or 40-minute long library *Storytimes* or *Rhymetimes* compared to the rest of the week that families spent in non-library environments. Extracting the effect of library programs, activities and resources from children's family characteristics and activities is complex, as described by experienced Senior Staff member Julia:

It's what mum does and what mum and dad do and what the child sees in the home...They're only going to *Storytime* once or twice a week tops. It's what

they see for the remaining seven days a week exhibited in their own home. And hopefully they are not seeing this [showing phone]. Hopefully, they are seeing this [showing book] ... Truthfully, it's about what children see modelled in their own home. (SS04)

Findings from this study were unable to measure the effectiveness of libraries early childhood language and literacy programs, resources and activities. However, in broad terms, Julia (SS04) commented widely about the overarching value of library use, saying, that the difference libraries made was enormous, and that families would not attend unless they were getting something out of it. Another positive story was supplied by Senior Staff member Joanne (SS07) who described how a mother came in and said she remembered singing at *Storytime* and that her 15-year-old still came to the library because he remembered *Storytime*.

3.3 Parents/carers

In the absence of formal evaluative practices, information about parents'/carers' views on the effectiveness of library programs was gathered through observations of library based events. However, observations were limited in their ability to determine perceptions of value since they took place only once per program per location. Nevertheless, engagement with books was noted as an indicator of library effectiveness, and examples of child and parent/carer book sharing were collected. These instances included two parents and their children browsing books together while waiting for *Storytime* to begin (OB01), a mother selecting and reading a story to her child (OB06), children looking at books briefly by themselves and enjoying the pictures without necessarily being able to read the text (OB09), and a mother with a newly walking baby allowing her child pull books off the shelves, spread them on the floor and attempt to open them. The baby turned pages and appeared to understand how books worked, and they were interesting to her.

Field notes for library-user groups captured a small number of remarks related directly to children's language and literacy learning through library activities. For example, comments about library effectiveness were made by two primary school teachers (PU01,

PU03), two mothers who wanted their children to learn how to sit still before starting kindergarten (PU04, PU05) and a grandparent who said visiting the library was educational for children (PU05). A notable comment was from a mother who said libraries were not a comfortable place for her to visit as she could not read, but knew she needed to come for the sake of her child so that the child could learn to read (PU02)..

4. Key finding 3: There is limited information about interactions of library based early language and literacy support with children's Home Learning Environments

The study found limited information about interactions between libraries and children's HLEs. This was the case for all staff groups, involving Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff, Library Managers and Operational Staff.

4.1 Local Government Councillors

Little information was offered by stakeholders about libraries actual or potential interactions with children's diverse Home Learning Environments (HLEs). Among Local Government Councillors, opinions referred more to children's home lives in general terms than to library interactions with their homes. For example, Local Government Councillor Janelle (LG04) suggested that people were often too busy to sit with a child for seven or eight minutes to read a book together, while Local Government Councillor Lindy (LG02) said she thought reading with children had fallen back in contemporary lifestyles. Lindy advised she was disturbed to find many families did not read with their children. It was not a given. However, even Local Government Councillors who expressed an interest in early childhood matters did not expand on how libraries could, or do, help with this situation.

4.2 Library staff

Senior Staff appeared to have similarly low levels of knowledge as Local Government Councillors about library interactions with children's HLEs, with Senior Staff members Nicole, Patrick and Marin (SS01, SS02, SS03) saying they had no information about HLEs at all. In comparison, Senior Staff member Julia (SS04) held that some actions from *Storytimes* were remembered at home, with an accompanying thought that if families were interested enough to come to *Storytime* there may well be doing something

literacy related at home anyway. Senior Staff member Frederick (SS08) saw actions being taken one step further, saying *Rhymetime* attendees reported to him that after attending a library session, their child would now pick up a book and read or want to read. Senior Staff member Ellen alleged that displaying words on interactive touch screens meant that parents/carers could get involved and remember words to take back home. Ellen suggested that this was particularly helpful for young parents/carers who may not know or remember nursery rhymes and needed to relearn them (SS08). Overall, it was found that Senior Staff had some awareness of children's home learning environments but lacked sound data to endorse their conclusions.

Without data to interrogate, Library Managers and Operational Staff offered divergent opinions about libraries' interactions with children's HLEs. For example, when considering whether she knew if children took library learning into their homes, Library Manager Caitlin reported, "No, it's too hard" (LM04). In contrast, Library Manager Seringey said, "I think they do, yes" (LM08) and Library Manager Marget responded, "Some of them definitely do, definitely" (LM07). Library Manager Martine said, "Anecdotally, I believe probably at least 50% of families who participate in an activity within the libraries actually continue on with it at home" (LM03) while Library Manager Monique (LM06) contrastingly noted that staff could not know for sure about libraries' impact because they did not go home with people. Finally, Library Manager Fran had little direct information about children's home learning but made use of memory aids to encourage home learning. For example, she asked children if they remembered the previous week's story, or responded enthusiastically when children said they liked a book and wanted to borrow it.

Library Managers, thus, offered a wide spectrum of opinions on this matter. In comparison, Operational Staff practiced specific ways to help promote learning in children's homes. These strategies included repeating the same songs each week so that families could memorise them (OP02, OP07) and providing photocopies of the *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* song sheets so families could take them home and learn the words (OP02). However, the effects on language and literacy outcomes achieved through these simple techniques were unknown.

4.3 Parents/carers

Among the study's 30 library-using families, engagement at home with language and literacy skills or activities learned at the library was reported anecdotally. This included parents/carers singing library songs with their children (OP01), children singing library songs by themselves at home (PU03) and children asking adults to sing library songs to them (LM04). However, no comments were made by parents/carers specifically about language and literacy learning (PU01, PU03, PU05) and a common response by parents/carers when asked about learning at home was a puzzled look (PU03). However, one mother described library learning that was enacted by her children at home. She told how here children were not very interactive at the library, but when they got home, they set up and replayed *Storytime* for their father (PU08).

As a result of encouragement from library staff, some library-using parents/carers indicated they felt inspired to sing and talk more with their babies at home, which was especially appreciated by those who were stressed by crying infants (PU01, PU02). Parents/carers with older babies and toddlers said they would use songs and fingerplays at home more, now that they were aware of their language and literacy aspects (PU02, PU04). Although few parents/carers expressed the value of library learning, some spoke of taking information back into their homes, and one mother advised that the songs and stories gave her ideas of how to do things at home (PU04).

In contrast, library non-using parents/carers did not comment on home literacy activities (PN01, PN02, PN03). Data indicated some aspects of home lives that may have had an impact on this situation. For example, one mother (PN03) said she was discouraged from engaging with learning activities because she was lonely at home with little family assistance and a husband who worked long hours. Another was a single parent (PN02) who needed to get out of the house rather than stay at home alone (PN02) and a third (PN03) was challenged by perceived competition and one-upmanship among mothers at early childhood events. A fourth mother (PN01) advised she had not thought about language and literacy before the researcher asked about it, and finally, a fifth participant (PN03) was a mother with disabilities who spoke of her chaotic childhood, little schooling, speech problem, trauma, self-described drug, health and legal issues and an

inability to read which, when combined, limited engagement with language and literacy with her child when at home.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has reported on data collected in answer Research Question 3 concerning effectiveness of library programs, activities and resources and their interactions with children's HLEs. Data indicates that stakeholders have limited knowledge about library based language and literacy support for young children, along with limited knowledge of effectiveness of programs, activities and resources. There is currently insufficient evidence available from libraries either quantitatively and qualitatively by which stakeholders could meaningfully determine language and literacy benefits that do, or could, accrue from young families' use of relevant library based early childhood services. It was also discovered that little was known of libraries' language and literacy interactions with children's HLEs.

In the next chapter, matters raised in the data from this study are discussed according to emergent themes. The discussion is accompanied by references to relevant academic and professional literature, and the potential significance of findings is noted.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

This study aimed to explore how early childhood library services support language and literacy learning in children's first three years of life. It details libraries' current early language and literacy programs, activities and resources, along with supports and impediments to their use by young families and interactions with children's Home Learning Environments (HLEs). This chapter discusses four key themes that were identified from the findings. First, key theme one examines libraries' methods of information sharing, literacy modelling and social engagement to support early language and literacy learning in children from birth to age three years. Second, key theme two explores the knowledge and skills required of library staff to provide this support. Next, key theme three is concerned with evaluation of library based language and literacy support for young children. Lastly, key theme four discusses the promotion of library based language and literacy support for families with children in the birth to three years' age cohort. It is noted that the small rural library is not included in discussion about programs as none were provided during the period of the study's data collection activities.

2. Theme 1: Information sharing, literacy modelling and social engagement

Libraries support early childhood language and literacy learning through the provision of resources, programs and activities. Provision of printed resources that are plentiful, accessible, good quality, free and in a range of formats is a core role of public libraries. Alongside these resources, programs and activities to encourage language and literacy engagement were found to be offered in three primary ways that supported families with children from birth to age three years. First, some library based sessions focus on information about language and literacy in intentional and planned ways. Second, some sessions offer language and literacy content to families through informal modelling of relevant knowledge and behaviours. Finally, some library events are arranged to be

largely social, encouraging adults and children to talk together, families with children of similar ages to interact together, and visits to the library to be enjoyable, informal and language rich. These three modes of early language and literacy engagement are discussed in the next section.

2.1 Intentional information sharing in library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

Libraries play a role in supporting young children's language and literacy learning, and one way they achieve this is to share educational information with parent/carers and children. In the metropolitan and regional libraries in this study, information sharing of early language and literacy content during library sessions included explaining aspects of print knowledge, sound discrimination and vocabulary, as well as how to build families' and children's motivation and skills to engage with print materials. Information sharing was offered at literacy enhanced and educationally planned library *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* which are described in the literature as a key contribution of libraries (Albright et al., 2009; Djonov et al., 2016;; Peterson et al., 2012; Prendergast, 2016). Campana et al. (2016) report library staff being intentional with early language and literacy information, while Renshaw and Goodhue (2020) recount the ability of libraries and their staff to deliver evidence-based early language and literacy programs and activities. Evidence from more than ten years ago shows that library programs have been designed for many years to develop language and literacy skills in young children (Strempel, 2009) and literacy information sharing for families has been a core role for libraries for decades.

Researchers who have investigated the nature of information sharing during library based early childhood language and literacy programs have found they involve common characteristics. These include being flexible (Bruce, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018;), having a proactive and strengths based approach (Gillon et al., 2022) and being offered in a dynamic environment not restricted by timetables and formally mandated curricula such as occurs in schools (Garmer, 2016). Further, the nature of events with enhanced language and literacy content aligned with Morgan and Chodkiewicz's (2009) description of a respected pedagogy for early

language and literacy within communities. This pedagogy is based on children's interests and experiences, using child focused, play-based strategies and involving enthusiastic family interactions. Morgan and Chodkiewicz (2009) accurately portray the way library sessions with deliberate language and literacy intent were observed to be planned and delivered, with library staff displaying effective communication skills, a modicum of language and literacy knowledge, and the right disposition.

To effectively share information about early language and literacy, Operational Staff in the metropolitan area were assisted with this part of their library role by provision of literacy content prepared by a qualified specialist. The specialist had developed twelve months' worth of language and literacy material, ready to roll out in packs with books, tips and plans (SS07, OP07). Operational Staff with effective communication skills were able to mobilise resources in these packs at regular library events, and some were additionally seen to use personal skills in adapting presentations according to target groups, local demographics, and geographic locations (SS08). However, it was noted that this did not apply to the rural library in this study.

Intentional information sharing that was observed at literacy enhanced sessions may help families and young children in two ways. First, it may assist in building children's generic skills such as concentrating and paying attention which are essential for learning. Second, it may enhance learning of specific language and literacy skills such as sound discrimination and new vocabulary. For example, when engaging a generic stance, staff encouraged children to listen and attend (as also found by Young, 2019) as well as promoting to parents/carers the benefits of shared reading and how to build parental confidence in assisting children's learning (Marshall, 2022). In comparison, when engaging strategies with a direct and focused language and literacy stance, staff endeavoured to build children's specialised skills such as enhancing phonemic awareness, understanding new words and developing print knowledge (OB06, OB07, OB08).

Without necessarily acknowledging the original source, literacy enhanced sessions frequently followed guidelines set out by the *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR) program

in the USA. These guidelines have streamlined earlier technical language and literacy strategies into more user-friendly encouragements for parents/carers to talk, read, play sing and write with their children. ECRR strategies include the use by library staff of what have been termed ‘asides’ of language and literacy information, which involve commentary or informal tips from staff directly to parents/carers during early childhood activities (Neuman, 2017). Evidence from evaluation of ‘asides’ suggests they provide useful information without compromising *Storytime* quality or enjoyment (Stewart et al., 2014). However, use of language and literacy ‘asides’ is a technique that has yet to be thoroughly explored in the context of Western Australia’s library based *Storytimes*, *Rhymetimes* and other programs where the focus is more on the modelling of language and literacy, skills, as described next.

2.2 Modelling of literacy behaviours in library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

Modelling of literacy behaviours can convey language and literacy information to families and children in low-key ways. It is a technique described in Australia’s Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as a useful practice to use during teaching and learning activities with young children (AGDE, 2022). Such methods have grown from the Theory of Social Learning (Bandura, 1969) which indicates that literacy skills can be enhanced in young children through watching and interacting with others. As advised by Rohde (2015) a modelling technique can facilitate effective input even when library staff are unversed in formal teaching skills, childhood development knowledge or early language and literacy information.

In a national forum, Tayler et al. (2016) describe literacy modelling as having abilities to promote conversational exchanges, encourage thinking and talking, provide information, stimulate questions and use unfamiliar vocabulary, all of which were observed during library *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*. Non-intrusive characteristics of literacy modelling took place in inconspicuous, understated and non-didactic ways, for example when staff illustrated how to engage in shared reading, how to actively involve children in the story and how to encourage interactive conversations (OB09, OB10, OB14). Staff with literacy modelling skills showed the direction of print and pages (Irwin et al., 2012; Peterson et

al., 2012), encouraged attentive behaviours by talking in a lively manner of topics of interest to young children, and demonstrated playful ways to engage in literacy learning through spontaneous games and queries (Bamkin et al., 2013; Wilson-Scorgie, 2022). Children were observed to respond to literacy modelling by staff when they heard the rhythm of the language, learnt and copied pronunciation, and had unfamiliar words explained, as similarly found by Bamkin et al. (2016).

The literacy consultant in this study (SS07) reminded library staff how to model forgotten nursery rhymes, promote repetition of activities and information, and ensure terminology used in communicating with parents/carers was non-technical and easy to understand. She encouraged playing with playdough to develop children's fine motor skills (SS07), with this having an added benefit of encouraging staff to think laterally about activities that may help the language and literacy learning of the children with whom they worked. Literacy modelling practices have been found to be promoted for library staff through Western Australia's *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* (Allington & Cunningham, 2022) with training showing library staff how to demonstrate reading techniques, and how to introduce families to library resources in non-stigmatising ways (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2013).

Although some staff were reticent to do so, modelling of relevant activities to parents/carers was a common approach to the delivery of early childhood language and literacy learning opportunities at public libraries. In comparison, some libraries focused on social elements of language and literacy learning, and these are discussed next.

2.3 Social engagement in library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

Families in this study commonly accessed library programs, activities and resources for young children for the purposes of social engagement and connection to other families. Library-using parents/carers revealed they visited their local library to have time away from home, meet with friends and keep their children happily occupied. However, parents/carers in these sessions rarely discussed language and literacy learning as a reason for their library visits. This was confirmed by findings from Delica and

Elbeshausen (2017) and Leorke et al. (2018) who noted the social nature of library engagement among young families. With a comparable outlook, this study found that Operational Staff were concerned about ensuring families enjoyed their time at the library and returned multiple times, rather than emphasising delivery of language and literacy messages (OP01, OP02, OP04, OP08, OP09).

A social motivation for library visits was noted by all parent/carer user groups, with 29 of the library-using parents/carers responding to the social nature of programs, while just one, who was a schoolteacher, mentioned the language and literacy aspects of library visits. In addition to engaging in social interactions, staff and families were eager to have fun during library visits, as noted by McCormack (2018) and Hunt (2020) whose research showed that socialisation and fun were primary reasons supplied by parents/carers for attending library programs. Socialisation had the added benefit that learning can be powerful when parents/carers and children have fun together, as described by Anderson (2006). Anderson suggests that an aim of *Storytimes* was for adult/child interactions to be enjoyable and also to be filled with language. Anderson proposes that when reading is perceived as fun by both the parent/carer and the child, positive exchanges between adult and child may result in both parties looking at books together more frequently.

While motivations for families to visit the library centred on social aspects rather than language and literacy content, visits were nevertheless favourable for early language and literacy learning to occur in young children. Learning through social engagement at the libraries is indicative of Shonkoff and Phillip's view (2000) and Heckman's work (2011) concerning the importance of interactive relationships for children's early language learning. Similarly, advice from Hopkins et al. (2013) that social elements of programs may be as important as linguistic and cognitive elements was illustrated among participating library-using families in this study.

Social aspects of learning language and literacy concentrate on children's participation, interaction and careful watching rather than on direct adult-led tuition. This is affiliated with Bandura's Theory of Social Learning (1969) in which daily interactions embody essential early oral language skills. Hopkins et al. (2013) confirm this theory, offering an

additional factor that exposure to stimulus is essential for language engagement, and libraries provide numerous exposures to such stimuli. Exposure may involve access to print resources, opportunities for families to visit during extended opening hours, and provision of free interactive events involving both planned and unplanned learning opportunities. Evidence from this study indicates such opportunities are provided at libraries, as similarly described by Payne and O'Brien (2006) in their work with children in ECEC. Payne and O'Brien describe benefits when language is offered to children in verbal and written forms throughout each day as a regular part of everything they do.

Social aspects of library attendance can have positive influences for families in addition to language and literacy learning. For example, Boulton et al. (2018) found that not only can such visits assist parent/carer mental health, but this study showed they can also influence overall child development through provision of multiple stimuli for oral activities (PU05, SS04). In the libraries' social environment, oral language opportunities were taking place even when library visits were regarded by Lucas (2013) as "babysitting ... and maybe singing an alphabet song now and then" (p.200). In comparison, backing Sensenig's view (2012) of the importance of oral language in the development of later written literacy skills, children in this study were seen to use language through singing songs and rhymes, commenting on stories, asking and answering questions, following directions and responding with comprehension and creativity (OB01, OB11). As young children, they expressed themselves through movement of their bodies and through words according to their age and developmental stage, communicating their thoughts in preverbal or newly verbal ways. Children were accommodated with this mode of communication through presence of interested adults in social, safe, friendly and accessible spaces.

Suitable child-friendly physical spaces in accessible locations were seen in this study to provide both social opportunities and language stimuli. Libraries' physical spaces have been described as enriched spaces for both socialising and learning (Leorke et al., 2018), as well as welcoming places for spending free time and mixing with other families. The findings of this study correspond with literature that depicts library provision of early

language and literacy information being unobtrusive, non-intensive and non-stigmatising (Mendelsohn et al., 2018; Rankin & Brock, 2015; Zubrick et al., 2015).

In contrast to widely held perceptions among library non-users, the literature notes that a positive library atmosphere exhibited by staff with the right manner, attitude, demeanour and performance is considered central to family engagement and children's participation in early language and literacy programs (Nadkarni & Klatt, 2014; Neuman et al., 2007; Reid & Howard, 2016). Staff are required to be welcoming, interested, warm, responsive, consistent and knowledgeable (Massis, 2008; Phillips, 2015; Prendergast, 2011; Schaff, 2020; Smith et al., 2021; Wasik & Hindman, 2015). At the same time, libraries themselves need to remain proactive places that work on behalf of children, families and communities (Medlar, 2016). They need to provide a calm and welcoming learning atmosphere (DeMartini, 2006; Djonov et al., 2016; Neuman, 2006) and be fun, safe and clean places for children to spend time (Smallwood & Birkenfeld, 2018). Descriptions of libraries also include being trusted (Parker, 2015), used as a refuge (Cart, 2010), as involving non-threatening spaces where all are welcome regardless of age or circumstances (Strempele, 2009), and having friendly staff and a homely feel (ALIA, 2015).

For some participants in this study who were library non-users, however, libraries were not perceived as places for social engagement and were seen as challenging places to visit. Reluctance to visit appeared to reside in personal difficulties with reading (Anderson et al., 2014), regarding reading as a chore, and learning to read being confronting (PN03). These participants proposed that they were not motivated to visit libraries with their young children since the children were too young to need language and literacy assistance (PN02). Families who did not use libraries further noted practical hindrances to library visits such as being short of time or having children who were particularly active and noisy. They tended to find screens and visual data more useful than books, and some relayed that books and reading had not been parts of their lives when they were growing up (PN01, PN03). Library non-users cited in the literature additionally included new parents/carers who were too tired or stressed to leave home with a young baby (Knoll, 2014), tied to the house due to baby nap times, or inhibited by isolated living circumstances (Hancock et al., 2015). With these varied ways of delivering

language and literacy information to young families, library staff need to have a range of specific skills. The skills they need are discussed in the next section.

3. Theme 2: Diverse knowledge and skills among library staff

The diversity of staff knowledge, focus, content, aims and provision of early childhood library language and literacy services for young children was mixed in level, content and understanding. Findings from this study indicate that library staff require specialised knowledge and skills to deliver effective early language and literacy programs for young children and their families. Knowledge and abilities include an understanding of early language and literacy and of early childhood development, along with effective presentation and communication skills. The previously discussed three-dimensional approach of information sharing, modelling and social opportunities that libraries provide requires distinct skills among library staff who plan and deliver sessions. Although most staff were confident in practical ways of presenting enjoyable sessions, they could sometimes lack knowledge of early language, literacy and child development, and not all staff recognised their role as language and literacy educators (SS07). The diversity, range and complexity of knowledge and skills used by library staff for their multiple daily roles, which include delivery of successful early language and literacy sessions, are explored in the next part of the chapter.

3.1 Library staff require knowledge of early language, literacy and child development

Library staff who work with young children and their parents/carers were found to vary in their qualifications and knowledge about early child development, in particular early language and literacy learning. While the majority of Senior Staff held tertiary qualifications (SS02, SS03, SS04) the subject matter of these studies was mixed and seldom related to early literacy. In comparison, among Operational Staff, few who worked regularly with families had formal qualifications, although two had school based backgrounds as education assistants. While Operational Staff were expected to present language and literacy based sessions for young children and parents/carers they had mostly started their library employment with broad interpersonal attributes but little literacy knowledge, obtaining and developing their skills and knowledge on the job. As additionally highlighted by Mardhani-Bayne (2020) “despite the importance of this group

to frontline programming practices, there is a dearth of relevant literature concerning non-librarian library staff” (p.20), including limited information about how they engage with early language and literacy activities. This concern was confirmed in this study.

Senior Staff were aware of a need to train Operational Staff sufficiently in their role of promoting language and literacy learning for children from birth to age three years and training was provided in diverse ways (SS01, SS05, SS07). In one LGA the Library Manager advised that she had trained all staff in early language and literacy skills, and that they all knew how to deliver *Storytime* or *Rhymetime* if required. She reported that she trained staff in how to manage their first attempts at language and literacy events and walked them through relevant aspects of what children were learning. In comparison, a different LGA had developed teams according to staff skills and personal interests, with no obligation for all staff to be language and literacy trained. However, metropolitan Senior Staff Roma (SS05) suggested that Operational Staff may lack clarity about the importance and possible effects of their early childhood role, and resourcing to free staff from other library duties may assist in making time for training in early language and literacy. However, in the rural LGA there was a different philosophy amongst staff. Here, the part-time staff received minimal management backing, and advised that while training was offered, they did not take part in it. Staff were confident that they knew what to do, although considerations of how story reading could benefit children’s language and literacy learning were not revealed by these staff.

Along with general communication of language and literacy information, library staff assumed the educator role during only a proportion of their work hours. During their limited hours and variable circumstances as educators, a measure of training in early education methods was proposed to help staff be effective, despite the role not involving direct, teacher-led instruction of technical language and literacy skills. Training suited to the informal and non-prescriptive circumstances of library based early childhood learning (SS05, SS07, LM03, LM04) may be assisted by an understanding of pedagogies suited to the infant age group (Davis et al., 2015), although this would come at a resourcing cost for LGAs who may have limited knowledge of the importance of early language and literacy learning.

Suitable early childhood training for library staff may include defined language and literacy content as well as learning about effects of a recent push-down of an academic curriculum which has resulted in fewer play-based opportunities in early childhood settings (Barblett et al., 2016; Bellen, 2016). Push-down effects sit uneasily with the informality which characterises library based education and learning in children's early years. As advised by Deerr et al. more than 15 years ago (2006), instead of becoming more like formal schools, library staff were encouraged to focus on purposeful play-based learning along with empowerment of parents/carers as their child(ren)'s first and best teacher.

Although staff were found to need knowledge of early literacy skills, a deep understanding of early childhood pedagogy was not suggested. While Operational Staff required training in skills and knowledge to fulfil duties expected of them around young children's language and literacy learning (Chaitow et al., 2022, Djonov et al., 2018) this training was practical and operational rather than academic (SS07). In Western Australia, training was offered through the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* and was similar to that offered by South Australia's *Raising Literacy* program, Queensland's *First Five Forever* program and the *Zero to Three* organization. Overseas, the UK's *Bookstart* project was the model on which *Better Beginnings* was built and training packages developed, while *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR) from the USA has provided literacy information for library staff worldwide. In the ECRR manual (ALSC, 2011) optional training made available for library staff includes information about early literacy research, practices for staff to demonstrate to parents/carers, and specific literacy information to share with parents/carers. Nevertheless, while Sylva et al. (2004) advise that libraries should ensure staff have knowledge of both literacy curricula and child development, it has been suggested that these formal features should not be overstated to parents/carers (Ghoting & Martin-Diaz, 2006).

This study demonstrated discrepancies in the delivery of language and literacy content in programs across libraries, including one library in the rural area where no programs or activities were offered. However, the impact that staff variations in knowledge and practice may have on language and literacy learning has not been calculated (Becker,

2012) and it is unknown how staff training in early literacy may affect language and literacy outcomes among families. While clear identification of progress through staff-led literacy learning opportunities was not evident, this did not mean that no such progress was occurring. Examples in the literature indicate that progress was made by all families who attended library activities. For example, Crist et al. (2020) describe outcomes of the USA's *Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries* (SPELL) program for birth to three-year-olds which involved increased knowledge and vocabulary, and greater engagement with language and literacy learning among library-using families with children in their before-school years. To use this knowledge effectively, staff were seen to need competent communication and presentation skills, which are covered in the next section.

3.2 Library staff require practical communication and presentation skills

Operational Staff in this study were found to require a range of complex skills for carrying out their daily library duties. This includes proficiency with standard library duties such as stock circulation, answering enquiries and assisting library visitors with technology, as well as specific skills for interacting with families and young children. In a similar manner to Crist et al. (2020) this study found that learning these skills could be left to staff's unguided experimentation (Crist et al., 2020), but this issue has achieved little exposure in the literature. Aside from descriptions of performance aspects of storytelling by Turner (2009) and Djonov et al. (2018), presentation skills for library staff appear to be currently under-investigated. As a result, in real-world situations where staff are employed to execute numerous daily duties it was alleged that the youngest member of staff could be chosen to work with the children by default (SS05). Alternatively, one Senior Staff member advised that any staff member who had their own young children was swiftly scheduled to do *Storytime*, even if they lacked the skills and manner to do so (SS07). To remedy this situation, this same Senior Staff member offered training for Operational Staff in her LGA with a presentation skills workshop called *Discover Your Voice* (www.mymusicalvoice.com/p/discover-your-voice) which included tips on voice projection and protection used by professional actors (SS07).

To assist families to take part in library programs, interpersonal skills of library staff were seen to be important. Smith et al. (2021) found that skills such as building relationships for families within communities, as well as having local knowledge to offer links to education, health, financial and social sectors in their communities was useful. Library staff work with parents'/carers' needs in conjunction with children's needs, including affirming parents'/carers' actions in how they relate to their child(ren) (Celano & Neuman, 2015). Staff are seen to be encouraging and inviting (Clark, 2016) and work to prevent parents/carers feeling compelled or obliged to meet certain expectations (Vanobbergen, 2009). They offer the sorts of skills described by Bamkin et al. (2011) that illustrated how a staff member managed a child's interruptions in a calm manner, while maintaining a cheerful tone and continuing the story without a break.

Another skill noted in the study's observations was an ability to connect with a range of families and to keep calm in a chaotic situation. Ralli and Payne (2016) add that children's staff also need to be confident in managing noisy elements of young users' natural energy levels. Georgeson (2015) promotes abandonment of embedded ideas about being quiet in the library, as well as encouraging positive personal interactions with all users. Finally, contemporary literature has explored the social work role that library staff are increasingly called upon to play (Wahler et al., 2020). However, this characteristic entails significant knowledge, awareness, insight and training that is not yet an employment requirement for most library staff in Western Australia. The social work role was not discussed by participating staff or covered in the current study. Chiefly, library staff are expected to share language and literacy skills in non-technical ways to disparate listeners with varying education and language levels and of all stages from pre-verbal infants to grandparents, including adults who may be distracted by technology or talking with other adults (Hotta, 2022).

Planning and implementing effective language and literacy sessions in libraries was observed to involve a discrete skill set including continual responsiveness to change. A variety of ages, audience composition and attention levels as a core feature of library based sessions was similarly noted by McKenzie and Stooke (2009) in their work about community-based activities with young children. McKenzie and Stooke (2009) promote

improvisational approaches and proactive involvement of library staff in preparation and delivery of programs which fit well with ways in which library based *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* are delivered .

In this study, interactions between families and staff were enhanced by staffs' kindness and patience. These attributes were enriched by graceful handling of behavioural problems, positive comments on what children were doing, and restraint in using the word 'don't' (Diament-Cohen & Goldsmith, 2016). Promotion of staff always remembering to include joy as they delivered activities (Clark, 2020) was consistent with suggestions for them additionally to be caring and responsive to children, as well as offering spaces for families that were reliably tranquil and hospitable (Weiss et al., 2016). Understanding exchanges between parents/carers and children, and between families and the library (Schaff, 2020), knowing how to encourage people to linger at the library (Leorke et al., 2018) and developing opportunities to provide a personalised service (Djonov et al., 2018) have additionally been encouraged among Operational Staff. Although a small number of parents/carers in this study advised that they appreciated the direct literacy content, more simply wanted their attendance to be pleasurable, including having fun laughing at or with the library staff (Hunt, 2020). In practice, staff were observed to work with all elements of these contrasting interpretations.

To boost the effectiveness of staff's knowledge and skills in the delivery of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources to young children, evaluation of their input would be beneficial. Information about evaluation of library-based early childhood services is given in the next section.

4. Theme 3: Evaluation of library based early language and literacy support

The place of libraries in children's educational journeys has received limited consideration by educators, policy makers and the public. In Australia, public libraries are not directly accountable to educational policies or measurements, and lack of formalised or mandated evaluative processes has perhaps inhibited understanding of libraries' value in children's early learning. Researchers noted over 15 years ago that there was

little information about outcomes of early childhood programs in Australia (Wise et al., 2005), with lack of information about the effectiveness of libraries' early language and literacy programs being proposed as a cause of this poor acknowledgment (Campana et al., 2016; Wilson-Scorgie, 2022). For example, an experienced Senior Staff member in this study was vexed that the presence of library representatives was not considered necessary at discussions about early language and literacy with senior education policy strategists (SS05). Additionally, the CEO of Australia's national peak body for libraries (ALIA) referenced a lack of awareness of libraries in federal and state departments of Education (SS01), and she promoted nation-wide plans for long-term evaluation of library based early language and literacy inputs and outcomes. Building sound evaluative processes for both inputs and outcomes may increase stakeholders' understanding of the library's role in supporting young children's early language and literacy learning.

In this study it became apparent that evaluation of library based language and literacy services at the present time did not provide library managers or policy makers with reliable data. Four aspects of evaluations may be considered, using different terminology but nevertheless linking closely with primary and secondary outcomes listed in the recent National Early Language and Literacy (NELLS) Discussion paper (Renshaw & Goodhue, 2020, p.7). Elements of useful evaluations include, but are not limited to, longitudinal appraisal of program content and of resource use, measurement of the learning of specific literacy concepts, the effect of library programs, activities and resources on learning dispositions, and how engagement with libraries' programs, activities and resources might influence children's language and literacy learning in their HLEs. Each of these elements is discussed in turn in the next section.

4.1 Longitudinal appraisal of library based early language and literacy support

Longitudinal appraisal of programs, activities and resources is currently limited in Western Australia, apart from three research studies conducted about the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2010, 2013, 2015) which indicate positive impacts of the program on attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and practices of families with young children. Nevertheless, evidence from the present study indicates that appraisal of library based early language and literacy programs is currently

restricted mostly to quantitative measures of library attendance (OP01, OP02, LG02, LG03, LM02, LM03, SS04, SS05, SS09). While attendance numbers may indicate that programs are popular, they cannot show which aspects of library based programs are working, and how they might benefit from changes to improve learning among young children (Parker, 2015). Further, warnings about determining a causal link between attendance and learning have been given in research from Canada (Wilson-Scorgie, 2022) which advises that language and literacy progress may be affected by other factors in participants lives that are unknown to library staff. For example, staff may have no information about whether families were attending language and literacy programs elsewhere or had additional language and literacy influences in their lives which may be affecting children's literacy learning.

Whether or not they were aware of this warning, library staff and policy makers in this study were seen to be actively seeking suitable evaluative strategies as a need for evidence of libraries' impact grows (SS01, SS08). With background information from ALIA's *Early Literacy Framework* (ALIA, 2014a) along with the *Literacy Matters* strategy developed by the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA, 2017) and the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (AGDE, 2022) the larger metropolitan libraries in this study were beginning to create assessment protocols to review families' learning from library based programs, activities and resources. Senior Staff at these libraries regarded the establishment of robust longitudinal studies and evaluations of library programs and resource usage as a pressing need in the library sector (SS07, SS08).

4.2 Literacy concepts learned through library based early language and literacy support

It was evident from this study that libraries provide multiple ways to support elements of Clay's theory of emergent literacy (1966). These include offering social support, building collaborative relationships, providing multiple literacy stimuli and giving free access to comprehensive resources to encourage children's language and literacy learning. However, libraries were limited in the delivery of detailed print concepts described in Clay's discussion on concepts about print, such as providing explicit information about text direction, phonological awareness, letter identification, vocabulary and general knowledge.

Useful measurement of children's progress with specific language and literacy concepts remains under-reported. It was apparent that counting or record-taking of new songs, rhymes and fingerplays learnt or stories heard was mostly absent, as was regular and accurate counting of library resources borrowed or used by young families. Just one example in this study included quantitative assessment of dimensions such as number of new vocabulary words learnt, rhymes built, or letters named. This was a personal challenge by one Library Manager who considered whether children had learnt three new words during a library based language and literacy session (LM02).

Nevertheless, observations in this study noted that library staff frequently included specific literacy concepts within their *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes*, either in planned or *ad hoc* ways. Concepts included explaining new vocabulary words or items of general knowledge, pointing out alliteration, onomatopoeia or rhyme within a story or song, showing direction of text and naming numbers, colours and shapes. Capturing and counting these types of interactions between staff and children may be a suitable starting point for measurement of libraries' language and literacy support for children and young families. In addition to learning of specific concepts, children's learning may include behavioural changes related to language and literacy learning. Potential behaviour changes are explored below.

4.3 Behavioural changes following engagement with library based early language and literacy support

Observations from this study endorse an understanding that social aspects of children's development are important for language and literacy learning. For example, appropriate outcomes of library based language and literacy programs may encompass core literacy pre-requisites of listening, attending, comprehending and responding (Hoyne & Egan, 2022; Peterson et al., 2012; Rosenkoetter & Knapp-Philo, 2006;). However, currently no long-term or formalised assessment of changes in children's or adults' literacy behaviour takes place at libraries and observed changes to literacy behaviours cannot be confidently asserted as a consequence of engaging with library events or resources. Rather, libraries were found to use informal staff feedback instead of formal evaluative practices, and while staff who worked consistently with young children had positive

opinions about their progress (OP01, OP02) little information was systematically recorded or measured.

Behavioural change among library users has been described in research by Peterson et al. (2012) from the University of Toronto. Although the information is from Canada, it could helpfully be considered in similar Australian circumstances, with Peterson et al. describing program outcomes that successfully foster children's school readiness through the encouragement of participation in activities, asking of questions, following instructions, understanding storylines and being motivated to read. Children were observed to have also learned sounds, rhymes and new vocabulary.

In comparison to Canada, Australian researchers from the Telethon Kids Institute (TKI) suggest that libraries could helpfully engage in more vigorous and timely research on data driven protocols (Runions et al. 2022), with Peterson et al.'s research perhaps offering a useful template. Information available from research in the eastern states of Australia (Phillips, 2015) may also provide a structure for investigation into appropriate evaluative methods in Western Australia. Phillips' comprehensive document *Reading and literacy for all: Quality indicators for early years' literacy programs in Victorian public libraries* (2015) provides multiple resources and a practical toolkit for use by staff in libraries of all sizes to assess literacy behaviours. Senior Staff who were seeking to improve libraries' accordance with ALIA's metrics in their standards and guidelines (SS05, SS08) may find examples and samples of measures of effectiveness within Phillips' toolkit.

Determining non-intrusive ways to assess children's confidence and competence in using language in spoken and written forms is still under debate. Methods that are calm, age-appropriate and able to follow young children's progress in language and literacy behaviours across time are yet to be fully developed. Measures that are appropriate for library literacy learning occasions that are social, playful, and self-directed need to be discreet compared to direct assessment protocols that may be used by the formal education sector. Subtle methods are required to honour libraries' child-centred learning

style in which opportunities or openings for engagement are offered, rather than focussing on information being provided through adult-led direction.

Extracting the value of libraries' language and literacy activities from the general progress of children as they age inevitably lacks precision. Since children make progress naturally during the early years of their lives, determining how much of this progress has been assisted by engagement with library based activities, and how much would have occurred without such engagement, is problematic. New, vigorous and composite evidence is necessary to explore complexities around changes in children's and adult's literacy behaviours resulting from attendance at library based programs.

5. Theme 4: Promotion of library based early language and literacy support

Broad promotion of libraries' early childhood programs, activities and resources may increase stakeholder awareness of two concepts. First, promotion may inform families and other stakeholders of the importance of early language and literacy learning by young children. Second, promotion may inform families and stakeholders of ways by which libraries provide support for this early language and literacy learning through provision of programs, activities and resources. Since promotional activities require financing, improved resourcing of library-based early language and literacy services would be required. This may take the form of increased staffing levels to enable Library Managers and Operational Staff to have dedicated time allocated to early childhood duties within the broad range of daily activities that they are required to perform..

Promotional activities to change perceptions of libraries as outdated and unfriendly are discussed next. In addition, information is given next about how to enhance understanding of contemporary libraries' assistance for families and their young children's learning.

5.1 Awareness of the importance of early language and literacy, and of libraries' early language and literacy support

Awareness of the importance of early language and literacy learning was inconsistent among stakeholders. The literature indicates that professional policy makers have low

awareness of young children's needs in general (Neumann, 2016; WALGA, 2015; Walker et al., 2011) while in this study Local Governmental Councillors, library staff and parents/carers showed inconsistent understanding of both the meaning and the practice of early literacy. Strategic promotion of libraries' early language and literacy role may help boost families' understanding of its importance for their young children. If libraries are shown to offer a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, this may encourage their use and consequent exposure of families to early language and literacy. However, the concepts of atmosphere, welcome and friendliness are subjective, and the literature includes both positive and negative responses to libraries' atmospheres among the general population.

Libraries perceived as outdated

Hampering awareness of libraries' early language and literacy support is a persistent myth of libraries being outdated and unfriendly for families (Deerr et al., 2006; Dudley, 2013). Libraries continue to face misperceptions about their character, purpose and the differing roles of print and technology, along with unhelpful stereotyping that does not accurately reflect library changes in recent years (Fong & Wade, 2017; Hand et al., 2014; Pahl & Allen, 2011). In this study, participants in all three library non-user groups perceived libraries to be old fashioned and stressful place to visit with young children. This misunderstanding was noted as an ongoing problem by three Library Managers (LM03, LM05, LM06) despite Observations of four *Storytimes* and six *Rhymetimes* indicating otherwise (OB01, OB02, OB03, OB06, OB07, OB08, OB09, OB10, OB11, OB15). This study shows that knowledge among parents/carers of what takes place within contemporary libraries varies widely especially among library non-users who revealed inaccuracies about twenty-first century libraries (PN02, PN03, LM03, LM04) and had negative pre-conceived ideas of libraries as old fashioned (SS02, SS04).

The problem of perceptions of libraries as outdated was detailed widely in the literature (Ferens et al. 2017; Ghoting & Martin-Diaz, 2006; Knoll, 2014; Rankin & Brock, 2015). Mertens et al. (2018) suggest that among the considerable number of people who have not visited a library for years, often since their childhood, restricted awareness of library activities was evident. Not only were they unaware that libraries were no longer solely

concerned with books, but they also did not know that libraries have changed from quiet and solemn places to ones that are active and busy within their local communities.

Despite having been a core element of public libraries for more than a century the free availability of comprehensive print resources was not reliably known (ALIA 2014b; Bundy, 2005; Colab, 2018a; Djonov, 2018) which was also shown by evidence from this study (SS02, OP08). Among families who may have benefited from attending the library, substantial numbers were too busy, lacked interest, had not considered visiting a library as an activity for their family (PU05, OP03) or were unaware of what libraries offered in terms of language and literacy or other learning (OP01).

Misunderstandings included libraries being regarded as unsuitable places for small children, where you had to be quiet, where children were required to sit still and listen, where other customers might frown on noisy children and where the staff might be severe or irritable (SS04). In several cases, parents/carers who held these views about library behaviour were the same parents/carers who misinterpreted the nature of early language and literacy learning. These parents/carers tended to consider literacy as exclusively related to being able to read, including children being taught didactically and systematically how to make sense of written words. Children in these families may experience restricted opportunities to practice and develop their language and literacy skills compared to children in families with more expansive views. This pertains to children whose families choose not to take part in opportunities available to them, including visiting the Community Child Health Nurse, or attending Playgroup, Playcafé, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) or other early childhood programs where early language and literacy skills may be championed.

Libraries perceived as unimportant and not welcoming

Among library non-using parents/carers libraries were regarded as unimportant for their needs since they could obtain any information they required elsewhere. They could also take their children to Playgroup or other similar activity rather than the library, since these other activities were seen as more suited to the active, unpredictable and boisterous nature of small children. The notion of libraries being comfortable and welcoming which has been reported in the literature needs to be balanced with valid

concerns of library non-users. In real-world contemporary situations where poor language and literacy levels are evident, where sensibilities of being judged are apparent and where misperceptions of libraries thrive, libraries present themselves differently among groups of people. Evidence indicates differences between library users who feel relaxed and welcome (PU01, PU02, PU03, PU04), while library non-users feel uncomfortable (PN03). While few barriers to library use were encountered in terms of physical accessibility or financial cost, data indicates there may be hidden barriers related to accessibility, for example among those who find literacy an alarming word, who struggle to read, and who regard libraries as unwelcoming (Bundy, 2005). This has also been described by Walter (2001) who wrote of adults with poor literacy skills feeling uncomfortable in libraries, and who felt stigmatized by educated library staff who could not empathise with them.

In a similar manner, Circle (2018) has researched customers' library experiences in the USA, finding that even after people have located the exterior of the library, they may still face access difficulties. For example, once inside the library they may be faced with too much choice and no way of knowing how to find what they need. Signage may be confusing, and rules may not make sense. This may be true for all users as well as being especially problematic for visitors who are not regular or confident library users, or for whom reading is challenging.

In contrast to widely held perceptions among library non-users, the literature notes that a positive library atmosphere exhibited by staff with the right manner, attitude, demeanour and performance is considered central to family engagement and access to early language and literacy programs (Nadkarni & Klatt, 2014; Neuman et al., 2007; Reid & Howard, 2016)., Libraries need to remain proactive places working on behalf of children, families and communities (Medlar, 2016), as well as promoting their services to improve family awareness of the importance of children's early language and literacy and how libraries can help.

5.2 Promotion strategies

For families to benefit from library programs, activities and resources they first need to know of them, and thereafter need relevant and up-to-date information to determine which elements are suited to the age, stage and nature of their children. If this information is hard to find, confusing, complex or otherwise inaccessible to young families, families may omit consideration of libraries' guidance with their young children's language and literacy learning (Djonov et al., 2018).

Lack of knowledge of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children occurred at multiple levels in this study. This includes high tier policy makers (SS05), people living close to a local public library (PU02) and families among the 60% of the population who are not library members (National and State Libraries Australia [NSLA], 2018). Broader promotion of public libraries' resources, facilities, programs, activities and resources may reduce misunderstandings about contemporary libraries, and Bundy (2011) indicates that library non-users themselves advocate raising awareness through promotion of library services.

This study shows that promotion of library activities either in print or digital media, or through being seen out in the community is lacking in its ability to engage young families for whom libraries, language and literacy are not a regular part of life. A need for bolder marketing and promotion activities by the library sector was signposted by the continuation of inaccurate and outdated knowledge among members of the public. For example, despite print resources being core library business, their potential for boosting language and literacy learning among young children appears to be underused and undervalued. Due to poor promotion, families lack awareness of literacy benefits of comprehensive language and literacy resources targeted directly at young children, consequently making minimal use of them. This topic has been explored in the literature (Velasquez & Campbell-Meier, 2018), discussed by professional bodies (SLWA, 2019) and spoken of by study participants (SS06, SS07). Careful planning of durable marketing and promotional activities is required since, as advised by Farmer and Stricevic (2011), one-shot efforts are likely to be insufficient to have long-term impact. Schmidt and Hamilton (2017b) note that framing messages in positive rather than negative terms is helpful. In

addition, efforts are required to ensure promotional information is clear, consistent and strong (<https://wordsgrowminds.com.au>).

Findings in this study indicate that holistic promotion of libraries may improve awareness of their early language and literacy role among young families, with evidence suggesting a current lack of clarity about their role and purpose. For example, from a national perspective, Leorke et al. (2018) were concerned that agencies through which libraries were evaluated and funded had limited knowledge of libraries' early childhood work. To improve such knowledge, contemporary place-based practices (Field & Tan, 2018) could be engaged to discover how to reach new library customers (Velasquez & Campbell-Meier, 2018), how to promote the library experience holistically (ALIA, 2014) and how to stimulate interest in the value of reading (Farmer & Stricevic, 2011). Evidence from this study indicates a similar concern about promoting the essence of libraries, such as improving their image (SS02), broadcasting that they are free and welcoming (LM05) and describing their comprehensive resources (OP09). These are antecedents of early childhood promotion, rather than the substance of it, and a detailed approach is required to promote specific library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for families with young children. A wide-angle view of promoting libraries may therefore be useful ahead of a more fine-grained outlook describing specific language and literacy services.

Against a challenging backdrop of restrictive corporate marketing processes as shown in this study, local library staff found practical ways of bypassing the formalities and interacting with their communities, both digitally and face-to face. In the digital space, there was mixed use of social media by LGAs, with some using *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* to promote language and literacy messages and events (LM08), while others avoided social media according to corporate protocols (SS02). Also in the digital space, professionally developed and educationally sound applications such as *First Five Forever* (<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/first5forever>), *Bright Tomorrows Start Today* (<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/bright-tomorrows-start-today>) and *Kindytxt* (<https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/education>) have been built to provide language and literacy tips direct to families. Once the free application has been downloaded to a

personal device, families receive age-targeted, easy-to-understand information and ideas about language and literacy. This is immediate, clear and requires little or no effort, time or money on the part of busy parents/carers, and collecting evidence about how engagement benefits children's language and literacy is a next step. Evidence around how early childhood programs such as digital as well as in-person programs support the underlying theoretical concepts of this study is covered in the next section.

4.4 Interaction of library based early language and literacy support with children's Home Learning Environments

Data about Home Learning Environments (HLEs) of young children in this study was limited, with parents/carers providing short anecdotes of children's home behaviour following attendance at library activities. Anecdotes involved mainly singing of library songs and rhymes (OP01, PU04 but it is noted that anecdotes involve self-selected and potentially non-representative parent samples who may also display social desirability biases (Liu & Li, 2022). Despite the confirmed importance of parent/child reading within children's HLE's, research has suffered from difficulties in accessing private homes to evaluate parent/child activities and children's real-world learning opportunities (Becker, 2012; Cook & Farmer, 2011; Nichols, 2011.. Difficulties in collecting accurate information about the interaction of library programs, activities and resources with children's HLEs may further include biases towards already engaged families since disengaged families were not around, or not confident, to be asked (Melhuish et al., 2008; Mellon, 1990; Puglisi et al., 2017; Wildemouth, 2017).

Contextual information to determine whether parents/carers regularly and happily read to their children within their home is limited (Taylor et al., 2016). Additionally, implications of genetic and non-genetic features involved with children's learning are yet to be robustly discussed for their potential influence on early language and literacy engagement (Cahill et al., 2020; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). The field of early language and literacy learning may benefit from comprehensive research into home/library relationships in a similar way to recent increases in understandings of home/school relationships.

6. Relationship of findings to the frameworks

The study was conceptualised with three theories of early language and literacy learning, being Vygotsky's socio cultural theory of learning, Clay's theory of emergent literacy (1966) and Bandura's theory of social learning (1969). Evidence indicates a number of ways in which library based programs, activities and resources support these theories, involving a range of language and literacy concepts that are displayed when young children actively engage with public libraries.

During library based sessions, young children were seen to participate informally in understanding the conventions of print, learning vocabulary and building narrative skills, as described by Clay (1966) in the theory of emergent literacy. Further elements of Clay's theory demonstrated at library based sessions included children learning through engagement with language and literacy materials and being offered multiple opportunities to build specific language and literacy skills. It was especially noted that library based sessions were presented in friendly and familiar ways, ensuring that they were fun and enjoyable, and that children were motivated to take part.

Elements of Vygotsky's and Bandura's social learning theories that were displayed at library based early language and literacy sessions involve generic skills of maintaining sustained attention, retaining information, developing memory and reproducing actions and words to consolidate comprehension. As with Clay's theory, motivation was a key element, with children motivated to engage with books through having fun with their family and friends, copying rhymes, songs and fingerplays and playing informal age-appropriate games in a relaxed atmosphere.

Evidence from this research indicates that the main elements of the theories were exhibited at all library based early literacy sessions. Libraries offered literacy learning moments through everyday activities, boosted by books, songs and opportunities to talk in supportive social environments. Children were encouraged to engage with their parents/carers, and parents/carers were encouraged to find multiple occasions to engage with their children. Modelling of literacy behaviours was passed from adult to

child, and the necessary foundations of attention and motivation were promoted through ensuring activities were lively and enjoyable.

The conceptual framework's representation as two pillars was used to guide information-gathering activities. Stakeholder information in the library field was gathered from Local Government Councillors, Senior Staff, Library Managers and Operational Staff, while stakeholder information from families' perspectives was gathered from library using families and library non-using families.

Areas of investigation shown in pillar one embrace factual data such as the library services currently provided for young families, as well as perceptual data of supports and impediments to use of those services. Areas of investigation shown in pillar two similarly involve data of stakeholder perceptions of libraries and their early childhood services including supports and impediments to use. In this pillar, data relates to families with young children aged between birth and three years. Pillars combine to provide the study's outcomes which include policy development and service improvement for early childhood language and literacy support by the public library sector.

However, during data collection activities it was found that the context of participating libraries was significant in the provision and implementation of early language and literacy programs, activities and resources, and this was not shown in the Conceptual Framework. Differing contexts of participating libraries were found to result in variances between library services, with the small rural library having insufficient resources to provide early childhood programs or activities. This was in contrast to the range of services provided by the regional and metropolitan libraries which were located in urban contexts.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed topics that illuminate public libraries' input into language and literacy learning for young children. First, three differing ways libraries provide language and literacy activities for library users were described, and second, the diverse skills and knowledge required of library staff to successfully deliver these activities were explored.

Third, the chapter discussed how improved evaluation of library programs, activities and resources may improve acknowledgment of libraries' place in children's educational journeys. Finally, the chapter considered how to promote libraries' language and literacy role so more families engage with it and children's skills improve.

The following is the final chapter of this thesis. It reiterates the aims and findings of the research, along with recommendations arising from the study and opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

This closing chapter reviews the aims of this research into how public libraries support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to age three years. It begins with an outline of the previous chapters, followed by summarising the study's key findings in answer to the research questions. Recommendations for modifications to public library language and literacy services for young children are given, along with original contribution to knowledge of the research. Limitations of the work are given and opportunities for future research are identified. The chapter ends with concluding remarks from the researcher.

This thesis consists of ten chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic and rationale of the study, while Chapter Two details research and professional literature associated with early language, literacy and public libraries. Next, Chapter Three describes the study's Conceptual Framework and Chapter Four explains the research design, methodological approach, sample, methods and analysis techniques. Chapter Five describes in detail the context of the libraries used in the sample. Findings for the study's three Research Questions are explored in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, followed by interpretation and discussion of the meaning of these findings in Chapter Nine. Chapter Ten is this concluding chapter.

2. Key findings

The study aimed to provide new knowledge about the role of public libraries in supporting language and literacy learning by children in their first three years of life. It was based on an awareness of early language and literacy learning being founded in relationships and positive social interactions between adults and children. Accordingly, the study explored how libraries provide socially-based literacy learning opportunities and directed language and literacy content through a variety of early childhood

programs and activities. Libraries' core role of providing comprehensive print resources for use either in the library or in children's homes as a key support for early language and literacy learning was also investigated. The study asked three Research Questions which are detailed below along with the key findings for each question.

RQ1: What language and literacy services for children from birth to age three years and their parents/carers are currently provided by public libraries in Western Australia?

The study details three main answers for Research Question 1. The first answer gives details of multiple library programs and activities that support language and literacy learning by young children. Programs such as *Storytime*, *Rhymetime* and the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* are provided across multiple library locations, while programs including *Toddler Time*, *Learning with Storytime* and *Learning English Through Storytime* (LETS) are provided where a need had been expressed by families or noted by library staff. One library, however, in a rural location did not provide programs for young children. The second answer for Research Question 1 details comprehensive library resources that are a central service provided by libraries in support of early language and literacy learning, while the third answer describes a three-fold variety of focus among differing early childhood services for young children. This three-fold provision of early childhood sessions involves, first, sessions with intentional language and literacy content which provide explicit literacy facts through information sharing strategies, and second, sessions with unplanned or informal language and literacy learning opportunities. This second type of session involves moderate literacy aims during *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* when literacy concepts are modelled casually and spontaneously by library staff in response to the families in attendance. A third type of session at libraries with modest or unexpressed literacy aims focussed on social aspects of language and literacy learning during children's early years. Libraries with a social focus worked with an understanding that social engagement, provision of literacy stimuli, multiple language opportunities and frequent serve-and-return conversations with adults were valuable for young children's language and literacy learning.

Augmenting this information about varying styles of delivery, the study described a range of both supports and impediments to library based early language and literacy services. This information is in answer to Research Question 2:

RQ2: What factors support or impede the implementation of effective library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for children from birth to age three years and the engagement of their parents/carers?

Factors that support the implementation of library based language and literacy programs for children and families include the friendliness of staff and the diversity of programs offered so families can find programs to suit the ages and needs of their children. In addition, support was found in the free availability of library services. In contrast, factors that impeded the implementation and use of library based language and literacy programs involved constrained resources, perceptions of libraries as outdated, limited knowledge of libraries' early childhood input, some unhelpful library procedures, and poor marketing.

When investigating supports and impediments to delivery of early language and literacy programs, and engagement with them by parents/carers of young children, it was found that knowledge and skills of library staff were salient. To effectively provide the multiple early childhood programs and numerous resources offered at libraries, library staff need diverse skills, expertise, competencies and information. Staff require a modicum of knowledge about early childhood development, early literacy learning and early childhood pedagogies in order to provide appropriate services to the cohort in question. In addition, Senior Staff require abilities in corporate policy and strategy development, while Library Managers need the ability to work on diverse daily planning requirements at their local library, including arranging the best use of staff, resources, programs and services. Vitally, Operational Staff who work face-to-face with parents/carers and young children need competent communication skills to engage all ages from birth to grandparents, as well as interacting successfully with people of varied cultural, language, educational, literacy and SES backgrounds. It was found that communication skills among Operational Staff who presented literacy based activities were boosted when

staff had lively presentation abilities that involved audience engagement, crowd control, voice projection and storytelling skills.

A lack of evaluation and measurement of children's literacy progress was identified in the study's data which is seen as an impediment to greater acknowledgment of library services by the educational sector, politicians and parents. Quantitative measurement of progress with specific language and literacy topics was rarely carried out and there was little qualitative assessment of library programs apart from anecdotal information from staff and parents/carers. Whether children knew more sounds, letters, songs, words or general information as a result of library attendance was not known. Counting the number of attendees at library activities was used as a proxy for evaluation of programs on the understanding that families would not attend if they were not learning from and/or enjoying their attendance.

Limited staff resourcing was an impediment to family engagement with early language and literacy learning at the small rural library. At this library, the part time staff were unable to provide *Storytimes* or other early childhood activities due to being required for Customer Service duties. Also at the rural library, and with some of the Councillors in the larger libraries, limited Local Government Councillor awareness of the importance of early language and literacy and of library based early language and literacy support was an obstacle to funding of early childhood these services.

Other impediments to engagement with library based early language and literacy services at the six libraries in this study included parents'/carers' poor perceptions of libraries which they viewed as outdated and unnecessary, as well as poor marketing of libraries to re-frame these perceptions, poor communication between libraries and families, and some unhelpful operational processes such as fines for overdue items.

Finally, answers to Research Question 3 concerning interactions of library based language and literacy services for young children are given next. These relate to the following question:

RQ3: How effective do key stakeholders perceive library based programs to be in supporting children's language and literacy learning, and the interactions with their Home Learning Environment?

In answer Research Question 3, it was found that stakeholder information about libraries' language and literacy interactions with young children's HLEs was limited by stakeholders' restricted knowledge. This included slight knowledge of the importance of early language and literacy as well as sparse knowledge of libraries' early language and literacy programs, activities and resources. Answers to Research Question 3 described the uneven nature of stakeholders' knowledge about early language and literacy learning for children from birth to three years, as well as their limited knowledge of library based programs, activities and resources for this age group. Finally, answers for this research question indicate that information about interactions of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources with children's HLEs was mostly unknown.

It was noted that if libraries are not sufficiently promoted they may fail to be considered as useful language and literacy supports for young families. Promotion may be achieved through print and digital media, word-of-mouth, and library services operating out in communities and outside library buildings. Outreach at external venues may put libraries more consistently in parents'/carers' minds, including being seen at commercial shopping centres, local schools, social functions, ECEC centres and civic facilities.

The answers to the Research Questions described above suggest a number of changes libraries could make with their early language and literacy programs, activities and resources for the benefit of children and young families. Some possible changes and recommendations to achieve strong early language and literacy outcomes are described in the next section.

3. Recommendations

The findings of this study signpost changes that could be made in leadership, policy, development and implementation of library based language and literacy services for

young children and their families. Based on the results of this research, seven recommendations for improved provision of public library services to support the early language and literacy learning of young children are given below.

Recommendation 1: Expand early language and literacy content of library based early childhood programs while maintaining social benefits

This study found that library based early literacy programs that were social, fun and non-judgmental were well attended by families with young children. It is recommended that early literacy content within programs could be increased while maintaining the social and enjoyment aspects of sessions. This may involve increased attention to aspects of specific literacy content including vocabulary, general knowledge, letter recognition and sound discrimination, as well as modelling generic skills such as children sitting to listen and parents/carers learning how to share a book interactively with their child(ren). When social activities, enjoyment and early literacy are combined, the prospects of young children improving their language and literacy skills may be heightened. Consequently, children may start their formal school years with language and literacy abilities which will serve them well throughout their school years and future adult lives.

To increase the informal sharing of specific content of library based literacy sessions for young children, staff may be encouraged to make use of play-based learning resources designed purposefully for children from birth to age three years. These may be acquired from commercial sources, from colleagues who work in libraries, schools or ECEC institutions, or from higher education staff and students with early literacy interests. Alternatively, they may be prepared in line with guidelines in EYLF (AGDE, 2022) using staff's personal creativity.

Recommendation 2: Build staff knowledge of early language and literacy, and of early childhood development

Library staff work daily and face-to-face with parents/carers and children. If staff have increased knowledge about early childhood growth and early language and literacy learning, they may enhance their coaching of children from birth to age three years and their parents/carers. Knowledge required of library staff includes suitable literacy content as well as varied delivery methods for language and literacy learning such as

using rhyme, repetition and alliteration, or pointing out new vocabulary and general knowledge to the children. It may involve knowing how to share with parents'/carers' ways to bring literacy learning into their everyday lives through play, casual conversations, daily interactions and a consistent manner of enjoyment rather than linear or didactic instruction.

Knowledge may be built through in-person or online training via the State Library of Western Australia, Local Government Authorities or external training providers. Library staff may learn from visiting peers at other libraries, watching other staff delivering *Storytime* and *Rhymetime* sessions, taking part in practical workshops and demonstrations, and engaging in focussed discussions with knowledgeable colleagues. The professional library sector may assist by developing accurate and targeted literacy information in multiple formats specifically for library staff. This may involve written text in the form of books, workbooks, manuals or pamphlets, and audio-visual information through YouTube, blogs, social media, displays or recordings. Academic research in the field of enhanced library services to support the development of language and literacy in young children would also be useful for sharing with library staff in user-friendly and supportive ways.

For this to occur, additional financial resources may be required to include the cost of training content as well as the cost of covering for staff while they are away from their regular duties to attend the training. Local Government Councillors would need to be made aware of the need for this training so that LGA budgets could be increased accordingly.

Recommendation 3: Promote library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

Currently, library resources appear to be underutilised by young families, while library programs frequently remain unrecognised by stakeholders for their language and literacy input into the lives of young children. To improve this situation, and consequently improve literacy learning of children from birth to age three years, creative promotion of libraries' resources and programs would be beneficial. Advertising that is

contemporary, energetic and imaginative may assist in removing persistent perceptions of libraries as outdated institutions and as stressful places to visit with young children. Promotion of early childhood services needs to be factually informative with dates, times, locations and booking processes for activities. Crucially, it also needs to be educationally informative, offering clear and simple reasons why families might like to participate and what they may expect to learn from attendance with their child(ren).

Promotion needs to be multifaceted and widespread across all types of communities. It may involve print media such as flyers, posters, newsletters, newspaper articles and magazine features, as well as diverse digital media opportunities such as social media posts, blogs/vlogs, TV advertisements, and programs, talks, interviews and radio segments. Funding for these activities may be sought from grant schemes, philanthropic agencies, government-based educational and health strategies, or Local Government Authorities' annual budgets for libraries, education, health, early childhood and community services.

Recommendation 4: Conduct extended outreach of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

In addition to broad promotional activities, libraries could gain more exposure to the public through increasing their outreach events at community venues. This may involve partnerships with ECEC centres, schools, the Health Department and other agencies as advised by Killmier (2010) and Martinez (2008) more than a decade ago. Being seen outside the library building may encourage use by those who are currently reluctant to enter a library as they perceive them to be outdated, challenging, uninteresting or unnecessary. Once library non-users have engaged with resources and programs in outreach contexts where they feel comfortable, this may improve chances of them visiting a local library facility with their young family.

Extended outreach may be achieved through strategic management of staffing levels and duties. This may involve restructuring of tasks and responsibilities among staff, including potential use of technology to free up staff from routine library tasks such as issues and returns. Staff may then be able to work outside the walls of the library in

community venues for some hours each week. Outreach activities may also be extended through garnering support from philanthropic or commercial sponsors to fund external activities, and through nurturing partnerships with other agencies to make effective use of opportunities, resources and promotional campaigns.

Recommendation 5: Provide sustainable resourcing to support libraries' early language and literacy role and to improve knowledge of its importance

Libraries have a broad range of roles to cover with limited finances, staff and other resources. It would appear that availability of programs and access to library services for young children is dependent on the social context of where you live. Long-term availability of funding is required to improve equity of access and ensure universal provision of early language and literacy programs in all regions of the state, whether well populated metropolitan areas or sparsely populated rural areas. Such funding needs to be sufficient to expand the knowledge of Local Government Councillors on the importance of early childhood language and literacy services for their ratepayers. It would further be beneficial to provide funds for relevant training and professional guidance to Local Government Councillors who have input into strategic directions, spending and allocation of resources of the City or Shire

Availability of more funds would enable increased staff numbers as well as increased training for library staff in early childhood development and early language and literacy, more widespread promotion of library-based early language and literacy services, improved provision of services for young families in rural areas, and long term development of evaluation processes. Finally, future training may entail how such programs, activities and resources can influence HLEs.

Recommendation 6: Create suitable and effective evaluation tools for library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources for young children

Recommendation 6 from this study concerns a compelling need for evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of library based early language and literacy programs.

Creation of effective tools may assist in the recognition of libraries as advocates and providers of language and literacy education for children from birth to age three years.

Contemporary corporate reporting mechanisms and modern financial requirements that

necessitate regular collection of multidimensional statistics, relevant Key Performance Indicators and financial viability may provide a strategic framework. These quantitative measures may then enhance support for libraries in relevant political agendas.

Since undertaking evaluative processes involves staff time, this may also involve expanded resourcing if extra staff are required to work on development and implementation of new evaluation programs. Once systems have been trialled and improved until they are working well, evaluative tasks may then be included in regular rostered hours of staff. To assist with smooth implementation of new evaluation processes, library staff may benefit from networking, attending conferences and taking part in practical training opportunities with staff from other libraries.

Recommendation 7: Learn more about libraries' interactions with children's HLEs

Collecting more information about libraries' interactions with children's HLEs may encourage improved connections between libraries and homes. This may benefit children's language and literacy learning in their first three years when much of their time is spent in unique personal home learning environments. Interactions between people in the home such as parents, carers, siblings, extended family members and other adults and children may helpfully be considered to foster positive social language and literacy interactions. Information about family interactions with books and other reading material may be useful in providing feedback for the future development of library based language and literacy services that interact more directly with children's homes.

While collecting information about children's HLEs has challenges, use may be made of parents'/carers' natural inclinations to talk about their children. This may be encouraged through provision of simple feedback forms either in pen and paper format or on iPads following *Storytimes* or *Rhymetimes*. It may also be encouraged by regular conversations between library staff and parents/carers, along with staff requesting and displaying photographs of children engaging with language and literacy tasks at home, or requesting and displaying parental anecdotes of their children's home-based language and literacy activities. For more extensive and formal data collection, libraries may

distribute surveys to families online or on paper, plan occasional focus groups of parents/carers, request interviews and articles on children's language and literacy in print and digital media, advocate political support, and mine data from large scale national research such as conducted by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and ongoing research programs through the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) and the Telethon Kids Institute (TKI).

4. Contribution to knowledge and significance of the study

Findings from this study are significant for new information gathered about how public libraries support language and literacy learning among children from birth to age three years. Insight has been obtained into how libraries currently work, and how they are perceived by families who use them as well as families who do not currently use them. The study proposes that participation by families in library based programs and activities may help to reduce the number of children who begin their formal education with poor language skills (AEDC, 2018) and thus enable more children to have positive long-term educational outcomes. New understandings of how engagement with public libraries may result in positive language and literacy outcomes for young children have been made.

This research revealed a variety of factors that are involved with public libraries' engagement with language and literacy learning by young children. These factors include an understanding that despite wide availability of free and diverse library based language and literacy services for young children, there is limited stakeholder knowledge and awareness of these services, as well as poor promotion and inefficient communication channels between libraries and other agencies. Libraries were found to be working in the early language and literacy field with little acknowledgment from policy makers or from the formal education sector, which was potentially related to a current lack of realistic and robust evaluation of library based language and literacy programs, activities and resources. Library staff are currently working on manageable ways to assess language and literacy topics, changes to children's language and literacy behaviour, and parent/child engagement.

The role of libraries in providing social support for parents/carers and their young children was noted, including positive influences of social engagement for early language and literacy learning. Library based social support was enhanced by staff friendliness and the provision of enjoyable activities, although it was also found that some non-engaged families perceived libraries and their staff as judgmental, outdated or unnecessary, which was a barrier to their use.

5. Limitations of the study

The methods and processes of the research have been detailed throughout this thesis, but there were some limitations to the research. First, a qualitative approach has practical limitations, second, the size of the study relating to number of libraries and participants was limiting, and third, a lack of audio -visual recordings prevented collection of richer data. Finally, restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic reduced data collection opportunities. These difficulties are described below along with the steps taken to mitigate their impact on the outcomes of the research.

Characteristics of the qualitative approach selected for this study include being resource intensive, investigations being limited to specific local contexts, and potentially low accuracy in data collection if affected by the researcher's relationship with participants. The approach may additionally offer few opportunities for validation of data and be limited in transferability and generalisability of findings. Restrictions of a qualitative approach were mitigated by collecting rich data which could be mined deeply for meanings and implications, and by ensuring the researcher maintained a respectful professional distance rather than offering opinion when conducting interviews and focus groups.

As this study was unfunded and was carried about by a single researcher, there was a limit to the number of libraries that could be visited and the number of interviews and discussions that could take place. Sending printed or online surveys to Playgroups and Mothers' Groups was considered for access to higher numbers of participants, but the researcher preferred in-person visits to ensure integrity of questioning and to encourage depth and richness in the data. To mitigate limitations of the size of the study, libraries

of varied types and environments were selected. Data collection concentrated on detail and quality in a small number of people and libraries to provide depth of information, in contrast to accessing many people and libraries for breadth of information.

Neither audio nor video recordings were made of observations or focus groups due to noisy and busy environments of *Storytimes* and *Rhymetimes* and consents needed for this to occur. Instead, comprehensive field notes of rich material were taken by the researcher. Future research would benefit from both audio and video recordings of early language and literacy sessions with young families to provide expansive multi-modal data of what is said and done at these popular events.

Data collection took place within the 2020 to 2022 Covid-19 pandemic during which libraries were shut down for some periods and families were required to stay within their homes. To mitigate the impact of government-mandated Covid-19 shutdowns and isolation periods, research observations were conducted at times when regulations had been reduced or lifted and library programs, activities and resource availability had resumed to some extent.

6. Opportunities for future research

Varied opportunities exist for future research into libraries' role in the early language and literacy field (McCormack, 2018; Sensenig, 2011), including research into targeted adaptations of library programs, activities and resources to suit differing contexts and family circumstances (Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021; Son & Morrison, 2010). This study indicates four key topics on which more information would be helpful to support library based language and literacy learning by young children. These topics involve families, library staff, programs and children's HLEs, as described below.

Families: First, there was limited knowledge about families who were unaware of the importance of early language and literacy, or who had misconceptions about the child-friendly nature of contemporary libraries and their role in supporting early language and literacy. Large-scale research concerning how to foster early language and literacy

learning in disengaged or unaware families with children from birth to age three years may alleviate this difficulty.

Library staff: Second, it was apparent from the study's data that little was known about the breadth and depth of skills and duties required of library Operational Staff in their early language and literacy role with young families. This is an area that would benefit from investigation of both educational theory and professional practice if libraries are to fulfil their rising potential within children's educational journeys.

Programs: Third, it was evident from the study that information about the effectiveness of library based early language and literacy programs was lacking. Researchers and practitioners could usefully collaborate to explore children's learning of explicit language and literacy information as well as their learning of foundational practices such as listening, attending and interacting following participation in library programs and use of library resources. Gaps exist in research about what libraries do in the early language and literacy field (McCormack, 2018; Sensenig, 2011) and what new library programs may be created to suit contemporary circumstances (Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021; Son & Morrison, 2010).

Children's HLEs: Fourth, the current research indicated that new information could helpfully be sought about interactions between library based language and literacy activities and children's HLEs. Examination of how language and literacy learning is continued within the home following engagement with library events may assist in enhancing children's language and literacy skills in the years before they start school.

While there are challenges presented by public library settings when attempting to study early language, literacy and learning (Djonov et al., 2018) gathering new knowledge about these four areas of interest may be achieved through future academic research in conjunction with input from professional staff in the public library sector. Challenges include the variable and broad spectrum of ages and developmental stages of participating children, irregular group sizes and compositions, and spasmodic individual attendance. Also, the complexity of real-world problems and the need to investigate

multiple elements such as genetics, lifestyle, environment, finances and available services are complexities yet to be overcome (Cassells et al., 2020). Nevertheless, any research that increases understanding amongst politicians, practitioners and the public concerning library based language and literacy support for families with children between birth and age three years would be beneficial for young families.

7. Concluding remarks

Libraries' approach of providing programs and social events with abundant oral language opportunities for children empowers families to respond in ways suited to their individual lives. To support families, libraries also freely provide large numbers of quality printed resources from which children from the youngest ages can make selections and start to develop early language and literacy skills through personal agency.

Members of the population who use libraries are enthusiastic about the services and resources they supply, while those who do not use them appear less aware of, or responsive to, the possibilities. As a practising librarian with three decades of experience, the researcher is aware that library non-users are a significant percentage (>50%) of the population. These non-users may be missing language and literacy support that could assist their children to start school with suitable skills. They may also be overlooking beneficial social and community engagement opportunities freely available to them through public libraries that can be found in towns throughout the state.

To remedy this situation, libraries could beneficially promote their services and facilities more broadly, including their dedicated early language and literacy programs, activities and resources. They could ensure their early childhood services are managed by staff who are the right people for the job, who are trained accordingly, and who have skills to encourage use of libraries' plentiful printed resources. Libraries also need to ensure that they are physically and socially accessible to community members of all types.

This study heightens awareness of libraries as one in a variety of opportunities for children to build language and literacy skills before they start school. While such opportunities are also available from Playgroups, Mothers' Groups, pre-kindergartens

and ECEC centres, libraries have advantages. The study found that libraries being free, welcoming, local, and consistently funded were characteristics that encouraged young families to engage with early language and literacy activities. With these characteristics as a foundation, this research has provided evidence to support an expanded role for libraries that may ultimately increase the percentage of children starting school with the language and literacy skills required for learning.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, L., & Langston, A. (2006). *Parents matter: Supporting the 'Birth to Three Matters' Framework*. Berkshire, UK. McGraw-Hill Education, Open University Press.
www.oup.com.au
- Adam & Barratt-Pugh (2020). Book sharing with young children: A study of book sharing in four Australian long day care centres. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, December 23, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798420981745>
- Adenfelt, M., Segerström, A., & Strandberg, R. (2021). *Bookstart around the world*. Swedish Book Council. <https://www.bokstart.se/ombokstart/bokstart-i-andra-lander/bookstart-around-the-world/>
- Albright, M., Delecki, K., & Hinkle, S. (2009). The evolution of early literacy: A history of best practices in Storytimes. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, 7(1),13-18
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8696/b3b6b3dd7ca08494fc4500363956c887930d.pdf>
- Allen, G. (2011). *Early intervention: the next steps: An independent report to Her Majesty's Government by Graham Allen, MP*. London, UK: Her Majesty's Government. The Stationery Office.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-intervention-the-next-steps-2#>
- Allen, L., & Kelly, B. (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children, birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. Washington: Institute Medicine and National Research, Council of the National Academies. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/
- Allington, R., & Cunningham, M. (2022). *Children benefit from modeling, demonstration, and explanation*. <https://www.education.com/download-pdf/reference/23009/>
- Alvarado, C. (2022). *Exploring the effects of early childhood adversity and sustained attention on reading outcomes*. Master's Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, USA. https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/27273zubrick
- American Library Association (ALA). (2015). State of America's Libraries Report 2015. http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/0415_StateAmLib_0.pdf
- Anderson, S. (2006). Books for very young children. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.553-562). Washington: Zero to Three Press.

- Anderson, K., Barratt-Pugh, C., Kaleveld, L., & McLean, C. (2014). *Development of a Literacy Framework for the State Library of Western Australia*. Perth, Australia: Edith Cowan University, Institute for Education Research.
https://slwa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/SLWA_Literacy_Framework_Development_Project_Report.
- Andrzejewski, A. (2021). Forget about Libraries, it's Storytime at the Laundromat. *Public Libraries Online*, February 2019.
https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/06/25/forget_about_libraries_its_story_time_at_the_laundromat781781.html
- Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC). (2011). *Every Child Ready to Read* (2nd ed). Chicago: American Library Association. <http://everychildreadytoread.org>
- Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL). (2015). *Children and Young People's Promise in Public Libraries*. <https://ascel.org.uk/childrens-and-young-peoples-promise>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2017). *Preschool education, Australia 2017*.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/4240.0>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2021). *Births, Australia, 2021*.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/births/australia-2021>
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). (2014). *The impact of socio-economics and school readiness for life-course educational trajectories: Research snapshot*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/>
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). (2018). *Early childhood development for children living in Western Australia by region. Australian Early Development Census. Sub Report: Western Australia 2015*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth of Australia and WA Department of Education. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/>
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). (2021). *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021*. Canberra, Australia.
<https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2021-aedc-national-report>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2005). Babies who read, succeed. *Incite: Magazine of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 2005(4).
<https://www.alia.org.au>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2014a). *Early literacy framework and strategy for Australian public libraries*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Library and Information Association: Public Libraries Advisory Committee.
<https://read.alia.org.au/early-literacy-framework-and-strategy-australian-public-libraries>

- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2014b). *Future of the library and information science profession*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Library and Information Association. <https://www.alia.org.au/futureoftheprofession>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2015). *National welfare and economic contributions of public libraries: Final report*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Library and Information Association: SGS Economics and Planning Pty. Ltd. <https://www.alia.org.au>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2016). *Australian national early literacy summit 2016*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Library and Information Association. <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Events/Conferences/Past-Events/2021/Australian-National-Early-Literacy-Summit-2016.aspx>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2021). *APLA-ALIA Standards and guidelines for Australian public libraries, May 2021*. <https://read.alia.org.au/apla-alia-standards-and-guidelines-australian-public-libraries-may-2021>.
- Baker, L., & Sher, D. (2010). Beginning readers' motivation for reading in relation to parental beliefs and home reading experiences. *Reading Psychology* 23(4),239-269. doi.org/10.1080/713775283
- Bamkin, M., Goulding, A. & Maynard, S. (2013). The children sat and listened: Storytelling on children's mobile libraries. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 19(1),47-78. doi.org/10.1080/13614541.2013.755023
- Bamkin, M., Maynard, S., & Goulding, A. (2016). Grounded theory and ethnography combined: A methodology to study children's interactions on children's mobile libraries. *Journal of Documentation*, 72(2), 214-231. doi.org/10.1108/JD-01-2015-0007
- Bandura, A. (1969). Social learning theory of identificatory processes. In *Gosling, D. (Ed.) Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research. Chapter 3*, 213-262. New York: Rand McNally & Company. <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/Bandura1969HSTR.pdf>
- Bann, C., Wallander, J., Do, B., Thorsten, M. & Pasha, O. et al., (2016). Home-based early intervention and the influence of family resources on cognitive development. *Pediatrics* 137(4). doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-3766
- Barblett, L., Knaus, M., & Barratt-Pugh, C. (2016). The pushes and pulls of pedagogy in the early years: Competing knowledges and the erosion of play-based learning. *Australasian Journal of Early Education*, 41(4), 3-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939116041004>

- Barclay, D. (2017). Space and the social worth of public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(4), 267-273. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1327767
- Barnett, M., Paschall, K., Mastergeorge, A., Cutshaw, C., & Warren, S. (2020). Influences of parent engagement in early childhood education centers and the home on kindergarten school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 53, 260-273. doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.05.005
- Barnes, J. (2011). Early childcare experiences and language development up to 3 years. Evidence from a prospective longitudinal study in England. In *Early Years Research and Implications for Policymaking: The UK experience*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. [doi:10.13140/2.1.3481.0885](https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.3481.0885)
- Barratt-Pugh, C., & Allen, N. (2011). Making a difference: Findings from 'Better Beginnings': A family literacy intervention program. *The Australian Library Journal*, 60(3), 195-204. doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2011.10722616
- Barratt-Pugh, C., Anderson, K., & North, S. (2013). The changing perspectives of librarians in the 'Better Beginnings' family literacy program. *The Australian Library Journal*, 62(3), 183-195. doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2013.832847
- Barratt-Pugh, C., & Maloney, C. (2015). Growing 'Better Beginnings': An evaluation of a family literacy program for pre-schoolers. *Issues in Educational Research*, 25(4), 364-380. <https://www.iier.org.au/iier25/barratt-pugh.pdf>
- Barratt-Pugh, C., & Rohl, M. (2016). Transforming research into practice: Implications of a family literacy program for early childhood professionals. In Scull & Raban (Eds.) *Growing up Literate: Australian Literacy Research for Practice*. South Yarra, Australia: Eleanor Curtain Publishing. <https://ecpublishing.com.au/>
- Barton, L. & Brophy-Herb, H. (2006). Developmental foundations for language and literacy from birth to 3 years. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.15-60). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Bastiansen, C., & Wharton, J. (2015). Getting ready for play! Toy collections in public libraries. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, 13(4), 13-16. doi.org/10.5860/cal13n4.13
- Bateman, F. (2023). Libraries as playspaces: A case study from Wyndham City Libraries. *Incite: Magazine of the Australian Library and Information Association*, March 2023: 44(1), 40-41. <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Web/Communications/INCITE.aspx>
- Becker, K. (2012). 24 hours in the children's section: An observational study at the public library. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 40(2), 107-114. [doi:10.1007/s10643011-0499-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643011-0499-0)

- Bendickson, L. (2020). *Poverty, parental depression, parental self-efficacy, social support, and the home learning environment of toddlers: An application of the family stress model*. Doctoral thesis: University of British Columbia.
<https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0392615>
- Bennett, O. (2013). Death of the library? Shock fall in users as government cuts bite. *London, UK: Daily Express: Thursday, September 26, 2013*.
<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/432412/Death-of-the-library>
- Bentley, T., & Savage, G. (2017). *Educating Australia: Challenges for the decade ahead*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing.
<https://www.mup.com.au/>
- Berman, J. (2013). Utility of a conceptual framework within doctoral study: A researcher's reflections. *Issues in Educational Research*, 23(1),1-18.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.356179062206358>
- Berthiaume, G. (2017). *Rethinking the role of libraries and archives and museums in the age of Google*. Manitoba, Canada: University of Manitoba, Colloquium, Department of History.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/library-archives/news/2017/07/>
- Bhatt, R. (2010). The impact of public library use on reading, television, and academic outcomes. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 68(2),148-166.
doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1384181
- Biedinger, N. (2011). The Influence of education and home environment on the cognitive outcomes of preschool children in Germany. *Child Development Research*, 2011. Article ID: 916303. doi.org/10.1155/2011/916303
- Bishop, B. (2016). A safe, helpful and ubiquitous place that requires further study. *Public Library Quarterly*, 35(4),318-324. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1245003
- Black, A. (2001). The Victorian information society: Surveillance, bureaucracy, and public librarianship in 19th century Britain. *Information Society*, 17,63-80.
doi.org/10.1080/019722401750067432
- Bormuth, J. (1973). Reading literacy: Its definition and assessment. *Reading Research Quarterly* 9(1). *Committee on Literacy of the National Academy of Education*.
[doi:10.2307/747227](https://doi.org/10.2307/747227)
- Boulton, C., Granville, G., Hayden, C., Lee, B., & Musyoki. E. (2018). *Library rhyme times and maternal mental health: Results of an action research project*. Arts Council, UK, 2018. doi:[org/10.13140/RG.2.2.15459.20000](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.15459.20000)
- Bowe, D. (2022). *Improving early literacy through culturally relevant pedagogy*. Doctoral

- dissertation. Delaware: Wilmington University. www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/improving-early-literacy-skills-through/docview/2659600875
- Bowers, K., Howard, V., & Brown, A. (2018). Storytime in a box. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children*, 16(1), 23-29. doi.org/10.5860/cal.16.1.23
- Brian, J. (2014). There is no longer a need for public libraries. *Debating Matters*, August 2014. http://archive.debatingmatters.com/documents/DM_TopicGuidesLibraries20141.pdf
- Brough, R. (2016). *How mothers shape the context of their pre-school children's play: A grounded study*. Doctoral dissertation. Brisbane, Australia: The University of Queensland. School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2014.989177
- Bruce, J. (2015). *Tomorrow's libraries: Future directions of the South Australian public library network*. https://www.libraries.sa.gov.au/custom/web/PLS/SAPLN_tomorrows_libraries_digital_edition_3
- Brushe, M., Lynch, J., Reilly, S., Melhuish, E. & Brinkman, S. (2020). How many words are Australian children hearing in the first year of life? *BMC Pediatric* 20(1) 52. [doi.1186/s12887-020-1946-0](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-020-1946-0)
- Bundy, A. (2005). Libraries Building Communities. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services* 18(2), 39-40. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.005104841337912>
- Bundy, A. (Ed.). (2009). Next Chapters: Public libraries for older adults in Australia and New Zealand. In *Conference Proceedings, May2, 2009. Sydney, Australia: Auslib Press*. <https://www.auslib.com.au/conference>
- Bundy, A. (2011). Dollars, sense and public libraries. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 24(2). [dollars-sense-public-libraries-technical-report.pdf \(slv.vic.gov.au\)](https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/dollars-sense-public-libraries-technical-report.pdf)
- Bundy, A. (2015). Libraries building communities. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 18(2),39. <https://www.auslib.com.au/periodicals.htm>
- Burgess, S., Hecht, S., & Lonigan, C. (2002). Relations of the home literacy environment to the development of reading-related abilities: A one-year longitudinal study. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37: 408-426. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i230218>
- Burnett, C., Merchant, G., & Neumann, S. (2020). Closing the gap? Overcoming limitations in socio-material accounts of early literacy. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(1). doi.org/10.7711/1468798419896067

- Burns, T., & Gottschalk, F. (2019). *What do we know about children and technology?* Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation.
<https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/Booklet-21st-century-children.pdf>
- Bus, A., & DeJong, M. (2006). Book sharing: A developmentally appropriate way to foster Pre-academic growth. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.123-144). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Cahill, M. & Ingram, E. (2022). Extra-textual talk in public library storytime programs: A focus on questions. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, (20)4.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X221098662>
- Cahill, M., Joo, S., Howard, M., Dwyer, J., King-Oaks, & Yates., B. (2020). What is Storytime good for and what makes Storytime good? A survey of public library directors. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 1(15),1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000619898224>
- Cairney, T. (2003). In: SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy. Eds.: Larson, J. Marsh, J. [Chapter 5. doi.org/10.4135/9781848608207](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608207)
- Campana, K., Kociubuk, J., & Mills, E., (2019). Making space for Storytime: The role of the environment in the production of Storytime. *Public Library Quarterly*, 39(2), 140-156. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1622396
- Campana, K., Mills, J., & Ghoting, S. (2016). *Supercharged Storytimes: An early literacy planning and assessment guide*. Chicago: American Library Association.
<https://www.ala.org/>
- Campana, K., Mills, J., Capps, J., Dresang, E., Carlyle, A., Metoyer, C., Urban, I., Feldman, E., Brouwer, M., Burnett, K. & Kotrla, B. (2015). Early literacy in library Storytimes: A study of measures of effectiveness. *The Library Quarterly*, 86(4), 369-388. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688028>
- Campbell-Hicks, R. (2016). Early literacy programmes in public libraries: Best practice. *The Australian Library Journal*, 65(2)121-129.
doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2016.1121770
- Cart, M. (2010). Here there be sanctuary: The public library as refuge and retreat. *Public Library Quarterly*, 12(4) 5-23. doi.org/10.1300/J118v12n04_02
- Cartmill, E. (2016). Mind the gap: Assessing and addressing the word gap in early education. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 3(2),185-193.
doi.org/10.1177/2372732216657565
- Cassells, R., Dockery, M., Duncan, A., Kiely, D., Kirkness, M., Twomey, C., Nguyen, T., &

- Seymour, R. (2020). The early years: Investing in our future. *Focus on Western Australia Report Series, No. 13. August 2020*. Perth, Australia: Bankwest-Curtin Economics Centre.
<https://bcec.edu.au/publications/the-early-years-investing-in-our-future/>
- Caxley Shire (2011). Caxley Community Crime Prevention and Safety Plan Review.
<http://www.caxley.wa.gov.au/Assets/Documents/CSCP-review-2011-14-20-04-11.pdf>
- Celano, D., Knapczyk, J., & Neuman, S. (2018). Public libraries harness the power of play. *Young Children: 73*(3). *National Association for the Education of Young Children*.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26788986>
- Celano, D., & Neuman, S. (2001). *The role of public libraries in children's literacy development*. Pennsylvania Library Association. Pennsylvania Department of Education. <https://www.palibraries.org/>
- Celano, D., & Neuman, S. (2015). Libraries emerging as leaders in parent engagement: Parents are discovering that libraries offer opportunities to play with their children and learn how to improve their reading. *Phi Delta Kappan, 96*(7).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715579037>
- Centre for Policy Development (CPD). (2021). *Starting Better: A guarantee for young children and families*. Canberra, Australia: Centre for Policy Development.
<https://cpd.org.au/2021/11/starting-better-centre-for-policy-development>
- Cerny, R., Markey, P., & Williams, A. (2006). Outstanding library service to children: Putting the core competencies to work. *Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)*, American Library Association. www.alastore.ala.org/
- Chaitow, L., McCabe, P., Munro, N., & Purcell, A. (2022). Language and early literacy professional development: A complex intervention for early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, Early online 1-11*. [doi:10.1080/17549507.2022.211513](https://doi.org/10.1080/17549507.2022.211513)
- Chelliah, R. (2017). Libraries at the crossroads: Strive and thrive or resist and perish. A proposal for rebranding and regenerating the traditional public library. *IFLA Journal, 11*(2),91-105.
<https://realkm.com/2017/04/28/libraries-at-the-crossroads-strive-and-thrive-or-resist-and-perish/>
- Chen, P., Rea, C., Shaw, R., & Bottino, C. (2016). Associations between public library use and reading aloud among families with young children. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 173*,221-227. doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.03.016
- Chenail, R. (2011). Ten steps for conceptualizing and conducting qualitative research studies in a pragmatically curious manner. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(6),1713-

1730. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol16/iss6/13/>
- Cheung, S., Siu, T. & Caldwell, M. (2022). Mathematical ability at a very young age: The contributions of relationship quality with parents and teachers via children's language and literacy abilities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 2022,1-11. doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01338
- Christensen, D., Taylor, C., & Zubrick, S. (2016). Patterns of multiple risk exposures for low receptive vocabulary growth 4-8 years, in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. *Plos One*, 12(1). <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0168804>
- Circle, A. (2018). Customer experience in public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 37,356-374. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2018.1522937
- City of Wanneroo. (2017). *Early childhood strategic plan: 2017/18*. Perth, Australia: City of Wanneroo. <https://www.wanneroo.wa.gov.au>
- Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for pleasure: A research overview*. London, UK: National Literacy Trust. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496343.pdf>
- Clark, L. (2016). *Do you do birthday parties? Caregiver's perceptions of emergent literacy programming in libraries and their motivation for attending*. Doctoral dissertation. Florida: Florida State University. http://purl.flvc.org/fsu/fd/FSU_FA2016_Clark_fsu_0071E_13504
- Clark, L. (2017). Caregivers' perceptions of emergent literacy programming in public libraries in relation to the National Research Councils' guidelines on quality environments for children. *Library and Information Science Research*, 39,107-115. doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2017.04.001
- Clark, M. (2020). Our small moments: Stories of literacy and learning from an early childhood educator. *The Irish Journal of Early Childhood Studies*, 13(1),187-197. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/JudithButler/publication/343532886>
- Clay, M. (1966). *Emergent reading behaviour*. Doctoral dissertation. Auckland, New Zealand: University of Auckland. <http://hdl.handle.net/2292/778>
- Clinton, H. (1995). *It takes a village*. New York: Simon and Schuster. <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/It-Takes-a-Village/Hillary-Rodham-Clinton/>
- Cohen, F., & Anders. Y. (2019). Family involvement in early childhood education and care and its effects on the social, emotional and language skills of 3-year-old children. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 31(1),125-142. doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2019.1646293

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th Ed.) Routledge, UK.
<https://www.routledge.com/Research-Methods-in-Education/Cohen-Manion-Morrison/p/book/9781138209886>
- Cohrssen, C., Niklas, F., & Tayler, C. (2018). Making a difference to children's reasoning skills before school-entry: The contribution of the home learning environment. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 54, 79-88.
doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.06.001
- Colab Evidence Report. (2018a). *Early childhood programs: Supporting a strong start to life*. Perth Australia: Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia.
<https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/colab-evidence-report-early-childhood-programs-v1.pdf>
- Colab Report. (2018b). *Supporting children and their families in the Midland region, City of Swan*. Perth, Australia: Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia.
<https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/supporting-children-and-their-families-in-the-midland-region-11-april-2018.pdf>
- Colliver, Y., Arguel, A., & Parrila, R. (2020). Formal literacy practices through play: Exposure to adult literacy practices Increases child-led learning and interest. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 2020.
doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2020.1779668
- Colliver, Y., Humburg, P., & Harrison, L. (2021). Free play predicts self-regulation years later: Longitudinal evidence from a large Australian sample of toddlers and pre-schoolers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly: December*, 2021, 1-14.
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yeshe-Colliver/publication/356840798>
- Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (CCYP). (2013). *Early childhood: Issues Paper No. 11*. Perth, Australia: Commissioner for Children and Young People. <https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/>
- Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia (CCYP). (2019). *Improving the odds for WA's vulnerable children*. Perth, Australia: Commissioner for Children and Young People. <https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/>
- Committee on Community Services. (2018). *Support for new parents and babies in New South Wales: Report 2/56*. Sydney, Australia: Committee on Community Services. Legislative Assembly of New South Wales. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/>
- Cook, D., & Farmer, L. (2011). *Using qualitative methods in action research: How librarians can get to the why of data*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries. <https://journals.acrl.org/>
- Cook, S. (2016). *Integrating technology in early literacy: A snapshot of community*

innovation in family engagement. New America.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570877.pdf>

Costello, D., & Keyser, C. (2016). Meet them in the moment: Engaging public library patrons when it matters most. *Weave: Journal of Library User Experience* 1(4).

doi.org/10.3998/weave.12535642.0001.404

Cox, E. (2000). *A safe place to go: Libraries and social capital*. Sydney, Australia: University of Technology Public Libraries Branch of the State Library of New South Wales. https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/safe_place.pdf

Crisp, G. (2017). Non-fiction in motion: Connecting pre-schoolers with non-fiction books through movement. *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 66(4),423-424. doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2017.1357281

Crisp, T. (2004). Books for babies: Libraries and literacy. *Australian Bookseller & Publisher*, 83(9): 39-40. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/42514795>

Crist, B., Donovan, C.V., Doran-Myers, M., & Hofschire, L. (2020). Supporting Parents in Early Literacy through Libraries (SPELL): An evaluation of a multi-site library project. *Public Library Quarterly*, 39(2):89-101.

doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1622070

Cross, D. (2017). *Bright Tomorrows Start Today*. Perth, Australia: Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia: Minderoo Foundation.

<https://www.minderoo.org/bright-tomorrows-start-today/>

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Allen & Unwin, Australia.

Crystal, D. (2010). *A little book of language*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. ISBN 9780300155334. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/>

Cullinan, B., Greene, E., & Jaggar, A. (1990). Books, babies, and libraries: The librarian's role in literacy development. *Language Arts*, 67(7): 750.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/23738960>

Dalmer, N., McKenzie, P., Rothbauer, P., Martin-Yeboah, E., & Oswald, K. (2022). *“Palaces for the people”: Mapping public libraries' capacity for social connection and inclusion*. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<http://hdl.handle.net/11375/28142>

Dana, J. (1920). *A library primer*. Publisher: Library Bureau, USA. (1st edition, 1896)
https://openlibrary.org/works/OL484254W/A_Library_Primer?edition=libraryprimer00dana

Davies, H. (2017). *Libraries are for everyone: Providing quality services to people who are*

- homeless*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Library and Information Association.
<https://www.alia.org.au/>
- Davis, B., Torr, J., & Degotardi, S. (2015). Infants and toddlers: How visible are they in the Early Years Learning Framework? *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 9(12). doi.org/10.1186/s40723-015-0014-y
- DeCasper, A., & Spence, M. (1986). Prenatal maternal speech influences newborns' perception of speech sounds. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 9, 133-150.
psycnet.apa.org/record/1987-00723-001
- Deerr, K., Feinberg, S., Gordon, E. & Schull, D. (2006). *Libraries are family places for literacy and learning*. In Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years. Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- DeLeon, S. (2021). The Social Return On Investment methodology as a tool for valuation and impact assessment for libraries. *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 70(2),177-193.
doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2021.1895465
- Delica, A., & Elbeshausen, H. (2017). The social library in three contexts: Programmes and perspectives. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 49(3),237-245. doi.org/10.1177/0961000615622680
- DeMartini, T. (2006). Group environments that foster language and literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.309-334). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Deotto, J. (2018). Reading with Dad: Links to language development. *Every Child*, 24(1), 28-29. <https://www.mcri.edu.au/>
- Department of Education. (2022). *Belonging, being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.
<https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/belonging-being-becoming-early-years-learning-framework-australia>
- Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE). (2020). *Australian Curriculum*. Government of Australia. <https://www.dese.gov.au/>
- Diament-Cohen, B. (2006). *Mother Goose On the Loose*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org>
- Diament-Cohen, B. (2019). *Mother Goose On the Loose: Updated*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org>
- Diament-Cohen, B. (2020). Reimagining infant and toddler pre-literacy programs. *Young Children*, 75(3),72-79.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345749188 Reimagining Infant and Toddler Preliteracy Programs Mother Goose on the Loose](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/345749188_Reimagining_Infant_and_Toddler_Preliteracy_Programs_Mother_Goose_on_the_Loose)

Diamant-Cohen, B. & Goldsmith, A. (2016). The evolution of preschool Storytime research. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children*, 14(3), 36-39.

<https://www.journals.ala.org/index.php/cal/article/view/6083/7820>

Dickinson, D., McCabe, A., Anastasopoulos, L., Peisner-Feinberg, & Poe, M. (2003). The comprehensive language approach to early literacy: The inter-relationships among vocabulary, phonological sensitivity, and print knowledge among pre-school-aged children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(3), 465–481.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0663.95.3.465>

Dickinson, D., & Tabors, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*. Baltimore: P.H. Brookes Publishing Co.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/home>

Djonov, E., Torr, J. & Stenglin, M. (2018). *Early language and literacy at public libraries: Framework developing and evaluating early literacy sessions*. Sydney, Australia: State Library of New South Wales and Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University.

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/services/early-language-and-literacy-nsw-public-libraries>

Djonov, E., Torr, J., & Stenglin, M. (2018). *Early language and literacy: review of research with implications for early literacy programs at NSW public libraries*. Sydney, Australia: State Library of New South Wales and Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University.

https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/earlyliteracy_literature_review_feb2018.pdf

Doig, D. (1992). *Factors related to the amount of time children spend in leisure reading*. Honours thesis. Perth, Australia, Edith Cowan University.

https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/406

Doucett, E. (2015). *New routes to library success: 100+ ideas from outside the stacks*.

Chicago: American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org/>

Dowd, F. (1997). Evaluating the impact of public library Storytime programs upon the emergent literacy of preschoolers: A call for research. *Public Libraries* 36(6), 346-354. ERIC Number: EJ558551.

eric.ed.gov/id=EJ558551

Dudley, M. (Ed.) (2013). *Public libraries and resilient cities*. Chicago: American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org/>

Duncan, G., Kalil, A., Mogstad M., & Rege, M. (2022). *Investing in early childhood development in preschool and at home*. Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<https://www.nber.org/papers/w29985>

- Eade, A. (2022). Words and music. *Incite: Magazine of the Australian Library and Information Association*, February 2022: 43(1),21.
[doi/10.3316/informit.368144578555833](https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.368144578555833)
- Eagleman, D. (2017). *The brain: The story of you*. New York: Canongate Books Limited.
<https://www.wheelersbooks.com.au/books/9780525433446-brain-the-story-of-you/>
- Economic Intelligence Unit. (2012). *Starting well: Benchmarking early education across the world*. London, UK: Child Care and Education Research Connections. Lien Foundation. <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/23728>
- Edwards, C. (2014). Maternal literacy practices and toddlers' emergent literacy skills. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 14(1), 53-79.
doi.org/10.1177/1468798412451590
- Egan, S., Hoyne, C., Moloney, M., Breatnach, D., & Pope, J. (2020). Shared book reading with infants: A review of international and national baby book gifting schemes. *The Irish Journal of Early Childhood Studies*, 13(1), 49.
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/JudithButler/publication/343532886>
- Elek, C., Gray, S., West, S., & Goldfield, S. (2021). Effects of a professional development program on emergent literacy promoting practices in early childhood education and care. *Early Years: An International Research Journal* (online).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2013.765177>
- Elliott, A. (2006). Pathways to literacy. *ACER Research Developments*, 16(16): 6-9.
<https://www.acer.org>
- Elo, S., Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Polkki, T., Ultriainen, K., & Kyngas, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4, 1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Evans, G. (2004). The environment of childhood poverty. *American Psychologist*, 59(2): 77. [doi/10.1037/0003-066X.59.2.77](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.2.77)
- Exley, D. (2019). *The end of aspiration? Social mobility and our children's fading prospects*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press. <https://bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/>
- Ezzy, D. (2013). *Qualitative analysis: Practice and innovation*. Allen & Unwin, Australia.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315015484>
- Farmer & Stricevic (2011). Using research to promote literacy and reading in libraries: Guidelines for librarians. *IFLA Professional Report No. 125*. <https://www.ifla.org/>
- Fellowes, J., & Oakley, G. (2014). *Language, literacy and early childhood education*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press. <https://www.oup.com.au/>

- Fenton, A., Walsh, K., Wong, S., & Cumming, I. (2014). Using strengths-based approaches in early years' practice and research. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 47(1): 27-52. doi.org/10.1007/s13158-014-0115-8
- Ferens, M., Wagner, C., Oliva, M., & Robinson, S. (2017). Barriers to inclusive public library service. <http://info4socialgood.web.unc.edu/files/2017/04/Barriers-to-Inclusive-Public-Library-Service.pdf>
- Ferguson, S. (2007). Libraries in the twenty-first century: Charting new directions in information services. *Centre for Information Studies*. Wagga Wagga, Australia: Charles Sturt University. <https://csu.edu.au/>
- Fernald, A., Marchman, V., & Weisleder, A. (2013). SES differences in language processing skill and vocabulary are evident at 18 months. *Developmental Science*, 16(2): 234–248. doi.org/10.1111/desc.12019
- Field, F. (2010). *The foundation years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults: The report of the Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances*. London, UK: Her Majesty's Government. The Stationery Office. <https://www.nhbs.com/publisher/stationery-office-tso>
- Field, N., & Tran, R. (2018). Re-inventing the public value of libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 37: 113-126. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1422174
- Fikrat-Wevers, S., van Steensel, R., & Arends, L. (2021). Effects of family literacy programs on the emergent literacy skills of children from low-SES families: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 20(10): 1-3. doi.org/10.3102%2F0034654321998075
- Flewitt, R. (2013). Early literacy: A broader vision. *Association for the Professional Development of Early Years' Educators Occasional paper*. http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3132/1/flewitt_occasional-paper3.pdf
- Fong, M., & Wade, C. (2017). *Engaging families in learning: A qualitative snapshot of how families and educators are supporting children's learning*. Centre of Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/354>
- Franks, R. (2012). Grey matter: The aging librarian workforce, with a focus on public and academic libraries in Australia and the United States. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 25(3): 104 -110. <https://search.informit.org/informit.71771302>
- Fricke, S. (2012). *Efficacy of language intervention in the early years*. Department of Human Communication Sciences, University of Sheffield. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12010>

- Garmer, A. (2016). Public libraries in the community. *Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*, 13(1): 1-28. <http://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/jlp>
- Georgeson, D. (2015). The Corner: An ecology of play, language and literacy. *Practically Primary*, 20(02). <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2623998>
- Ghoting, S., & Martin-Diaz, P. (2006). *Early literacy Storytimes @ your library: partnering with caregivers for success*. www.alastore.ala.org/content/early-literacy-storytimes-your-library%C2%AE-partnering-caregivers-success
- Gibson, N. & O'Connor, H. (2003). A step-by-step guide to qualitative data analysis. *Pimatiziwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 1,64-90. www.researchgate.net/publication/292432218
- Gil, J., Ewerling, F., Ferriera, L., & Barros, A. (2020). Early childhood suspected developmental delay in 63 low-and middle income countries: Large within and between-country inequalities documented using national health surveys. *Journal of Global Health: June 2020*. [doi:10.7189/jogh.10.010427](https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.10.010427)
- Gilbert, L., Teravainen, A., Clark, C., & Shaw, S. (2018). *Literacy and life expectancy: An evidence review exploring the link between literacy and life expectancy in England through health and socio-economic factors*. National Literacy Trust, UK. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/literacy-and-life-expectancy/>
- Gilley, T., Tayler, C., Niklas, F., & Cloney, D. (2015). Too late and not enough for some children: Early childhood education and care (ECEC) program usage patterns in the years before school in Australia. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 9(1): 1-5. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40723-015-0012-0>
- Gillon, G., McNeill, B., Scott, A., Arrow, A., Gath, M., & MacFarlane, A. (2022). A Better Start literacy approach: Effectiveness of Tier 1 and Tier 2 support within a response to teaching framework. *Reading and Writing* 2022. doi.org/10.1007/s11145-022-10303-4
- Gilpin, G., Karger, E., & Nencka, P. (2021). The returns to public library investment. *Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago: Working Paper No. WP 2021-6*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21033/wp-2021-06>
- Goldfield, S., Katz, L., Tanton, R., Brinkman, S., Woolcock, S., & Giles-Corti, B. (2018). *Foundational Community Factors (FCFs) for early childhood development: A report on the Kids In Communities Study (KICS)*. University of Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/CCCH-KICS-Final-Report-April-2018.pdf>
- Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2006). Caregiving routines and literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J.

- Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.255-274). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Goodman, A., & Gregg, P. (2010). *Poorer children's educational attainment: How important are attitudes and behaviours?* Joseph Rowntree Foundation York, UK. www.jrf.org.uk/report/poorer
- Goodman, Y., & Martens, P. (2020). *Critical issues in early literacy: research and pedagogy*. Routledge, USA. ISBN 9780805859003. www.routledge.com/Critical-Issues-in-Early-Literacy-Research-and-Pedagogy
- Gopnik, A., Meltzoff, A., & Kuhl, P. (1999). *The scientist in the crib: Minds, brains, and how children learn*. New York, USA: William Morrow & Co. doi.org/10.1097/00005053-2
- Goulding, A. (2006). *Public libraries in the 21st century: Defining services and debating the future*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company. <https://www.ashgate.com/>
- Goulding, A., & Crump, A. (2017). Developing inquiring minds: Public library programming for babies in Aotearoa, New Zealand. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(1): 26-42. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1275600
- Government of Western Australia (2018). \$49.3 million investment into early childhood initiative. *Media Release, Tuesday 13 March 2018, Perth, Western Australia*. <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2018/03/49-point-3-million-dollar-investment-into-early-childhood-initiative.aspx>
- Government of Western Australia. (1951). *Library Board of Western Australia Act 1951. Act No. 042 of 1951*. https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_537_homepage.html
- Gramling, M., & Rosenkoetter, S. (2006). Family literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.115-234). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Gurdon, M. (2019). *The enchanted hour: The miraculous power of reading aloud in the age of distraction*. New York, USA: Harper Collins Publishers. <https://www.harpercollins.com.au/>
- Gurria, A. (2012). *Parent Factor: Let's read them a story*. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Publishing, 2012. doi.org/10.1787/9789264176232-en
- Hagemann, E., Colvin, L., Gibson, L., Miller, S., Palmer, D., Jois, S., Silva, D., & Precott, S. (2019). *The ORIGINS Project*. In Hanson & Fukuoka (Eds.): *Pre-emptive medicine*:

- Public health aspects of developmental origins of health and disease. 10: 99-116. Centre for Child Health Research. Perth, Australia: University of Western Australia. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811321931>
- Hamilton, L., Hayiou-Thomas, M., Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. (2016). The home literacy environment as a predictor of the early literacy development of children at family-risk of dyslexia. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 20(5): 401-419. doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2016.1213266
- Hammersley, M. (2012). *Methodological paradigms in educational research*. British Educational Research Association, August 2012. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/methodological-paradigms-in-educational-research>
- Hancock, K., Cunningham, N., Lawrence, D., Zarb, D., & Zubrick, S. (2015). Playgroup participation and social support outcomes for mothers of young children: A longitudinal cohort. *PLoS One*, 10(7). [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0133007](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0133007)
- Hand, K., Baxter, J., Sweid, R., Bluett-Boyd, N., & Price-Robertson, R. (2014). Access to early childhood education in Australia: Insights from a qualitative study. *Australian Institute of Family Studies: Research Report No. 28*. <https://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport28/index.html>.
- Hannon, P., Nutbrown, C., & Morgan, A. (2020). Effects of extending disadvantaged families' teaching of emergent literacy. *Research Papers in Education*, 35(3): 310-336. doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2019.1568531
- Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning *Educational Research*, 50:3, 277-289. [doi: 10.1080/00131880802309424](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802309424)
- Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore. <https://products.brookespublishing.com/Meaningful-Differences-in-the-Everyday-Experience-of-Young-American-Children-P14.aspx>
- Hartas, D. (2010). Inequality and the home learning environment: Predictions about seven-year-olds' language and literacy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(5): 859-879. doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2011.588315
- Harwati, L. (2019). Ethnographic and case study approaches: Philosophical and methodological analysis. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*. 7(2). <https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJELS/article/view/5364>
- Hayes, D., & Ahrens, M. (1988). Vocabulary simplification for children: A special case of 'motherese'? *Journal of Child Language*, 15: 395-410. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000900012411>
- Hayes, N. (2015). *Continuity and change in family engagement in home learning activities*

- across the early years*. Doctoral dissertation. Brisbane, Australia: Queensland University of Technology. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/>
- Heckman, J. (2011). The economics of inequality: The value of early childhood education. *American Educator*, 35(1): 31-35. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ920516.pdf>
- Heckman, J. (2022). *FAQ for 'The lifecycle benefits of an influential early childhood program'*. <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/faq-lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program>
- Hedemark, A. (2017). Telling tales: An observational study of storytelling for children in Swedish public libraries. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 23(2): 106-125. doi.org/10.1080/13614541.2017.1367574
- Helmstetter, C. (2022). *Mixed methods investigations: School readiness in relation to early childhood programs for children from birth to 3 in one State*. Florida State University. <https://www.proquest.com/pagepdf/2671608008?accountid=10675>
- Hemmerechts, K., Kavadias, D., & Agirdag, O. (2016). The relationship between parental literacy involvement, socio-economic status and reading literacy. *Educational Review*, 69(1). doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1164667
- Herrera, L. (2016). The paradox and the promise: Perspectives on the future of public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 35(4): 267-275. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1244990
- Heseltine, R. (2020). Towards a new understanding of the purpose and practice of public libraries in the twenty-first century. *Public Library Quarterly* 39(1)2-26. [doi:10.1080/01616846.2018.1532279](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2018.1532279)
- Hill, S. (2002). *One hundred children turn ten: A longitudinal study of literacy development from the year prior to school to the first four years of school*. Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia. Australian Literacy Educators' Association. <https://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/1024>
- Hill, S., & Diamond, A. (2013). Family literacy in response to local contexts. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 36(1): 48 [doi: 105539705221321](https://doi.org/10.105539705221321)
- Holliday, A. (2009). *Doing and writing qualitative research (2nd Ed.)*. SAGE, University of Michigan. <https://artlesstanzim.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/holliday>
- Holt, G., & Holt, L. (2015). Library card campaigns and sustaining service: How do public libraries best serve poor children? *Public Library Quarterly*, 34: 270-278. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2015.1069684
- Hopkins, L., Brookes, F., & Green, J. (2013). Books, bytes and brains: The implications of

- new knowledge for children's early literacy learning. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 38(1): 23-28. doi.org/10.1177/183693911303800105
- Horgan, D. (2014). Library program for babies and pre-schoolers. *Wingham Chronicle; Wingham, NSW: 28 January 2014*.
<https://www.winghamchronicle.com.au/story/2050441/library-program-for-babies-and-preschoolers>
- Horowitz-Kraus, T., Schmitz, R., Hutton, J., & Schumacher, J. (2017). How to create a successful reader? Milestones in reading development from birth to adolescence. *Acta paediatrica (Oslo, Norway, 1992)* 106(4):534-544. [doi:10.1111/apa.13738](https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.13738)
- Hotta, A. (2022). Storytime surprise! *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children* 20(2), 10-11.
doi.org/10.5860/cal.20.2.10
- Howard, M. (2013). *Growing young minds: How museums and libraries create lifelong learners*. Washington, Institute of Museum and Library Services.
<https://www.imls.gov/>
- Hoyne, C., & Egan, S. (2022). ABCs and 123s: A large birth cohort study examining the role of the home learning environment in early cognitive development. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 221(2022): 105424. doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2022.
- Hunt, L. (2020). Caregivers' motivations for attending emergent literacy programming in public libraries: Qualitative analysis of three case studies. *Public Library Quarterly*, 39(5): 471-485. [doi:10.1080/01616846.2019.1684784](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1684784)
- Hutton, J., Horowitz-Kraus, T., Mendelsohn, A., DeWitt, T., & Holland, S. (2015). Home reading environment and brain activation in preschool children listening to stories. *Paediatrics*, 136(3): 466-478. doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-0359
- IFLA/UNESCO. (1994). *Public Library Manifesto*.
<https://www.ifla.org/publications/iflaunesco-public-library-manifesto-1994>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2022). *IFLA Newsletter, Spring 2022*.
<https://www.ifla.org/news/newsletter-spring-issue-2022>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2018). *Guidelines for libraries: Babies and toddlers. IFLA Professional Reports: 100*.
<https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-professional-reports-100>
- Irwin, J., Moore, D., Tornatore, L., & Fowler, A. (2012) Expanding on early literacy: Promoting emerging language and literacy during Storytime. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children*.10(2), 20-28. <https://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources>

- Jacobson, L. (2017). A story about Storytime. *School Library Journal*, 2017(7): 22-25.
<https://www.slj.com/>
- Jana, L. (2017). *The toddler brain: Nurture the skills today that will shape your child's tomorrow*. Hachette Book Group. New York.
<https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/>
- Johnson, A., Martin, A., Brookes-Gunn, J., & Petrill, S. (2008). Order in the house! Associations among household chaos, the home literacy environment, maternal reading ability, and children's early reading. *Merrill Palmer Quarterly: Wayne State University*, 54(4): 445-472. [doi:10.1353/mpq.0.0009](https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.0.0009)
- Johnson, E. (2015). Debunking the 'language gap.' *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 9: 42-50. [doi:10.1108/JME-12-2014-0044](https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-12-2014-0044)
- Jones, J. (2014). Literacy links: *Collaborative approaches to adult and family literacy*.: Report for Kay Poustie Scholarship. State Library Foundation, Perth, Australia
<https://slwa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-2014>
- Joo, S., Cahill, M., Ingram, E., & Hoffman, H. (2021). The literacy-enhancing potential of singing versus spoken language in public library Storytimes: A text analytics approach. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 2021, 1-24.
[doi: 10.1177/1487984211046652](https://doi.org/10.1177/1487984211046652)
- Kaderavek, J., & Justice, L. (2002). Shared storybook reading as an intervention context: Practices and potential pitfalls. *American Journal of Speech and Language Pathology*, 11(4): 395. [doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360\(2002/043\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360(2002/043))
- Kaeding, J., Velasquez, D., & Price, D. (2017). Public libraries and access for children with disabilities and their families: A proposed inclusive library model. *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 66(2).
doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2017.1298399
- Keenan, C. (2022). Reading revolution: How change begins with the under-fives. *The Griffith Review*, 2022, 48-59.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.305761390783380>
- Kerai, S., Almas, A., Guhn, M., Forer, B., & Oberle, E. (2021). *Screen time and developmental health: Results from an early childhood study in Canada*. Canada: Research Square. doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-496452/v1
- Kettle, L. (2014). Birth of a great idea will see babies signed up automatically at library. *Public Library News*, 2014(1). <https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>
- Killmier, C. (2010). *Programs, partnerships and place-making: A community development framework for the community-centred library*. Margery C. Ramsay Scholarship Report. Melbourne, Australia.

[https://www.libraries.vic.gov.au/downloads/Margery C Ramsay](https://www.libraries.vic.gov.au/downloads/Margery_C_Ramsay)

- Kimura, L. (2006). Music: The great organizer for early language and literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.235-254). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Knoll, D. (2014). Babies in the Library: Creating a truly baby-friendly early literacy play space. *Public Libraries*, 53. Chicago: American Library Association. Public Library Association.
<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2014/05/babies-in-the-library-creating-a-truly-baby-friendly-early-literacy-play-space/>
- Knoll, D. (2017). *Engaging babies in the library: Putting theory into practice*. Chicago: American Library Association.
<https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/engaging-babies-library-putting-theory-practice>
- Kopko, K. (2007). *Research sheds light on how babies learn and develop language*. New York: Human Development Outreach and Extension Publication.
<https://www.human.cornell.edu/hd/outreach-extension/upload/casasola.pdf>
- Kosciejew, M. (2020). Public Libraries and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. *IFLA*, 2020, 46(4), 328-346. [doi:10.1177/0340035219898708](https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035219898708)
- Krolak, L. (2005). The role of libraries in the creation of literate environments. In *Education for All: Global Monitoring Report. Literacy for Life UNESCO: 2006/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/50*. <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/literacy-and-reading/publications/role-of-libraries-in-creation-of-literate-environments.pdf>
- Kropp, L. (2013). Chew that book: Why babies belong in libraries. *School Library Journal*, 59(11).
<https://www.slj.com/Story=chew-that-book-why-babies-belong-in-libraries-early-learning>
- Kruger, S., Marcus, J., & Spiess, K. (2017). Does quality of early childhood education and care affect home learning environment of children? *Discussion papers of German Institute for Economic Research*: 1687,285.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3046544
- Kuchirko, Y. (2017). On differences and deficits: A critique of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the word gap. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 19(4). doi.org/10.1177/1468798417747029
- Kurt, L., Kurt, W., & Medaille, A. (2010). The power of play: Fostering creativity and innovation in libraries. *Journal of Library Innovation*, 2010,8-23.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44199874_The_Power_of_Play
- Lance, K., & Marks, R. (2008). The link between public libraries and early reading success.

School Library Journal: October 2011. American Library Association. [id: b0df7d30-02c7-b044-c155-6b834b78c2d](#)

- Langendonk, A., & Broekhof, K. (2017). The 'Art of Reading': The national Dutch reading promotion program. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(4), 293-317. [doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1354351](#)
- Lathey, N., & Blake, T. (2013). *Small talk: How to develop your child's language skills from birth to age four*. New York Macmillan. <https://theexperimentpublishing.com/>
- Lenhart, J., Suggate, S., & Lenhard, W. (2021). Shared-reading onset and emergent literacy development. *Early Education and Development: April 2021*.
- Leorke, D., Wyatt, D., & McQuire, S. (2018). 'More than just a library': Public Libraries in the 'smart city'. *City, Culture and Society*, 15, 37-44. [doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2018.05.002](#)
- Libraries South Australia (2020). <https://www.libraries.sa.gov.au/>
- Liu, H., & Li, M. (2022). Associations between home literacy environment and children's receptive vocabulary: A meta-analysis. *Advances in Psychological Science* 30(3), 556-579. [doi:10.3724/SP.J.1042.2022.00556](#)
- Lloyd, P. (2020). The public library as protective factor: An introduction to library social work. *Public Library Quarterly*, 39(1), 50-63. [doi:10.1080/01616846.2019.1581872](#)
- Lockyer-Benzie, M. (2004). Social inclusion and the City of Swan public libraries in Western Australia. *Health Information Library Journal*, 21, 36-44. [doi:10.1111/j.1740-3324.2004.00519.x](#)
- Lonigan, C., & Shanahan, T. (2008). *Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP): A scientific synthesis of early literacy development and implications for intervention*. Texas: National Institute for Literacy. <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>
- Lopez, M., Caspe, M., & McWilliams, L. (2016). *Public libraries: A vital space for family engagement*. Massachusetts: Harvard Family Research Project. American Library Association. <https://globalfrp.org/Articles/Public-Libraries-A-Vital-Space-for-Family-Engagement>
- Lopez, M., Caspe, M., & Simpson, C. (2017). Engaging families in public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 36(4), 318-333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1354364>
- Lucas, F. (2013). Many spokes, same hub: Facilitating collaboration among library and early-childhood services to improve outcomes for children. *Australian Library*

Journal, 62(3),196-203. doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2013.815576

Maas, J., Ehmig, S., & Seelman, C. (2013). *Prepare for life! Raising awareness for early literacy education: Results and implications of the International Conference of Experts, 2013*. German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Mainz, Germany. <https://www.stiftunglesen.de/>

McDermott, I. (2019). *Auckland urban libraries and preschool Storytime outreach*. Master's Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, N.Z.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10063/8203>

Maclean, J. (2008). *Library preschool Storytimes: Developing early literacy skills in children*: Penn State University, Pennsylvania.
https://old.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/pdf/fam_lit_cert_stud_work

Madureira, J. (2016). *Books vs. space: What really counts*. Report for Kay Poustie Scholarship, State Library of Western Australia Foundation, Perth, Australia.
www.slwa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2016_Kay_Poustie_Scholarship_Report_Jessica_Madureira.pdf

Maginn, P., & McKenzie, F. (2017). *Census of Western Australian Elected Members 2016 (Final Report)*. Department of Local Government Perth, Australia.
<https://dlgc.communities.wa.gov.au/Publications/Documents/Census>

Makin, L. (2006). *Literacy 8-12 months: What are babies learning?* *Early Years* 26(3), 266-277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140600898449>

Makin L., (2012). *Learning literacies birth to three: Positive approaches for early childhood educators*. Pademelon Press, Baulkham Hills, Australia.
<https://www.pademelonpress.com.au/>

Manz, P., Hughes, C., Barnabas, E., Bracaliello, C., & Ginsburg-Block, M. (2010). A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low income, ethnic minority or linguistically diverse young children? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(4), 409-431. doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2010.03.002

Mardhani-Bayne, A. (2020). *Early childhood literacy training for library assistants in public libraries: An exploratory case study*. Doctoral thesis. Syracuse: University of Syracuse. <https://surface.syr.edu/etd/1163>

Mardhani-Bayne, A., & Shamchuk, L. (2022). Early literacy learning for future library paraprofessionals: Authentic learning in library education. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 17(2).
doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v17i2.6808

Marshall, C. (2022). *Introduction to the special section on the Emergent Literacy and*

Language Early Childhood Checklist for Teachers (ELLECCT). University College London, UK. [doi: 10.1177/01427237221095302](https://doi.org/10.1177/01427237221095302)

Martinez, G. (2008). Public libraries: Community organizations making outreach efforts to help young children succeed in school. *The School Community Journal*, 18(1),93-104. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ798683.pdf>

Massis, B. (2008). *The challenges to library learning: Solutions for librarians*. ISBN 9781138801158. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/>

McCormack, L. (2018). *Bringing early literacy to the public library: A case study of an urban library using the 'Every Child Ready to Read' model*. Doctoral dissertation: Pennsylvania: Temple University. <https://library.temple.edu/>

McDonald, M. (2010). *Are disadvantaged families 'hard to reach'? Engaging disadvantaged families in child and family services*. Communities and Families Clearing House Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/are-disadvantaged-families-hard-to-reach>

McDougall, A., & Finney, B. (2017). *Libraries work! The socio-economic value of public libraries to Victorians*. SGS Economics and Planning, Melbourne, Australia. www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Libraries-work.pdf

McFarland, L., McKenzie, N., & Thompson, N. (2018). Early childhood educators' and parent's perspectives of literacy for children under three: An exploratory study. *New Zealand International Research in Early Childhood Education*, 21(2),45-58. www.journal/nzirece

McIntyre, M. (2002). Start with the child: The needs and motivations of young people. *The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals: November 2002*. <https://mhminsight.com/articles/start-with-the-child-report-565>

McKechnie L. (2006). Observations of babies and toddlers in library settings. *Library Trends*, 55(1),190-201. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236795279>

McKechnie, L., Dixon, C., Fear, J., & Pollak, A. (2006). *Rules of (mis)conduct: User behaviour in public libraries*. Ontario, Canada. The University of Western Ontario. doi.org/10.29173/cais178

McKend, H. (2010). *Early literacy Storytimes for pre-schoolers in public libraries*. ISBN 978-1-55471-479-7. Canada: Canada Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council. <https://ptplc-cptbp.ca>

McKenzie, P., & Stooke, R. (2008). Producing Storytime: A collectivist analysis of work in a complex communicative space. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 77,3-20. [doi:abs/10.1086/512953](https://doi.org/10.1086/512953)

McKenzie, P., & Stooke, R. (2012). Making a difference The importance of purposes to

- early learning programs. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children* 10(2), 47-52.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/0206288da95e0e5865fb03de4d5cc10c>
- McKenzie, P., Stooke, R., & McKechnie, L. (2009). Learning the library: *The work of public library Storytime participants*. In Proceedings of the annual conference of Canadian Association for Information Science, 2009. doi.org/10.29173/cais232
- McManus, M., & Suizzo, M. (2020). What do mothers experiencing poverty need to support their young children? Parent, school, and policy perspectives. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 2020. doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00673-5
- McTernan, J. (2011). Liberal whingers are wrong - we should shut our libraries. *Daily Telegraph, UK: October 20, 2011*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8838633/Liberal-whingers-are-wrong>
- Medlar, A. (2016). Envisioning a twenty-first century children's library. *Association for Library Service to Children*, 14(1). doi.org/10.5860/cal.14n1.29
- Melhuish, E., Phan, M., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatford, I., & Taggart, B. (2008). Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in early primary school. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), 95-114. [doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00550](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00550)
- Mellon, C. (1990). Naturalistic inquiry for library science: Methods and applications for research, evaluation, and teaching. *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, 79(3), 348-349. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC225571/>
- Meltzoff, A., & Kuhl, P. (2016). Exploring the infant social brain: What's going on in there? *Zero to Three Journal*, 36(3).
http://ilabs.uw.edu/sites/default/files/16Meltzoff_Kuhl_Social_Brain_ZTT.pdf
- Mendelsohn, A., Cates, C., Weisleder, A., Johnson, S., Seery, C., Canfield, C., Huberman, H., & Dreyer, B. (2018). Reading aloud, play, and social emotional development. *Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*, 141.
doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3393
- Mertens, W., Dahlke, A., Bennett, S., & Briggs, A. (2018). *Advancing Queensland's public libraries: A research report for State Library of Queensland*. Brisbane, Australia: Queensland University of Technology.
<https://chairedigitaleconomy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Advancing-Queenslands-Public-Libraries.pdf>
- Mesut, S., Sonnur, I., Kerem, A., & Justice, L. (2016). Parents' perceptions of children's literacy motivation and their home literacy practices: What's the connection? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(6).
doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.996422

- Miles, M., Huberman, A., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/home>
- Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA). (2010). *Engaging families in the early childhood development story: 50*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. <https://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/>
- Mol, S., Bus, G., & DeJong, M. (2009). Interactive book reading in early education: A tool to stimulate print knowledge as well as oral language. *Review of Educational Research, American Educational Research Association*, 79(2), 979-1007. doi.org/10.3102/0034654309332561
- Mooney, C. (2015). *The Brain*. Nomad Press, Vermont. ISBN 978-1-61930-278-5. <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-brain-carla-mooney/1120251298>
- Moore, T., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M., & West, S. (2017). *The first thousand days: An evidence paper: Summary*. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute. <https://www.rch.org.au/ccch>
- Morgan, L., & Chodkiewicz, A. (2009). Early Literacy in informal settings: Supporting home literacy practices. *The International Journal of Learning*, 16(7), 263 - 273. <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/11827>
- Moss, K. (2016). *The connections between family characteristics, parent-child engagement, interactive reading behaviors, and pre-schoolers' emergent literacy*. Doctoral dissertation. New York: Alfred University. <https://www.proquest.com/en-US/products/dissertations/individuals.shtml>
- Munday, I. (2022). Member of Legislative Assembly. <https://www.mandurah.wa.gov.au/>
- Murray, A., & Egan, S. (2014). Does reading to infants benefit their cognitive development at 9-months old? An investigation using a large birth cohort survey. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 30(3), 303-315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659013513813>
- Nadkarni, S., & Klatt, K. (2014). *STEP into Storytime: Using 'Story Time Effective Practice' to strengthen the development of newborns to five-year-olds*. Chicago: American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org>
- Nagel, M., & Scholes, L. (2016). *Understanding development and learning: Implications for teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Nalls, A., Mullis, R., Cornille, T., Mullis, A., & Jeter, N. (2010). How can we reach reluctant parents in childcare programmes? *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(8), 1053-1064. doi.org/10.1080/03004430902726040

- Narey, M. (2021). Starting with the right question: Not What is literacy, but Why is literacy? *Sense-making: Problematizing constructs of literacy for 21st Century education. Springer Briefs in Education*, 2021,13-36.
[doi:10.1007/978-3-030-68117-3_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68117-3_2)
- National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA). (2018). *Australian public library statistical report: 2015-2016*. Brisbane, Australia: State Library of Queensland. National and State Libraries Australia. <https://www.nsla.org.au/>
- National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA). (2020). *Australian public library statistical report: 2017-2018*. Brisbane, Australia: State Library of Queensland. National and State Libraries Australia. <https://www.nsla.org.au/>
- National Literacy Trust. (2011). *Literacy: A route to addressing child poverty?* National Literacy Trust Research Review.UK: National Literacy Trust.
<https://www.literacytrust.org.uk>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC). (2010). *Early experiences can alter gene expression and affect long term development*. Harvard University: Center on the Developing Child: Working Paper 10.
<https://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC). (2012). *The science of neglect: The persistent absence of responsive care disrupts the developing brain*. Harvard University: Center on the Developing Child: Working Paper 12.
<https://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- Nayak, S., Coleman, P., Ladanyi, E., Nitin, R., Gustavson, D., Fisher, S., Magne, C., & Gordon, R. (2021). *Understanding musicality-language links*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6581-3510>
- Neuman, S. (2006). Literacy development for infants and toddlers. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.275-290). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Neuman, S. (2009). *Changing the odds for children at risk: Seven essential principles of educational programs that break the cycle of poverty*. New York: Teachers' College Press. <https://nyuscholars.nyu.edu/en/publications/changing-the-odds>
- Neuman, S. (2018). Interview with Shannon Maughan in *Publishers Weekly*, March 2018.
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/>
- Neuman, S., & Celano, D. (2011). The knowledge gap: Implications of levelling the playing field for low-income and middle income children. *International Reading Association. Reading Quarterly*, 41(2),29-40. <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/>
- Neuman, S., & Knapczyk, J. (2022). Early literacy in everyday settings: Creating an

- opportunity to learn for low-income young children. *Reading Research Quarterly*, April 2022. doi.org/10.1002/rrq.468
- Neuman, S., Roskos, K., Wright, T., & Lenhart, J. (2007). *Nurturing knowledge: Building a foundation for school success by linking early literacy to maths, science, art and social studies*. ISBN 978-0439821308. New York: Scholastic.
<https://scholastic.force.com/>
- Neuman, S., Moland, N., & Celano, D. (2017). *Bringing literacy home: An evaluation of the 'Every Child Ready to Read' program. 2017 ECRR Report Final*. Association for Library Service to Children. <http://everychildreadytoread.org/>
- Neumann, M. (2016). A socioeconomic comparison of emergent literacy and home literacy in Australian pre-schoolers. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(4), 555-566. doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2016.1189722
- Nicholas, M., & Paatsch, L. (2021). Mothers' views on shared reading with their two-year olds using printed and electronic texts: Purpose, confidence and practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 21(1),3-26. doi.org/10.1177/1468798418792614
- Nichols, S. (2011). Young children's literacy in the activity space of the library: A geo-semiotic investigation. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 11(2),164-189. doi.org/10.1177/1468798411399275
- Niklas, F., Cohrssen, C., & Tayler, C. (2016). The sooner the better. Early reading to children. *SAGE Open: October-December, 2016*,1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016672715>
- Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2013). Home literacy environment and the beginning of reading and spelling. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 38,40-50. doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2012.10.001
- Noble, K., Rehill, P., Sollis, K., Dakin, P., & Harris, D. (2021). *The wellbeing of Australia's children*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and United Nations Children's Fund: Australian-Children's-Wellbeing-Index-Report.pdf. <https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/Australia/>
- Norman, M. (2012). Frail, fatal, fundamental: The future of public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 31(4),339-351. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.21012.734291
- Northern Territory Library. (2017). *Connected communities: Vision for Northern Territory public libraries, 2017-2023*. Darwin, Australia: Northern Territory Library. <https://ntl.nt.gov.au/>
- O'Hehir, E., & Reynolds, S. (2015). Highways and byways: Future directions for Australian public libraries. *The Australian Library Journal*, 64(4),308-320. doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2015.1087298

- Oliphant, T. (2014). 'I'm a library hugger!': Public libraries as valued community assets. *Public Library Quarterly*, 33(4), 348-361. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2014.970431
- O'Neil, C., & Watts, T. (2015). *Two futures: Australia at a critical moment*. Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing Company. <https://www.textpublishing.com.au/>
- Orrmalm, A. (2020). Doing ethnographic method with babies: Participation and perspective approached from the floor. *Children and Society*, 34(6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12380>
- Owens, R. (2010). The future of reading. *Incite* 31(3), 18 <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.899382924029291>
- Pahl, K., & Allen, C. (2011). 'I don't know what literacy is': Uncovering hidden literacies in a community library using ecological and participatory research methodologies with children. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 11(2), 190-213. [doi:10.1177/1468798411401864](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798411401864)
- Paley, J., Bertram, T., Cottrill, J., Errecart, K., White, A., Schaden, A., Schrag, A., Douglas, R., Tahmassebi, B., Crocker, R., & Streatfield, D. (2015). The evolution of Global Libraries' performance measurement and impact assessment systems. *Performance Measurement and Metrics* 16(2), 132-158. www.emeraldinsight.com/1467-8047.html
- Palmer, M. (2022). Study of future public library trends and best practices. *Public Library Quarterly* 41(1), 83-107. [doi:10.1080/01616846.2020.1868224](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2020.1868224)
- Palmer, S. (2015). *Toxic childhood: How the modern world is damaging our children and what we can do about it*. London, UK: Orion Publishing. <https://www.orionbooks.co.uk/>
- Palmer, S. (2016). *Upstart: The case for raising the school starting age and providing what the under sevens really need*. Edinburgh, UK: Floris Books. <https://www.florisbooks.co.uk/contact/>
- Parker, J. (2015). In the public interest. *Journal of Library Administration* 55, 647-657. [doi: 10.1080/01930826.2015.1085247](https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1085247)
- Parkhill, L. (2022). *The Daily Mail*, July 10, 2022. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10993529/Half-young-parents-dont-know-words-Twinkle-Twinkle-Little-Star.html>
- Parra, J., Gomariz, M., Hernández-Prados, M., & García-Sanz, M. (2019). Family involvement in early childhood education. *eJournal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation*, 2019. doi.org/10.7203/relieve.23.1.9258
- Pascal, C., & Bertram, T. (2016). *High achieving white working-class boys' project: Final*

- report. Birmingham, UK: Centre for Research in Early Childhood.
<https://www.crec.co.uk/>
- Payne, C., & O'Brien, M. (2006). Promoting language and literacy in child care. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.291-308). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Pearson, H. (2016). *The life project: The extraordinary story of our ordinary lives*. London, UK: Penguin Press. <https://www.penguin.co.uk>
- Peaselee, C. (2022). *The power of play: A case study on how play-based learning can affect the oral language and the social and emotional development of students in the kindergarten classroom*. Doctoral Thesis, Evangel University Graduate School, Missouri. www.proquest.com/openview/2c9172022c99625ec7c44dc2695f5e4e/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y
- Pedroso, J., Kubo, S., Silva, P., de Castro, G., Pimental, J., Perz Escamilla, R., Gubert, M., & Buccini, G. (2021). Population-based approaches for monitoring the nurturing care environment for early childhood development: A scoping review. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, August 2021. [doi:10.1111/MCN.1326](https://doi.org/10.1111/MCN.1326)
- Peterson, S., Jang, E., Jupiter, C., & Dunlop, M. (2012). Preschool early literacy programs in Ontario public libraries. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 7(2). doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v7i2.1961
- Pew Research Center. (2013). *Parents, children, libraries, and reading: Pew internet & American life project reports; 2013* SRI R8588-1-143.
[doi:10.1108/S0270-402120160000020003](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0270-402120160000020003)
- Pfeifer, K., & Perez, L. (2011). Effectiveness of a co-ordinated community effort to promote early literacy behaviors. *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 15,765-71.
[doi:10.1007/s10995-010-0637-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-010-0637-0)
- Phillips, B. (2018). *Reading and literacy for all: Quality indicators for early years' literacy programs in Victorian public libraries*. Melbourne, Australia: State Library of Victoria. <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Reading-and-literacy-for-all-early-years-quality-indicators2018.pdf>
- Pierce, P. & Profio, A. (2006). From cooing to conversation to *The Carrot Seed*: Oral and written language connections. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.103-122). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- PolicyWise for Children & Families (2017). *Public Libraries as a hub for Early Childhood Development (ECD)*. Alberta, Canada: Public Library Services Branch, Alberta Municipal Affairs. <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ma-public-libraries-as-a-hub-for-early-childhood-development.pdf>

- Pound, L. (2011). *Influencing early childhood education: Key figures, philosophies and ideas*. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press. <https://www.mheducation.co.uk/>
- Preece, J., & Levy, R. (2020). Understanding the barriers and motivations to shared reading with young children. The role of enjoyment and feedback. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(4),631-654. [doi:10.1177/1468798418779216](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798418779216)
- Prendergast, T. (2011). Beyond Storytime: Children’s librarians collaborating in communities. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, 9(1), 20-40. <https://www.ala.org>
- Prendergast, T. (2016). Seeking early literacy for all. *Library Trends*, 65(1). doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0023
- Prendergast, T., Goldsmith, A., & Diamant-Cohen, B. (2019). Reaching out to parents. *Children and Libraries: The Association of Library Service to Children*, 17 (Spring), 38-39. <https://www.ala.org>
- Press, F., & Wong, S. (2013). *A voice for young children: 75 years of ‘Early Childhood Australia’*. Deakin West, Australia: Early Childhood Australia. <https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/>
- Price Waterhouse Cooper. (2014). *Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia*. Price Waterhouse Cooper. <https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/putting-value-on-ecec.pdf>
- Prior, J., & Gerard, M. (2007). Family involvement in early childhood education: Research into practice. *e-Journal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation* 23(1). doi.org/10.7203/relieve.23.1.9258
- Ptacek, B. (2016). Early literacy and the public library: An opportunity of a lifetime (of reading). *Public Library Quarterly*,35(4),338-343. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1245007
- Puglisi, M., Hulme, C., Hamilton, L., & Snowling, M. (2017). The home literacy environment is a correlate, but perhaps not a cause, of variations in children’s language and literacy development. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 21(6),498-514. doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2017.1346660
- Pyett, P. (2003). Validation of qualitative research in the ‘real world’. *Qualitative Health Research*, 13(8),1170-1179. doi.org/10.1177/1049732303255686
- Qayyum, A., Afzal, W., & Mahoney, L. (2020). *Evaluating public library community engagement and impact for sustainable information services*. In International conference on information: Sustainable digital communities: 579-587. [doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-43687-2_48](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-43687-2_48)

- Quach, J., Elek, C., Beatson, R., Bridie, J., & Goldfield, S. (2017). *Reviewing the evidence for supporting children's early language and literacy development*. Melbourne, Australia: Murdoch Children's Research Institute: Centre for Community Child Health. https://earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NELLS-Lit-Review-2017_FINAL.pdf
- Ralli, J., & Payne, R. (2016). Let's play at the library: Creative innovative play experiences for babies and toddlers. *Library Trends*, 65(1),41-63. doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0020
- Ramey, C., & Ramey, S. (2004). Early learning and school readiness: Can early intervention make a difference? Michigan: *Merrill Palmer Quarterly: Wayne State University*, 50(4),471-491. [doi:10.1353/mpq.2004.0034](https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2004.0034)
- Ramírez-Esparza, N., García-Sierra, A., & Kuhl, P. (2014). Look who's talking: Speech style and social context in language input to infants are linked to concurrent and future speech development. *Developmental Science* 16(2),234–248. [doi:10.1111/desc.12172](https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12172).
- Ramos, A. (2012). Learning to read before you walk: Portuguese libraries for babies and toddlers. *IFLA Journal*, 38(3),78-85. [doi:10.1177/0340035211435396](https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035211435396)
- Ramos, A., & Vila, I. (2015). The role of public libraries in promoting reading within the family. *IFLA Journal*, 41(4), 364-369. [doi:10.1177/0340035215596351](https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035215596351)
- Rankin, C. (2014a). Rhymetimes, treasure baskets and books: How early years' libraries can help to deliver the best start. *Advances in Theory and Research, Implications for Practice*, (9),121-13. doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7853-5_8
- Rankin, C. (2014b). *The 'pathway of opportunity': The role of the librarian in supporting the development of communication, language and literacy in young children and their families*. In *Reading Towards a Better World: Proceedings of the 8th International Symposium on Library Services for Children and Young Adults: June 2014*. <https://www.ifla.org>
- Rankin, C. (2016). Library services for the early years: Policy, practice, and the politics of the age. *Library Trends*, 65(1),5-18. doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0022
- Rankin, C. (2018). *IFLA guidelines for library services to children aged 0-18: Revised version 2018*. <https://www.ifla.org>
- Rankin, C., & Brock, A. (2015). *Library services from birth to five: Delivering the best start*. London, UK: Facet Publishing. <https://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/>
- Rankin, C., Brock, A., Halpin, E., & Wootton, C. (2007). *The role of the early year's librarian in developing an information community: A case study of effective partnerships and early years' literacy within a Sure Start project in Wakefield*. In

Proceedings of the annual conference of Canadian Association for Information Science, 2007. [doi:10.29173/cais242](https://doi.org/10.29173/cais242)

Raphael, L. (2020). Storytime, three ways. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children* 18(2), 8-10.

<https://doi.org/10.5860/cal.18.2.8>

Reeves, S., Peller J., Goldman, J., & Kitto, S. (2013). Ethnography in qualitative educational research: AMEE Guide No. 80. *Medical Teacher*, 35(8),1365-1379.

doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2013.804977

Reid, H., & Howard, V. (2016). Connecting with Community: The importance of community engagement in rural public library systems. *Public Library Quarterly*, 35(3),188-202. doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1210443

Renshaw, L., & Goodhue, R. (2020). *National Early Language and Literacy Strategy Discussion Paper*. Canberra, Australia: The National Early Language and Literacy Coalition. <https://earlylanguageandliteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/National-Early-Language-and-Literacy-Discussion-Paper-2020.pdf>

Reynolds, M., B Buckingham, J., Madelaine, A., Arakelian, S., Bell., N., Pogorzelski, S., Wheldall, R., & Wheldall, K. (2021). What we have learned: Implementing MiniLit as an intervention with young struggling readers. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, November2021. doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2021.1989605

Roberts, J., Jurgens, J., & Burchinal, M. (2005). The role of home literacy practices in preschool children's language and emergent literacy skills. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 48,345-359.

[https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388\(2005/024](https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2005/024)

Robinson, E., Black, L., Knickelbein, B., Kovaleski, J., & Whitehead, G. (2016). *Home-based parent involvement and its relationship to basic early literacy skills in kindergarten*. Doctoral dissertation. Pennsylvania: Indiana University of Pennsylvania. <https://www.proquest.com/products-services/dissertations/>

Robinson, K. (2010). *Bring on the learning revolution*. TED talk.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_learning_revolution?language=en

Robinson, K., & Aronica, L. (2016). *Creative Schools: The grassroots revolution that's transforming education*. New York: Penguin Putman Inc.

<https://www.penguin.com>

Rocco, T., & Plakhotnik, M. (2009). Literature reviews, conceptual frameworks, and theoretical frameworks: Terms, functions and distinctions. *Human Resource Development Review* 2009 (8): 120. [doi: 10.1177/1534484309332617](https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484309332617)

Rohde, L. (2015). *The comprehensive early literacy model: Early literacy in context*. SAGE

Open 5(1). doi.org/10.1177%2F2158244015577664

- Romeo, R. (2019). Storytime at the laundromat. *Public Libraries Online*, February 21, 2019. <https://publiclibrariesonline.org>
- Rosenfeldt, D., McCarten, M., Teoh, H., & Langoulant, B. (2014). *Creative communities. The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries*. Melbourne, Australia: State Library of Victoria. www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Creative-communities-summary-report.pdf
- Rosenkoetter, S., & Knapp-Philo, J. (Eds.). (2006). Preface. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp. xv-xviii). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Rosenkoetter, S. & Wanless, S. (2006). *Relationships: At the heart of early language and literacy*. In *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years*. Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Roser, M., & Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2018). *Our world in data: Global education*. <https://ourworldindata.org/global-education>
- Ross, C., McKechnie, L., & Rothbauer, P. (2006). *Reading matters: What the research reveals about reading, libraries, and community*. London, UK: Libraries Unlimited. <https://www.librariesunlimited.org.uk/>
- Roth, R. (2018). *From principles to practice: Building a family engagement culture*. Los Angeles: LA: Partnership for Early Childhood Investment. <https://ap-od.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Engage-RD-From-Principles-to-Practice-LA-Partnership-Learning-Brief.pdf>
- Rowe, M., Turco, R., & Blatt, T., (2021). Can interactive apps promote parent-child conversation in low-income families? *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 2021, 101326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2021.101326>
- Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. (2008). *Policy Brief 10: Rethinking school readiness*. Melbourne, Australia. https://ww2.rch.org.au/empl;ibrary/ccch/PB10_SchoolReadiness.pdf
- Runions, K., Cahill, R., & Markham, R. (2022). *Toward a comprehensive early childhood development system: Evidence-based strategies for implementation*. The Australian Research Council of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Life Course. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4193254
<https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4193254>
- Sanders, J., & Albers, P. (2010). Multimodal literacies: An introduction. *Literacies, the arts, and multimodality*, 2010, 1-26. *National Council of Teachers of English*. <https://ncte.org/>

- Sangalang, B. (2018). *Building a family engagement culture*. Los Angeles: David and Lucile Packard Foundation, LA. Partnership for Early Childhood Investment.
<https://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/>
- Satu, M. Outi, K., Tarja, P., Kat, U., & Helvi, K. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open* 4(2014),1-10.
[doi:10.1177/2158244014522633](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633)
- Saxby, M. (1997). *Books in the life of a child: Bridges to literature and learning*. Melbourne, Australia. Macmillan Education.
<https://www.macmillaneducation.com.au/>
- Sayers, W. (1932). *A manual of children's libraries*. Routledge, UK.
<https://www.routledge.com/>
- Sbaffi, L., & Rowley, J. (2015). Public libraries and non-users: A comparison between Manchester and Rome. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 47(2),104-116. <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/lis>
- Schaff, S. (2020). *Teacher perceptions of family engagement in early childhood education programs*. Doctoral dissertation. Kentucky: Northern Kentucky University.
[ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2020. 27959905.](https://proquest.com/docview/27959905)
- Scherrer, K. (2017). *Stories, songs and stretches! Creating playful Storytimes with yoga and movement*. Chicago: American Library Association. ala.org/content/stories-songs-and-stretches
- Schmidt, H., & Hamilton, K. (2017a). Caregivers' beliefs about library visits. A theory-based study of formative research. *Library and Information Science Research*, 39(4), 267-275. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321256893>
- Schmidt, H., & Hamilton, K. (2017b). Visiting public libraries with young children: An investigation of individual and community factors among caregivers in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 40(2). doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2017.1389855
- Scott, L. (2015). Baby Story magic: Active early literacy through bounces, rhymes, tickles and more. *Public Libraries*, 54(1), 51-52. <https://www.ala.org>
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2019). *Working together to ensure equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early years: Position Paper*. Canberra, Australia: Early Childhood Australia.
[http://https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/](https://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/)
- Seligman, S. (2017). *Relationships in development: Infancy, inter-subjectivity, and attachment*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/>

- Sensenig, V. (2011). Reading first, libraries last: An historical perspective on the absence of libraries in reading and education policy. *Journal of Education*, 191(3), 9-18. doi.org/10.1177/002205741119100303
- Sensenig, V. (2012). *Libraries and literacy: An ecological perspective*. Doctoral dissertation. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/libraries-literacy-ecological-perspective/docview/1348165653/>
- Shonkoff, J., & Phillips, D. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academies Press, Washington. <https://doi.org/10.17226/9824>
- Shuey, E., & Kankaraš, M. (2018). *The power and promise of early learning*. OECD Working Paper No. 186, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f9b2e53f-en>
- Siegler, M. (2013). The end of the library. *Tech Crunch: Start-up and Technology News*, October 14, 2013. <https://techcrunch.com/2013/10/13/the-end-of-the-library/>
- Siraj-Blatford, B. (2010). *An ethnographic approach to researching young children's learning*. In *Doing Early Childhood Research*. Routledge, UK. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003115403-19/>
- Sirinides, P., Fink, R., & DuBois, T. (2016). A study of early learning services in museums and libraries. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, (45), 563-573. [doi:10.1007/s10643-016-0820-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0820-z)
- Slaby, M. (2014). *Children's public library use and kindergarten literacy readiness in the State of Maryland*. Masters dissertation. Maryland: University of Maryland. <http://hdl.handle.net/1903/15473>
- Smallwood, S., & Birkenfeld, J. (2018). A place to play: An assessment of a public library's play centers. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, 6(4), 9-11. <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/cal/issue/view/707>
- Smardo, F. (1980). Public library services for young children. *Children Today*, 9(3), 24-27. <https://www.eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ230760>
- Smith, J., Levickis, P., Neilson, R., Mensah, F., Goldfield, S., & Bryson, H. (2021). Prevalence of language and pre-language difficulties in an Australian cohort of 5-year-old children experiencing diversity. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 56(2), 389-401. doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12611
- Smith, S. (2008). The library has legs: An early childhood literacy outreach program in Victoria. *Australasian Public Libraries and Information Services*, 21(4). <https://www.auslib.com.au>

- Sojourner A. (2021). Increasing federal investments in early childhood care and education. *Lera Perspectives on Work, (2021)*14-19. University of Minnesota.
<http://lerachapters.org/OJS/ojs-2.4.4-1/index.php/PFL/article/view/3464>
- Son, S., & Morrison, F. (2010). The nature and impact of changes in home learning environment on development of language and academic skills in preschool children. *Developmental Psychology, (46)*,1103-1118.
doi.org/10.1037/a0020065
- Sonnenschein, S., & Munsterman, K. (2002). The influence of home-based reading interactions on 5-year-olds' reading motivations and early literacy development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 17*(3),318-337.
[doi:10.1016/S0885-2006\(02\)00167-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(02)00167-9)
- State Library of Queensland. (2012). *The library dividend summary report: A guide to the socio-economic value of Queensland's public libraries*. Brisbane, Queensland: Library Board of Queensland. SGS Economics and Planning.
<http://plconnect.slq.qld.gov.au/manage/research/the-library-dividend>
- State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) (2017). *Literacy Matters. Literacy Strategy 2017 – 2027*. State Library of Western Australia.
https://slwa.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/Literacy_Matters_corrected_22-10-19.pdf
- State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) (2019). *State Library of Western Australia: 2018-19 Annual Report*. Perth, Australia: State Library of Western Australia.
<https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au>
- State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) (2022). *WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026*. State Library of Western Australia, Public Libraries Western Australia, West Australian Local Government Association, Local Government Professionals.
[WA Public Libraries Strategy 2022-2026 | State Library of Western Australia](https://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/publications/wa-public-libraries-strategy-2022-2026)
- Stewart, R., Bailey-White, S., Shaw, S., Compton, E., & Ghoting, S. (2014). Enhanced Storytimes: Effects on parent/caregiver knowledge, motivation, and behaviors. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of the Association of Library Service to Children, Summer 2014*. <https://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources>
- Stice, M., & Levine, T. (2006). Resources to promote early language and literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.395-412). Washington: Zero to Three Press.
- Stoltz, D., Isett, P., Zang, L., Frye, L., & Sundermann, L. (2015). Just good practice: Engaging families with young children. *Public Libraries Online, 54*(5),27-30.
<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2015/10/just-good-practice-engaging-families-with-young-children/>

- Stooke, R., & McKenzie, P. (2009). Leisure and work in library and community programs for very young children. *Library Trends*, 57(4), 657-675. doi.org/10.1353/lib.0.0065
- Stooke, R., & McKenzie, P. (2011). Under our own umbrella: Mobilizing research evidence for early literacy programs in public libraries. *Progressive Librarian*, 36/37, 15-29, 109-110. https://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL/PL36_37/
- Storch, S., & Whitehurst, G. (2002). Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental psychology*, 38(6), 934. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0012-1649.38.6.934>
- Strempel, G. (2009). Children, early reading and a literate Australia. *Australian Library Journal*, 58(4):362-368. doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2009.10735924
- Sullivan J. (2022). Child development knowledge among new children's librarians. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 63(1), 1937. [doi:10.3138/jelis.2020-0033](https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis.2020-0033)
- Sullivan, M. (2014). It isn't about teaching your child to read. *Public Libraries*, 53(2). <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/>
- Sullivan, M. (2015). *Engaging diverse communities: Developing library services that develop communities*. Perth, Australia. Report for Kay Poustie Scholarship. State Library Foundation. <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/>
- Swaen, B., & George, T. (2022). *What Is a conceptual framework? Tips and examples*. Retrieved from <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/conceptual-framework/>
- Swain, J., & Cara, O. (2017). Changing the home literacy environment through participation in family literacy programmes. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 19(4), 431-458. doi.org/10.1177/1468798417745118
- Swain, J., Cara, O., & Mallows, D. (2017). We occasionally miss a bath, but we never miss stories: Fathers reading to their young children in the home setting. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 17(2), 176-202. doi.org/10.1177/1468798415626635
- Swan Alliance. (2015). *Community Asset and Gap Analysis 2015: Who cares? What children think*. <https://www.ngala.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Community Asset and Gap Analysis 2015.pdf>
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from pre-school to end of key stage 1*. Department for Education and Skills, Nottingham. U.K. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/2156>
- Tassoni, P. (2016). *Reducing educational disadvantage: A strategic approach in the early*

- years. London, UK, Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au>
- Taylor, C. (2016). *The E4Kids study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs (Effective Early Education Experiences): Overview of findings*. Melbourne, Australia, University of Melbourne. https://education.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2929452/E4Kids-Report-3.0 WEB
- Taylor, C., Zubrick, S., & Christensen, D. (2016). Barriers to parent-child book reading in early childhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 48,295-309. doi.org/10.1007/s13158-016-0172-2
- Teager, W., Fox, S., & Stafford, N. (2019). *How Australia can invest in children and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost of late action*. Early Intervention Foundation, Front Project, Telethon Kids Institute. <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/coli/full-report-how-australia-can-invest-in-children-and-return-more---final.pdf>
- Teale, W., & Sulzby, E., (1986). *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ed280004>
- Thurrow, R. (2016). *The first 1,000 days: A crucial time for mothers and children and the world*. New York: Public Affairs. <https://www.thurrow1000days.org/>
- Tough, P. (2013). *How children succeed*. New York: Random House. <https://www.penguin.com>
- Towell, J., Bartram, L., Morrow, S., & Brown, S. (2021). Reading to babies: Exploring the beginnings of literacy. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 21(3),321-337. [doi:10.1177/1468798419846199](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798419846199)
- Train, B., Dalton, P., & Elkin, J. (2000). Embracing inclusion: The critical role of the library. *Library Management*, 21(9), 483-491. [doi:10.1108/01435120010347955/](https://doi.org/10.1108/01435120010347955/)
- Trelease, J. (1982). *The read-aloud handbook*. New York: Penguin Random House. <https://www.penguin.com>
- Turner, M. (2009). *An exploration of kindergarten children's multi-literate practices in their homes*. Doctoral dissertation: Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/803>
- Van Bergen, E., Van Zuijen, T., Bishop, D., & De Jong, P. (2016). Why are home literacy environment and children's reading skills associated? What parental skills reveal. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(2),147-160. doi.org/10.1002/rrq.160
- Van Buren, E. (2016). *Why it's important to introduce a love for reading*. Missouri: St

- Joseph News-Press. <https://www.newspressnow.com/life/why-it-is-important-to-introduce-a-love-for-reading/article>
- Vanobbergen, B., Daems, M., & Van Tilburg, S. (2009). Bookbabies, their parents and the library: An evaluation of a Flemish reading programme in families with young children. *Educational Review*, (61), 277-278. [doi: 10.1080/00131910903045922](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910903045922)
- Vassilakaki, E., & Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, V. (2014). Identifying the prevailing images in library and information science profession: Is the landscape changing? *New Library World*, 115(7/8), 355-375. [doi:10.1108/NLW-03-2014-0](https://doi.org/10.1108/NLW-03-2014-0)
- Velasquez, D., & Campbell-Meier, J. (2018). Marketing practices in Australian libraries: Is promotion enough? *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 67(2), 116-130. [doi:10.1080/24750158.2018.1466429](https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2018.1466429)
- Victoria-and-New South Wales-to-announce-overhaul of-preschool-education. *The Guardian: June 16, 2022*. [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/16/victoria-and-nsw-to-announce-overhaul of-preschool education](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/16/victoria-and-nsw-to-announce-overhaul-of-preschool-education)
- Wahler, E., Provence, M., Helling, J., & Williams, M. (2020). The changing role of libraries: How social workers can help. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*. 101(1), 34-43. [doi:10.1177/1044389419850707](https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389419850707)
- Wakeling, S., Garner, J., Hider, P., Jamali, H., Lymn, J., Mansourian, Y., & Randell-Moon, H. (2021). *The challenge is now for us to remain relevant: Australian public libraries and the Covid-19 crisis*. IFLA. [doi:10.1177/03400352211054115](https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352211054115)
- Waldron, C. (2018). Dream more, learn more, care more, and be more: The Imagination Library influencing storybook reading and early literacy. *Reading Psychology*, 39, 711-728. doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2018.1536094
- Walker, C., Halpin, E., & Rankin, C. (2011). Measuring the value of public libraries: The fallacy of footfall and issues as measures of the value of public libraries: Summary report. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 47(1), 30-42. doi.org/10.1177/0961000613497746
- Walter, V. (2001). *Children and libraries: Getting it right*. Chicago: American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org>
- Wasik, B., & Hindman, A. (2015). Talk alone won't close the 30-million-word gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 96(6), 50-54. [doi:10.1177/0031721715575300](https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715575300)
- Weigel, D., Martin, S., & Bennett, K. (2006). Contributions of the home literacy environment to preschool-aged children's emerging literacy and language skills. *Early Child Development and Care*, (176), 357-378. doi.org/10.1080/03004430500063747

- Weisleder, A., & Fernald, A. (2013). Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary. *Psychological Science*, 24(11), 2143-2152. doi.org/10.1177/0956797613488145
- Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) (2015). *Public library services in Western Australia in 2025: Future Considerations*. Perth, Australia: Western Australian Local Government Association. <https://www.walga.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/Discussion-Paper-Public-Library-Services-in-2025.pdf>
- Widen, S., Orozco, M. & Lai Horng, E. (2020) Reaching unconnected caregivers: Using a text-message education program to better understand how to support informal caregivers' roles in child development. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 18(1), 29-43. doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19888725
- Wildemouth, B. (2017). *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science* (2nd ed.) Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited. <https://www.abc-clio.com/Libraries Unlimited.aspx>
- Williams, K., Berthelsen, D., & Laurens, K. (2022). Academic resilience from school entry to third grade: Child, parenting, and school factors associated with closing competency gaps. *Plos One*, 17(11): e0277551. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277551
- Williamson, K. (2006). Research in constructivist frameworks using ethnographic techniques. *Library Trends*, 55(1), 83-101. [doi:10.1353/lib.2006.0054](https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2006.0054)
- Wilson-Scorgie, D. (2022). Public library play-based early literacy programs: What is the parental experience? *Pathfinder: A Canadian Journal for Information Science Students and Early Career Professionals* 3(1),93-106. doi.org/10.29173/pathfinder53
- Wise, L. (2020). *Outcome-based evaluation of preschool Storytimes: Understanding youth public librarian perceptions*. Master's thesis. North Carolina: University of North Carolina. doi.org/10.17615/pn42-st79
- Wise, S., da Silva, L., Webster, E., & Sanson, A. (2005). *The efficacy of early childhood interventions: A report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Family and community Services*. Research Report No. 14. <https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/712/1/Efficacy%20of%20early%20childhood%20interventions.pdf>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). *Reducing inequities in health across the life-course: Early years, childhood and adolescence*. World Health Organization. <https://www.euro.who.int>
- Wortman, B. (2012). What are they doing and what do they want? The library spaces

customer survey at Edmonton Public Library. *Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 72. doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v7i2.1967

Wright, C. (2021). *To save play, we must precisely define it: An explanatory rubric for play in early childhood*. Master's thesis. New York: Columbia University. doi.org/10.7916/d8-f6zd-dt68

Yeo, L., Ong, W., & Ng, C. (2014). The home literacy environment and preschool children's reading skills and interest. *Early Education and Development*, (25), 791-814. doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2014.862147

Young, T., Sarroub, L., & Babchuck, W. (2019). Literacy access through Storytime: An ethnographic study of public library storytellers in a low-income neighborhood. *Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research* (14), 59-77. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub/375/>

Yu, M., & Daraganova, G. (2014). *Children's early home learning environment and learning outcomes in the early years of school*. Australian Institute of Family Studies. <https://aifs.gov.au/>

Zubrick, S., Taylor, C., & Christensen, D. (2015). Patterns and predictors of language and literacy abilities 4-10 years in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. *PLoS ONE*, 10(9):0135612. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone

Zubrick S. (2018). People Living in Place: Circumstances for early childhood development and learning. In *Connecting Early Years Network Support Program Forum: Western Australian Council of Social Service, Perth, April 12, 2018*. <https://www.kau.se/files/2019-06/Steve%20Zubrick%20CFBUPH%20Conference%20190611%200.pdf>

Zukoski, A., & Luluquisen, E. (2006). Building community support for early literacy. In S.R. Rosenkoetter & J. Knapp-Philo (Eds.), *Learning to read the world: Language and literacy in the first three years* (pp.429-454). Washington: Zero to Three Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Details of library programs from USA, Canada, Ireland and Norway

Appendix B: Participant Consent Forms and Information Letters

Appendix C: Data Collection Instruments

Appendix D: Library Snapshots

Appendix E: Audit Data

Appendix A

Details of library programs from USA, Canada, Ireland and Norway

Table 12: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in the USA (New York Public Library, Brooklyn Central Library and Queens Central Library)

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
ABC Kits	These include a rhyme sheet, CD, tips for parents and a free book delivered to hospital waiting rooms, medical centres, clinics, etc. The program stresses the value of reading with children for just 15 min a day to improve a child's language and literacy skills.
Reading is Fundamental	Visits to schools, homeless shelters, community centres, etc. for distribution of free books to disadvantaged children to start building their own collection of books.
Annual Play Date	A fun day of book-related ideas, activities and language and literacy concepts delivered by libraries at external venues.
Reach Out and Read	A partnership with doctors who 'prescribe' reading. Medical providers promote early language and literacy in paediatric exam rooms and provide free books. This program has been well reviewed.
Kidsmobile	A mobile children's library that visits schools, events, after-school centres, playgrounds, etc. and can be booked for community events.
Pop Up Library in the Park	Pop-Up Library at the beach, laundromat, shopping centre, etc. Bringing resources to the people rather than expecting people to go to the resources.
Every Child Ready to Read	Research-based information in toolkits to empower parents and libraries in their essential roles of nurturing pre-reading skills.
Ready Set Kindergarten	Library based stories and practical activities for children prior to their kindergarten year. Free books are given to children who participate in all six sessions.
Read Play Grow	Parent tuition in encouraging play for babies and toddlers for whom everything they do is a learning opportunity. Easy playful reading and language activities.
Super Science Fun	Partnership of resources and location between Scitech (Sci-Tech Centre of Northern New York) and libraries, encouraging holistic learning and well as increased funding.
Enhanced Storytimes	Including intentional teaching of phonemic awareness, word awareness, print awareness, vocabulary development and general knowledge. In addition, presenters promote the five essential components of early learning: talking, reading, playing, singing and writing.

Table 13: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Canada (Terry Salman Library, Brighthouse Public Library and Surrey Public Library)

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Ready Set Learn	A government program frequently delivered through libraries. Families engage in play-based learning at local schools, enabling children to become confident before entering formal schooling.
Alligator Pie	Delivery of <i>Storytimes</i> and staff training at day cares, including how to read with a child, how to choose suitable books, how to talk purposefully.
Man in the Moon	An award-winning registered programme funded by the Vancouver Public Library Foundation of <i>Storytimes</i> delivered by men for fathers and their babies – no women allowed.
Free for All	Delivering a library presence at markets, parks, festivals, etc.
Reading Buddies	Teenage volunteers buddy up with young children to read together, enabling teenagers to gain school community service credits at the same time as helping the children.
If You Give a Kid a Muffin	<i>Storytimes</i> for low-income and migrant families which include healthy snacks.
HIPPY	A registered programme, in partnership with the health department, for Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters.
Language Fun <i>Storytime</i>	Run at libraries by speech therapists, specifically for children with speech and other learning difficulties.
Lis avec Moi	Book gifting program delivered to families through libraries.

Table 14: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Ireland (Dublin City Library, Balbriggan Library and Tallaght Library)

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Read 2 Me	Talks and activities by library staff for parents, identifying six main pre-reading skills
Help My Kid Learn	A high-profile program partnering children's early childhood education and care, and adult literacy activities. It includes use of smart phone applications as well as traditional games. Printed, wallet-sized folders of information are provided for families on-the-go
Rediscover	A joint Industry-National Library project reminding people that their library is a great local resource for everyone to enjoy.
Shared Library	A library-day care (ECEC) sharing of books and skills, including one big book and multiple copies of the same title in small books. These are used in multiple ways during the week including being read, spoken, acted, mimed, and enriched through craft activities.
Ready 2 Read	Improving activities in disadvantaged communities in partnership with R.A.P.I.D. (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment & Development)
Vocational Class Interaction	ECEC students enrolled in vocational classes are encouraged to engage with library <i>Storytimes</i> . They are taught how to select books from the library suitable for young children, and they are encouraged to work personally with local families

Table 15: Early Childhood Programs in Three Libraries in Norway (Oslo Public Library, Holmlia Library and Grunerlokka Library)

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Read to Me Dad	Meeting fathers at sports tracks, gyms, shelters, prisons, etc. to talk about reading and to encourage men to be role models for their children
Strive for Five	Extending language and understanding between adults and children by at least five to-and-fro interactions
The Silver Suitcase	Delivering boxes of library books to day care centres, Playgroups, etc. either regularly or for special occasions
Mini Libraries	Set up in waiting rooms, bus stations, cultural venues, etc. from which people could 'borrow' a book which did not have to be returned
Lesefro	'Sowing the seed' of literacy through delivery of resources, training and book-related fun at day care centres. The programme includes all-day book parties, displays of activities using the books that have been lent and modelling how to read with children. The Lesefro contract between libraries and day cares requires books to be used every day, plus rep

Appendix B

Participant Consent Forms and Information Letters

1. Consent Form examples: Parents and Staff

Principal Researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027



Participant Consent Form

Parents – Interviews

Project title: How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.

Approval Number: 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS

I, _____, have received a copy of the Participant Information Letter for this research. I have read and understood what is being asked of me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that if I have additional questions I can ask the researcher.

By signing this Consent Form, I acknowledge that I understand that my participation in this research will include:

- One 45-minute interview with the researcher either face-to-face at a suitable venue of my choice, or via Skype or telephone;
- With permission, having my conversations digitally recorded;
- Understanding that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that the identity of participants will not be disclosed without consent.
- Understanding that the information provided will be used for the purposes of this research project, and may be reported in journal articles and presentations;
- Understanding that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty; and
- Freely agreeing to participate in the project.

Participant name:

Participant role:

Email address:

Signature:

Date

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. If at any time you are not satisfied the research or wish to make a complaint about the research process, you may contact the Human Research Ethics team on 6304 2170 or by emailing them at research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Principal Researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027



Participant Consent Form

Local Government Councillors and Staff

Project title: How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.

Approval Number: 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS

Principal Researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks

I, _____, have received a copy of the Participant Information Letter for this research. I have read and understood what is being asked of me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that if I have additional questions, I can ask the researcher.

By signing this Consent Form, I acknowledge that I understand that my participation in this research will include:

- One 45-minute face-to-face interview with the researcher at my Local Government Offices or nominated local public library;
- Making available project material, information letters and consent forms at my library and/or Council offices for distribution to potential participants, and answering questions and/or referring interested parents to the researcher;
- With permission, having my conversations digitally recorded;
- Understanding that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that the identity of participants will not be disclosed without consent.
- Understanding that the information provided will be used for the purposes of this research project, and may be reported in journal articles and presentations;
- Understanding that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty; and
- Freely agreeing to participate in the project.

Participant name:

Participant role:

Email address:

Signature:

Date

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. If at any time you are not satisfied the research or wish to make a complaint about the research process, you may contact the Human Research Ethics team on 6304 2170 or by emailing them at research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

2. Information Letter examples: Parents and Staff

Principal Researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks
School of Education
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027



Participant Information Letter

Parents - Focus Group

Project title: How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.

Approval number: 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS

Principal researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks

An invitation to participate in research.

You are invited to participate in a project titled “How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.” This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University. This project seeks to:

- Gather opinions of how stakeholders, Local Government Councillors, staff and parents view public library support for language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years;
- Describe how public libraries currently support language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years, and their parents; and
- Understand how library activities are translated into language and literacy activities in children’s homes.

You are being asked to take part in this project because you are a parent of a child from birth to three years. Please read this information carefully and ask about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about.

What is this project about?

This project aims to increase our knowledge about how public libraries currently support parents in the development of their child’s language and literacy learning from birth to three years. The purpose of the project is to describe early literacy activities, not to judge or assess the libraries or their programs.

It is anticipated that the research will boost public library support for children from birth to three years, along with increasing family engagement with language and literacy activities.

What does my participation involve?

Your participation in this research project will involve:

1. Taking part in one 45-minute Focus Group with the researcher, held at a local public library. Participants will be guided through discussion points and asked to give their opinions and perceptions.

2. Encouraging friends or acquaintances who have children from birth to three years to take part in the project.



Do I have to take part in this research project?

No. Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to and it will not disadvantage you or affect relationships with the library, the researcher or ECU. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are able to withdraw. However, if the project has already been published at the time you withdraw, your contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication. If you wish to know the outcomes of the study, please ask the researcher for a report at the end of her project.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information Letter to keep, and a Consent Form to sign. By signing this Consent Form, you are telling us that you understand what you have read and consent to take part in the research project.

What will happen to the information I give? The data will be analyzed, and used to write a thesis, and may also be published in a journal/book and given at conferences. Data will be coded and no names used, so that participants will be non-identifiable. Data will be stored securely in a lockable cabinet in an office at ECU or at the researcher's premises, and will be accessed only by the research team working on the project. The data will be stored for twenty-five years in accordance with the Western Australian University Sector Disposal Authority, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copy data and permanently erasing electronic data.

Has this research been approved? This research project has received the approval of Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The approval number is 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS.

Contacts

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this project, please contact:

Name	Ruth Campbell-Hicks
Role	Researcher/PhD Candidate
Institution	Edith Cowan University

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA 6027

Phone: (08) 6304 2170, Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Sincerely,

Ruth Campbell-Hicks

Researcher

Principal Researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks
School of Education, Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Participant Information Letter

Local Government Councillors and Staff

Project title: How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.

Approval number: 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS

Principal researcher: Ruth Campbell-Hicks

An invitation to participate in research.

You are invited to participate in a project titled “How Public Libraries in Western Australia seek to support the language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years.” This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University. This project seeks to:

- Gather opinions of how stakeholders, Local Government Councillors, staff and parents view public library support for language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years;
- Describe how public libraries currently support language and literacy learning of children from birth to three years, and their parents; and
- Understand how library activities are translated into language and literacy activities in children’s homes.

You are being asked to take part in this project because you are a Local Government Councillor or library staff member. Please read this information carefully. Ask the researcher questions about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about.

What is this project about?

This project aims to increase our knowledge about how public libraries currently support parents in the development of their child’s language and literacy learning from birth to three years. The purpose of the project is to describe early literacy activities, not to judge or assess the libraries or their programs.

It is anticipated that the research will boost public library support for children from birth to three years, along with increasing family engagement with language and literacy activities.

What does my participation involve?

Your participation in this research project will involve:

1. Taking part in one 45-minute face-to-face interview with the researcher. Interviewees will be guided through a series of discussion points and asked to give their opinions and perceptions. The interview will be held at the Local Government Offices or participating local public library.
2. Making project material, Information Letters and Consent Forms available at the library and/or Council offices for distribution to potential parent participants, and answering questions and/or referring interested parents to the researcher.

Do I have to take part in this research project?

No. Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do

not have to, and it will not disadvantage you or affect relationships with the library, the researcher or ECU. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are able to withdraw. However, if the project has already been published at the time you decide to withdraw, your contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication. If you wish to know the outcomes of the study, please ask the researcher for a report at the end of her project.

If you decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information Letter to keep, and a Consent Form to sign. By signing this Consent Form, you are telling us that you understand what you have read and consent to take part in the research project.

What will happen to the information I give? The data will be analyzed and used to write a thesis, and may also be published in a journal/book, and given at conferences. Coding will be used in the data to ensure that participants are non-identifiable. Data will be stored securely in a lockable cabinet in an office at ECU or at the researcher's premises and will be accessed only by the research team working on the project. The data will be stored for twenty-five years in accordance with the Western Australian University Sector Disposal Authority, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copy data and permanently erasing electronic data.

Has this research been approved?

This research project has received the approval of Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The approval number is 019-00022 CAMPBELLHICKS.

Contacts: If you would like to discuss any aspect of this project, please contact:

Name	Ruth Campbell-Hicks
Role	Researcher/PhD Candidate
Institution	Edith Cowan University

Or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170, Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au
Sincerely,

Ruth Campbell-Hicks
Researcher

Appendix C:

Data Collection Instruments

1. Audit and Observation Checklists

Audit checklist

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: size, colour, style, safety, suitability, number	Condition E – Exc'nt F – Fair P - Poor	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area			
02	Layout of children's area			
03	Buggy parking			
04	Feeding facilities			
05	Toilet/change facilities			
06	Storage facilities			
07	Computers			
08	Coffee			
09	Drinking water			
10	Quiet area			
11	Active/noisy area			
12	Imaginative play			
13	Solo area			
14	Group area			
15	Flooring			
16	Décor			
17	Book displays			
18	Toy arrangement			
19	Signage			
20	Shelving			
21	Tables			
22	Seating			
23	Storytime place			
24	Free space			
25	Clutter			
26	Location in library			
27	Location in building			
28	Parking spaces			
29	Public transport			
30	Ramps			
31	Safe doors			
32	Staff proximity			

33	Temperature control			
34				

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: size, colour, style, suitability, number, safety	Condition E – Exc'nt F – Fair P - Poor	Notes
01	Staff numbers		N/A	
02	Staff levels		N/A	
03	Staff interest		N/A	
04	Staff experience		N/A	
05	Staff qualifications		N/A	
06	Number of books			Per head of pop?
07	Suitability of books			
08	Number of toys			
09	Suitability of toys			
10	Number of kits			
11	Suitability of kits			
12	Technology			
13	Suitability of technology			

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, duration, craft, teaching, singing, parent information	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime			
02	Library Rhymetime			
03	Library Playtime			
04	Off premises sessions			
05	Irregular events			
06	One off events			
07	Linked events			
08	Staff training			
09				

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets			
03	Booklists			
04	Posters			
05	Newsletters			
06	Newspapers			
07	Websites			

08	Social media	Facebook; Instagram		
----	--------------	---------------------	--	--

Observation Checklist

Date	
Time	
Library name	
Library code	
Staff pseudonym (1)	
Staff pseudonym (2)	
Session type	
Number of children	
Number of parents/carers	

Social observations	
---------------------	--

Literacy observations	
-----------------------	--

2. Focus Group and Interview Questions

Focus Group Questions

RQ Topic Time		Questions to stimulate discussion	Encourage
RQ1 Current Services 1.45 – 2.00	1	What specific language and literacy services for children from birth to three years are you aware of at public libraries in WA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * At your local library * At other libraries that you have visited * At the State Library * At other venues * Through other agencies
	2	Are you aware of other library services for children from birth to three years that may have a different focus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Do these impact on language and literacy in any way? * Are they useful?
RQ2 Supports and impediments 2.00 – 2.15	3	Do you engage with any of these services? If so, what supports you to take part?	SUPPORTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Something to do * Suitable time * Friendly staff * Social for parents * Educational for baby
	4	If not, what prevents you from taking part?	IMPEDIMENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Time of sessions * Transport * Uncomfortable at the library with noisy toddler * Baby is too young * Not interested * Not useful * Too busy
	5	How do you feel when you are taking part in these services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Happy/relaxed * Overwhelmed * Bored * Interested * Anxious * The people and staff are/aren't friendly

<p>RQ3</p> <p>How effective are library programs in influencing HLEs</p> <p>2.15 – 2.25</p>	6	Do you feel that library programs have supported your child with their language and literacy learning? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Modelling by staff * Encouraging talking * Increased vocabulary * Interest in books * Social engagement
	7	If not, can you say why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Child too young * Sessions not fun or interactive * Same every week
	8	Could you say how much the library might have helped?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Comparing before and after engagement with Storytime/ rhyme time * Comparing child's interest in books before and after library use?
	9	Have you learnt anything at the library that you have then done at home ? Is this often, or just occasional?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Word play * How to read with small children * Crafts and games
	10	If you haven't transferred any library activities to your home, why is that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Already have plenty to do there * Too busy * Other children need attention * Not interested * They can do it when they are at school
2.25 – 2.30		Anything else? Debrief, thank you and informal chat	

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR STAFF

RQ Topic Time		Questions to stimulate discussion	Encourage
Introduction 8.30-8.35		<p>Could you please tell me some details about your professional background and work?</p> <p>Do you have knowledge about the early childhood field, or particular interest in it?</p> <p>Are you happy to give personal opinions as well as professional ones?</p>	
RQ1 Current Services 8.35-8.45	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>	<p>What specific services for children from birth to three years are offered at libraries in WA?</p> <p>What policies are in place for library services for children from birth to three years in WA?</p> <p>How strongly do libraries and early childhood services feature in the budgets of your organization?</p> <p>How much political support is expressed by your members for library services, and how do they fit with other priorities?</p> <p>What are your organization's future directions in the early childhood field?</p>	<p>* Regular</p> <p>* Occasional</p> <p>* General services</p> <p>* For parents</p> <p>* How proactive</p> <p>* Through other Agencies</p> <p>* Documentation</p> <p>* Business plans</p> <p>* Demographics</p> <p>* Finances</p>
RQ2 Supports and impediments 8.45-9.00	<p>6</p> <p>7</p>	<p>What factors support effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs in WA?</p> <p>What factors are impediments to effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs in WA?</p>	<p>* Policies</p> <p>* Senior staff</p> <p>* Resources</p> <p>* Promotion</p> <p>* Policies</p> <p>* Time constraints</p> <p>* Resources/budget</p> <p>* Lack of awareness</p> <p>* Other priorities</p>
RQ3 Impacts and transfer to HLEs 9.00 – 9.10	<p>8</p> <p>9</p>	<p>Does your organization implement ways of measuring the effectiveness and impact of library services? Do they have ways of knowing when to develop new services?</p> <p>Does your organization have any knowledge about the effect of library services on HLEs? Is this important? Why or why not?</p>	<p>* Parent feedback</p> <p>* Child actions</p> <p>* Staff reflection</p> <p>* Parent survey</p> <p>* Anecdotes</p> <p>* School/AEDC info</p>
9.10-9.15		<p>Anything else?</p> <p>Conclusion and de-brief</p>	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARY STAFF
Management Staff and Operational Staff

RQ/Topic Time	Q.	Questions to stimulate discussion	Encourage
Introduction 8.30-8.35		<p>Could you please tell me some details about your professional background and work? What is your current role?</p> <p>Do you have specialist knowledge about early childhood, or particular interest in it?</p> <p>Are you happy to give personal opinions as well as professional ones?</p>	
RQ1 Current Services 8.35-8.45	1 2	<p>What specific language and literacy services for children from birth to three years do you offer at your library/ies?</p> <p>Do you offer other library services for children from birth to three years that have an alternative focus?</p>	<p>* Regular * Occasional * General services * For parents</p> <p>* Do these impact on language and literacy * What is the purpose?</p>
RQ2 Supports and impediments 8.45-9.00	3 4	<p>What factors support effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs? At your library/ies and state-wide?</p> <p>What factors are impediments to effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs? At your library/ies and state wide?</p>	<p>* Policies * Senior staff * Skilled staff * Resources * Promotion</p> <p>* Policies * Time constraints * Staff skills * Resources/budget * Lack of awareness * Other priorities</p>
RQ3 Impacts and transfer to HLEs 9.00-9.10	5 6 7 8	<p>What impact do you believe your library-based programs to have?</p> <p>What factors are included in your assessment? How do you measure impact?</p> <p>How much, and how effectively, do you believe library activities are transferred to HLEs?</p> <p>What factors are included in your assessment? How do you know?</p>	<p>* Parent feedback * Child actions * Staff reflection</p> <p>* Parent survey * Anecdotes * School/AEDC feedback</p>
9.10-9.15		Conclusion and de-brief	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILLORS

RQ Topic Time		Questions to stimulate discussion	Encourage
Introduction 8.30-8.35		<p>Could you please tell me some details about your professional background and work?</p> <p>Do you have knowledge about the early childhood field, or particular interest in it?</p> <p>Are you happy to give personal opinions as well as professional ones?</p>	
RQ1 Current Services 8.35-8.45	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p>	<p>What specific services for children from birth to three years are offered at the libraries in your City/Shire?</p> <p>What policies are in place for library services for children from birth to three years in your City/Shire?</p> <p>How strongly do libraries and early childhood services feature in your budgets?</p> <p>How much political support is expressed by Council members for library services, and how do they fit with other Council priorities?</p> <p>What are your Council's future directions in the early childhood field?</p>	<p>* Regular</p> <p>* Occasional</p> <p>* General services</p> <p>* For parents</p> <p>* How proactive</p> <p>* Through other Agencies</p> <p>* Documentation</p> <p>* Business plans</p> <p>* Demographics</p> <p>* Finances</p>
RQ2 Supports and impediments 8.45-9.00	<p>6</p> <p>7</p>	<p>What factors support effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs? In your City/Shire and state-wide?</p> <p>What factors are impediments to effective provision of library based early language and literacy programs? In your City/Shire and state-wide?</p>	<p>* Policies</p> <p>* Senior staff</p> <p>* Resources</p> <p>* Promotion</p> <p>* Policies</p> <p>* Time constraints</p> <p>* Resources/budget</p> <p>* Lack of awareness</p> <p>* Other priorities</p>
RQ3 Impacts and transfer to HLEs 9.00 – 9.10	<p>8</p> <p>9</p>	<p>Does your City/Shire implement ways of measuring the impact of library services? Do they have ways of knowing when to develop new services?</p> <p>Does your City/Shire have any knowledge about the effect of library services on HLEs? Is this important? Why or why not?</p>	<p>* Parent feedback</p> <p>* Child actions</p> <p>* Staff reflection</p> <p>* Parent survey</p> <p>* Anecdotes</p> <p>* School/AEDC info</p>
9.10-9.15		<p>Anything else?</p> <p>Conclusion and de-brief</p>	

Appendix D

Library Snapshots

The researcher's field notes were used to create descriptive snapshots of six different events, providing rich data about real-life library based early language and literacy activities. Three snapshots are given at metropolitan libraries and three at regional libraries. No snapshots are given of the rural library as no young families visited on the occasions when the researcher was present.

Storytime at a metropolitan library

The presenter was the Library Manager. She asked first for listening ears and then for children to put out their hands to sing and play Open Shut Them, followed by roll them, shake them and blow a kiss. She then gradually took items out of a beach bag and talked about them: bucket and spade, towel, sunscreen, hat etc. The presenter offered multiple opportunities for oral language use, asking, 'Has anyone been to the beach?' and 'What did you do there?' She talked about sand, waves and paddling. The story 'Grandpa and Thomas' about a visit to the beach was then read. For the entire session, one child was up close and jumping excitedly in front of the presenter, wanting to touch the pictures and talk about them.

Early language and literacy content included:

Vocabulary: umbrella, spade, blanket, seagull

Colours: green and yellow umbrella

Numbers: counting the three shells and five stones

General knowledge: crabs and things at the seashore

Feelings: I like picnics, what happened to the sandcastle, being tired

Concepts: old person and young person, going-home time

Onomatopoeia: splish splash splosh, snippy snappy

Sounds: alliteration with letter S

Rhyming: nippy snippy

Repetition: swish swoosh swish sings the sea

Fingerplays, songs and rhymes

Rhymetime at a metropolitan library

The regular program format consisted of a welcome song followed by a story, song, story and final song. There was a general theme for the stories and a take-home craft. The choice of songs was consistent from week to week to build confidence among the children from familiarity and repetition. There was minimal interaction between the presenter and children, although parents/carers did model actions to their children, and they seemed comfortable and happy. No early language and literacy tips or other information was given about colours, shapes or numbers. Staff had attended *Better Beginnings* training at the State Library of Western Australia but said that they did just what they were comfortable with.

Rhymetime at a metropolitan library

The presenter followed a regular routine of ten traditional nursery rhymes and songs from a printed sheet that was used weekly. Numbers were included in a rocket song that counted 5,4,3,2,1. All the adults joined in the singing when asked and also the actions, encouraging their babies to do the same. This included 'scaring' their baby by leaning over hard to one side when singing 'Uncle John', causing cautious laughter from the adults and a few squeals from the babies. The presenter gave adults instructions of how to draw on their child's back. She did not elaborate on this practice. During the 30-minute session babies listened, looked, clapped, laughed, stretched (helped by adults), marched (carried by adults) and followed directions (shown by adults).

Storytime at a regional library

The presenter was familiar with the *Storytime* format, although apparently not well known to the children and parents/carers. One child got on and off a chair repeatedly, played with Duplo, and required adult attention. It was unclear whether he was playing and listening at the same time, or just playing. His older sister who was about seven years old sat very still and appeared to be listening carefully and with interest. Two of the children – both boys of about three or four years old – were highly engaged and pulled their small chairs up as close to the presenter as possible, until they were about 10cm from her face. One of the boys ran back to his grandparents occasionally, and then

returned to his place in front of the presenter. During the songs all the children followed directions, including saying hoorah, stamping, clapping, singing. The children laughed during the songs. One set of grandparents joined in, and the other set did not join in. The single mother sat quietly. The presenter mostly read the stories straight through, with an occasional comment about the content.

Storytime at a regional library

Toddlers were running around while mothers sat on comfortable chairs or with the children on the floor. Some children were looking at books, briefly but with interest. *Storytime* was presented by a young man who was experienced at doing *Rhymetime* and *Storytime* and was comfortable with the mothers and children. He had a quiet voice which resulted in a calm atmosphere. A similar sequence of songs was used in the *Storytime* as in the earlier *Rhymetime* and a short story with rhyming text was added in the middle. It took a little under 30 minutes, by which time children's concentration had lapsed.

Rhymetime at a regional library

The group of 11 mothers, two fathers, babies from one month old, twins of three months old and toddlers was active and busy. Babies were laid on blankets on the floor in front of their mothers, enabling good sight lines between the baby and the mother. Breastfeeding took place quietly after the session. *Rhymetime* was led by an energetic and competent staff member who had previous experience as both an early childhood educator and as a singer. She had a confident manner, good speaking voice, and audience-management skills. She knew most of the families and was keen to welcome those who were there for the first time. She was well prepared and did not need to refer to her list of songs during the 20 minutes allocated for *Rhymetime*. She found 20 minutes to be a suitable length of time for young babies.

Appendix E

Audit Data

Audit 1

PARTICIPANT CODE: L2a

AUDIT NO: 01

MODE: On site, weekday morning during term time

DATE: 11/09/2019

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	9 x 15 paces plus extra colouring-in table near the library's front door	F	
02	Layout of children's area	Specific area defined by low children's bookshelves, plus one bay of Parent Information Centre books. Carpeted; variety of seating; windows allowing natural light and views to an outdoor sitting area	F	
03	Pram parking	No specific place		Plenty of space for prams within the library
04	Feeding facilities	No		Comfortable chairs available
05	Toilet/change facilities	Clean and modern. Male, Female, and Baby Change room		
06	Storage facilities	No		
07	Computers	Two specifically for children		
08	Coffee	Vending machine in coffee area		
09	Drinking water	In foyer		
10	Quiet area	Individual desks located away from high traffic areas		Not enclosed but still quite private
11	Active/noisy area	Two large computer/meeting rooms available for activities		In the library building but not in the library itself
12	Imaginative play	Coloured pencils and paper available		
13	Solo area	Individual desks in main library		
14	Group area	Seating arranged to encourage social interaction		Used by knitters, people with

Ruth Campbell-Hicks

				disability, home schoolers
15	Flooring	Carpet	F	Well used
16	Décor	Corporate feel	F	
17	Book displays	On accessible shelves, including a number of copies of one title	E	
18	Toy arrangement	2 boxes in children's area	E	
19	Signage	None specifically for children		
20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children	F	
21	Tables	4 colourful children's tables	F	
22	Seating	Variety of comfortable seating for adults. Floor space for children. Children's chairs at the low tables	F	
23	Storytime place	In children's area	F	No defined area
24	Free space	In main library	F	
25	Clutter	Mostly clear of clutter		
26	Location in library	Close to staff desk and away from adult study areas		
27	Location of building	The whole building was the library and attached community meeting rooms. A shopping centre was 5 minutes' walk away across a main thoroughfare		
28	Parking spaces and cost	Shady parking spaces in library-specific car park, including ACROD bays		
29	Public transport	Bus stop within 1 minutes' walk		
30	Ramps	Not required		
31	Doors	Self-opening doors entering into large and spacious foyer		
32	Staff proximity	Close to children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Staff	4 FTE including both full time and part time		
02	Staff levels	Generous		
03	Staff interest	A number of grumbles		
04	Staff experience and training	Varied - generally not library based. Training available. Varied confidence in delivering literacy messages		
05	Staff qualifications	At management level only		
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards		

07	Suitability of books	Selected by qualified city librarian		<p>Board Books of strong cardboard or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large, clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as being furry, soft, fluffy, bumpy, smooth.</p> <p>JK books with illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease</p> <p>Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books</p>
08	AV materials			<p>Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, Blu-ray and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book</p>
09	Number of toys	2 boxes of blocks and Duplo		
10	Suitability of toys	Suitable for young children		
11	Kits	BB backpacks plus dementia and child-friendly Make-it kits to borrow		Make-it kits were a feature
12	Suitability of kits	High level of suitability		
13	Technology	2 children's computers		

14	Suitability of technology	Yes – some educational programs installed		
----	---------------------------	---	--	--

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	Once a week during term time plus mixed-age Storytime during holidays. Low literacy content		
02	Library Rhymetime	Baby rhyme time once a week Toddler Rhymetime once a week Low literacy content		
03	Library Playtime	No		
04	STE(A)M and other	STEAM for toddlers once a week during term time; some literacy content		
04	Off-premises sessions	Being considered at schools		
05	Irregular events	Yes - holiday activities arranged in-house		
06	One-off events	Outreach events arranged by management as required		
07	Linked events	Intergenerational, community and educational events arranged by management as required		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	Christmas bingo (for older children) Communi-tea (for adults)	Yes	
02	Brochures/pamphlets	Commercially printed pamphlet detailing all early childhood sessions in the city's libraries and museum	Yes	Created by Marketing Department
03	Booklists	BB Deadly books for little kids BB 30 books for curious kids BB 30 books for 4s and 5s BB 30 books to read before you're 3	Yes Yes Yes Yes	
04	Posters	2 commercial posters in children's area		
05	Newsletters	Digital		
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	City-based		
08	Social media	Facebook, Instagram		

Audit 2

PARTICIPANT CODE: L3

AUDIT NO: 02

MODE: On site, weekday morning during term time

DATE: 07/02/2020

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	4 x 4 paces; large windows looking out to garden	E	Integrated with the rest of the library
02	Layout of children's area	Specific area defined by brightly coloured children's carpet, and low children's bookshelves. Windows allowing natural light and view to small garden. Interesting fish net display above	E	Comfortable and clean
03	Pram parking	No specific place. Prams could be left unattended in the foyer		
04	Feeding facilities	No		
05	Toilet/change facilities	In adjacent building		
06	Storage facilities	No		
07	Computers	Four computers for general library use. Located in adult area but can be used by children on request	E	
08	Coffee	No		
09	Drinking water	No		
10	Quiet area	No		The library was too small
11	Active/noisy area	No		The library was too small
12	Imaginative play	Children's area had imaginative art		
13	Solo area	No		
14	Group area	A table at the far end of the library enabled group gatherings		
15	Flooring	Carpet	F	
16	Décor	Corporate feel	F	
17	Book displays	One	P	Appeared to be several months old
18	Toy arrangement	1 box in children's area	E	
19	Signage	None specifically for children		

Ruth Campbell-Hicks

20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children	E	
21	Tables	In adult area only		
22	Seating	No comfortable seating Study chairs around the table		Too small
23	Storytime place	Colourful mat in children's area	E	
24	Free space	No	E	Too small
25	Clutter	Clear of clutter		
26	Location in library	Close to staff desk and to entrance		
27	Location of building	Adjacent to Shire administration and also close to Playgroup and the Community Centre. The shops and main street were 2 minutes' walk away		
28	Parking spaces and cost	Shady parking spaces in conjunction with the Shire building, including ACROD bay		
29	Public transport	No public transport in town		
30	Ramps	Not required		
31	Doors	Heavy double glass doors entering into small foyer – not self-opening		
32	Staff proximity	Close to children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Staff	1 FTE consisting of 3 part-timers	N/A	
02	Staff levels	Generous	N/A	
03	Staff interest	Moderate	N/A	
04	Staff experience and training	Minimal Not confident to deliver literacy messages	N/A	
05	Staff qualifications	None	N/A	
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards	E	
07	Suitability of books	Mixed - according to profile given to SLWA		Board Books of strong cardboard or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large, clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as

				being furry, soft, fluffy, bumpy or smooth. JK books with illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease of use. Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books
08	AV materials			Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book
09	Number of toys	1 box of donated soft toys and blocks	F	
10	Suitability of toys	Suitable for very young children	E	
11	Number of kits	No		
12	Suitability of kits	N/A		
13	Technology	None in children's area	E	
14	Suitability of technology	N/A		

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	No		
02	Library Rhymetime	No		
03	Library Playtime	No		

04	STE(A)M or other	No		
05	Off-premises sessions	No		
06	Irregular events	No		
07	One-off events	Non-library events arranged by Community Development Dept. using library premises as the location		
08	Linked events	Non-library events arranged by Community Development Dept. using library premises as the location		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	Opening hours leaflet only	Yes	
02	Brochures/pamphlets	Five flyers of local information	Yes	
03	Booklists	No		
04	Posters	Yes – advertising community events		Faded
05	Newsletters	Free printed community newsletter	Yes	
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	Yes – Shire based		
08	Social media	Facebook page not active		

Audit 3

PARTICIPANT CODE: L1a

AUDIT NO: 03

MODE: On site, weekday morning during term time. Covid-19 distancing restrictions in place

DATE: 05/08/2020

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition Excellent <u>Fair</u> Poor	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	7 x 16 paces; large windows looking out to the street gave plenty of natural light and a spacious feel	E	Integrated with the rest of the library
02	Layout of children's area	Open area with children's coloured mat, Lego table and varied seating	E	Furniture suitable and in good condition
03	Pram parking	No specific place. Prams could be brought in		
04	Feeding facilities	No		Comfortable seating available
05	Toilet/change facilities	Clean and including Male, Female and Baby Change facilities	E	
06	Storage facilities	Lockers available in main library	E	
07	Computers	One catalogue computer with large, coloured keys	E	
08	Coffee	No		
09	Drinking water	In foyer		
10	Quiet area	Adult study areas were upstairs and away from the children's area. There was one room available for quiet study	E	
11	Active/noisy area	The quiet room could also be used for noisy activities!	E	
12	Imaginative play	Nothing specific		
13	Solo area	Study desks upstairs		
14	Group area	In main library		
15	Flooring	Carpet and children's mat	F	
16	Décor	Colourful. Rainbow painted on the big window	E	
17	Book displays	BB backpacks	E	
18	Toy arrangement	Removed due to Covid-19		
19	Signage	None specifically for children		

20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children	E	
21	Tables	Lego table only	E	
22	Seating	Bench seat, 2 comfortable adult chairs, 3 comfortable stools for adults, 3 plastic 'mushroom' stools for children, novelty chairs	E	
23	Storytime place	Defined by different coloured carpet	E	
24	Free space	No		Library felt crowded
25	Clutter	Clear of clutter		
26	Location in library	Close to sunny windows, away from study desks and from front entry		
27	Location of building	Adjacent to city buildings, opposite a small shopping centre and 5 minutes' drive to a major shopping centre		
28	Parking spaces and cost	None specifically for the library. Some cheap on-street parking nearby		
29	Public transport	Bus stop and train station within 2 minutes' walk		
30	Ramps	Not required; Lift for upstairs floor		
31	Doors	Self-opening doors to enter the building through a foyer		
32	Staff proximity	Away from children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>E</u> xcellent <u>F</u> air <u>P</u> oor	Notes
01	Staff	2 in the workroom, 2 allocated to children's programs, 3 on the floor. Staff rotate duties every 2 hours, except for children's programs. Some staff worked at other libraries as required, especially the children's program staff who work across all locations in the city		
02	Staff levels	Generous		
03	Staff interest	A few grumbles. Those who don't like children don't work with them, although that is contrary to city policy		
04	Staff experience	Unqualified but well experienced through years working with children.		

		Not confident to deliver literacy messages.		
05	Staff qualifications	BB training for children's program staff; support and structure provided by management		
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards	F	
07	Suitability of books	Yes - selected by city library staff		<p>Board Books of strong cardboard or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large, clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as being furry, soft, fluffy, bumpy or smooth.</p> <p>JK books with illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease of use.</p> <p>Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books</p>
08	AV materials			<p>Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, Blu-ray and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book</p>
09	Number of toys	Removed due to Covid-19		
10	Suitability of toys	N/A		

11	Number of kits	BB bags removed due to Covid-19		
12	Suitability of kits	N/A		
13	Technology	One catalogue computer		
14	Suitability of technology	Suitable for children		

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	Once a week during term time - online and live streamed during Covid-19 Some literacy content		Digital display of words in large format
02	Library Rhymetime	Once a week during term time - online and live streamed during Covid-19 Some literacy content		Digital display of words in large format
03	Library Playtime	Craft once a week online including live-streamed instructions plus craft packs Some literacy content		
04	STE(A)M or other	Not currently		
05	Off-premises sessions	Have been held at the local shopping centre as required		
06	Irregular events	Holiday activities in-house		
07	One-off events	Arranged by management rather than library staff		
08	Linked events	Arranged by management rather than library staff		
09	Incentives	Incentives to attend multiple story-times or read to their children had been developed by literacy experts, culminating in a small ceremony and book prize		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	No. On screens only		
03	Booklists	No		
04	Posters	No		
05	Newsletters	Digital		
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	Yes – city-based		
08	Social media	Facebook; Instagram		

Audit 4

PARTICIPANT CODE: L2b

AUDIT NO: 04

MODE: On site, weekday morning during term time

DATE: 11/08/2020

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>E</u> xcellent <u>F</u> air <u>P</u> oor	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	15 x 20 paces plus extra colouring-in table near the library's front door	E	Integrated with the whole library
02	Layout of children's area	Specific area defined by low children's bookshelves. Carpeted; variety of seating; full wall of windows allowing natural light and people from the outside able to look inside	E	Furniture in good condition – all items less than 3 years old
03	Pram parking	No specific place		Plenty of space for prams within the library
04	Feeding facilities	None specifically signed		
05	Toilet/change facilities	In the adjacent shopping centre and used by shoppers as well as library customers. Clean and modern. Male, female, and Baby Change room		
06	Storage facilities	No		
07	Computers	No		
08	Coffee	In adjacent shopping centre		
09	Drinking water	In adjacent shopping centre		
10	Quiet area	Two meeting rooms available, but no specific study areas. Adult areas were located away from the children's area although it was essentially one large open space	E	
11	Active/noisy area	In the main area of the library		Children's engagement enjoyed by other customers
12	Imaginative play	Colourful child-created art on display		
13	Solo area	No		
14	Group area	Separate meeting room available		
15	Flooring	Carpet	E	
16	Décor	Modern and colourful	E	

17	Book displays	On accessible shelves and changed regularly	E	
18	Toy arrangement	Removed due to Covid-19		
19	Signage	None specifically for children		
20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children	E	
21	Tables	4 colourful children's tables	E	
22	Seating	Comfortable seating for adults. Floor space for children. Children's chairs at the low tables	E	
23	Storytime place	In children's area	E	
24	Free space	Very spacious	E	
25	Clutter	Clear of clutter		
26	Location in library	At far end of library away from busy loans/photocopying area		
27	Location of building	The library space was leased from the new, large shopping centre in which it was located. Shop front location with picture windows		
28	Parking spaces and cost	Hundreds of spaces for shopping centre and for the library, including ACROD bays and Pram bays. Minimal shade.		
29	Public transport	Bus stop within 1 minutes' walk		
30	Ramps	Not required		
31	Doors	Self-opening doors entering library/community foyer		
32	Staff proximity	Away from children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Staff numbers	4 FTE including both full time and part time		
02	Staff levels	Generous		
03	Staff interest	Tight knit team with high interest and engagement		
04	Staff experience	Varied and useful; high confidence in delivering literacy messages		
05	Staff qualifications	One tertiary qualified and one fully EC trained. All staff trained in Storytime and Rhymetime delivery		
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards		
07	Suitability of books	Selected by qualified central librarian		Board Books of strong cardboard

				<p>or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large, clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as being furry, soft, fluffy, bumpy or smooth.</p> <p>JK books with bold illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease of use.</p> <p>Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books</p>
08	AV materials			<p>Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, Blu-ray and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book</p>
09	Number of toys	Removed due to Covid-19		
10	Suitability of toys	N/A		
11	Kits	BB backpacks on display		
12	Suitability of kits	High		
13	Technology	No		
14	Suitability of technology	N/A		

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	Once a week during term time Special literacy Storytime once a week Very high literacy content		
02	Library Rhymetime	Baby Rhymetime once a week Toddler Rhymetime once a week High literacy content		
03	Library Playtime	No		
04	STE(A)M and other	STEAM on Saturdays during term time High literacy content		
04	Off-premises sessions	Held on demand and by arrangement in the shopping centre in which the library is situated High literacy content		
05	Irregular events	Holiday activities in-house		
06	One-off events	Outreach events arranged by management as required		
07	Linked events	Intergenerational, community and educational events arranged by management as required		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	Kept in a cupboard rather than on display. Most information is disseminated digitally		
02	Brochures/pamphlets	Commercially printed pamphlet detailing all early childhood sessions in the city's libraries and museum	Yes	
03	Booklists	No		
04	Posters	No		
05	Newsletters	Digital		
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	Yes - City-based		
08	Social media	Facebook, Instagram		

Audit 5

PARTICIPANT CODE: L1b

AUDIT NO: 05

MODE: On site, weekday morning during holiday time

DATE: 18/01/2021

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>E</u> xcellent <u>F</u> air <u>P</u> oor	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	10 x 30 paces; large windows looking onto outdoor courtyard	E	
02	Layout of children's area	Specific area defined by low children's bookshelves, colourful mat, browser boxes, children's chairs, cushions and tables	E	Well used but suitable and comfortable
03	Pram parking	No specific place		Plenty of space for prams within the library
04	Feeding facilities	No		Comfortable chairs available
05	Toilet/change facilities	Male, Female and Baby Change room in library foyer		
06	Storage facilities	No		
07	Computers	In main library		
08	Coffee	Not in the library but plenty in nearby shops		
09	Drinking water	In foyer		
10	Quiet area	Large room with desks and sound proofing		
11	Active/noisy area	Wet area for children with cupboards for equipment		
12	Imaginative play	Coloured pencils and paper available		
13	Solo area	Individual desks in main library		
14	Group area	Two meeting rooms for group activities		
15	Flooring	Carpet with children's mats		
16	Décor	Primary colours, children's designs		
17	Book displays	No		
18	Toy arrangement	Removed due to Covid-19		
19	Signage	None specifically for children		
20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children		
21	Tables	3 colourful children's tables		

22	Seating	Variety of comfortable seating for adults. Floor space for children. Children's chairs at the low tables		
23	Storytime place	At front of children's area near wet area		
24	Free space	Yes		
25	Clutter	Some paperwork scattered nearby		
26	Location in library	Away from entry area. Sound proofing between children's area and study areas		
27	Location of building	Ground floor off an imposing entry. 5 minutes' walk to shopping centre		
28	Parking spaces and cost	Parking spaces nearby, including ACROD and Pram bays. Minimal shade		
29	Public transport	5 minutes' walk to bus stop. Train line is being built and station will be adjacent to the library		
30	Ramps	Not required		
31	Doors	Self-opening doors entering into large and spacious foyer		Large art work on display
32	Staff proximity	Away from children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Staff numbers	7 FTE including both full time and part time		
02	Staff levels	Generous		
03	Staff interest	Programs Team tight knit and experienced		
04	Staff experience and training	Many years' experience in total coming from a variety of backgrounds. BB training completed.		
05	Staff qualifications	Non-library tertiary qualifications plus a variety of other backgrounds. Younger staff are specifically encouraged		
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards		
07	Suitability of books	Selected by qualified city librarian		Board Books of strong cardboard or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large,

				<p>clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as being furry, soft, fluffy, bumpy or smooth.</p> <p>JK books with illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease.</p> <p>Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books</p>
08	AV materials			<p>Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, Blu-ray and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book</p>
09	Number of toys	Removed due to Covid-19		
10	Suitability of toys	N/A		
11	Kits	BB kits removed due to Covid-19		
12	Suitability of kits	N/A		
13	Technology	In adjacent adult area		
14	Suitability of technology	N/A		

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	Twice a week during term time. High literacy content		Digital display of words in large format
02	Library Rhymetime	Once a week during term time; High literacy content		Digital display of words in large format
03	Library Playtime	No		
04	STE(A)M and other	Coffee and Cuddles information session once a week; High literacy content		
04	Off-premises sessions	Being planned by new co-ordinator		
05	Irregular events	Holiday activities in-house		
06	One-off events	Being planned by new co-ordinator		
07	Linked events	Being planned by new co-ordinator		
08	Incentives	Incentives to attend multiple story-times or read to their children had been developed by literacy experts, culminating in a small ceremony and book prize		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	No. On screen only		
02	Brochures/pamphlets	No. On screen only		
03	Booklists	No		
04	Posters	No		
05	Newsletters	Digital		
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	Yes – city-based		
08	Social media	Facebook, Instagram		

Audit 6

PARTICIPANT CODE: L1c

AUDIT NO: 06

MODE: On site, weekday morning during holiday time

DATE: 25/02/2021

NOTED BY: Ruth

1. FACILITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>E</u> xcellent <u>F</u> air <u>P</u> oor	Notes
01	Dimensions of children's area	10 x 40 paces; large windows looking onto grass	E	
02	Layout of children's area	Specific area defined by browser boxes, colourful mats, children's chairs	E	Spacious
03	Pram parking	No specific place but enough room in the children's area		
04	Feeding facilities	No		Comfortable chairs available
05	Toilet/change facilities	Male, Female and Baby Change facilities in the Hub		
06	Storage facilities	No		
07	Computers	In main library		
08	Coffee	Not in the library but a café was part of the Hub		
09	Drinking water	In foyer		
10	Quiet area	No		
11	Active/noisy area	Area for children with cupboards for equipment		
12	Imaginative play	N/A due to Covid-19 restrictions		
13	Solo area	Individual desks in main library		
14	Group area	Two meeting rooms for group activities		
15	Flooring	Carpet with children's mats		
16	Décor	Primary colours, children's designs		
17	Book displays	Yes – face out books on display		
18	Toy arrangement	Removed due to Covid-19		
19	Signage	None specifically for children		
20	Shelving	Low level shelves plus browser boxes suitable for children		
21	Tables	Not now due to Covid-19		
22	Seating	Variety of comfortable seating for adults. Floor space for children.		

23	Storytime place	At front of children's area near wet area. Large television screen available		
24	Free space	Yes		
25	Clear and clean	Clear and clean		
26	Location in library	Near entry area. Physical barrier of browser boxes between children's area and entry		
27	Location of building	Ground floor as part of Community Hub that included library, rec centre, gym, pool, crèche, café and toy library		
28	Parking spaces and cost	Parking spaces nearby, including ACROD and Pram bays. Some shade		
29	Public transport	15 minutes' walk to bus stop. No train service		
30	Ramps	Not required		
31	Doors	Self-opening doors entering into large and spacious foyer		
32	Staff proximity	Near children's area		
33	Temperature control	Air conditioning and heating		

2. RESOURCES

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Condition <u>Excellent</u> <u>Fair</u> <u>Poor</u>	Notes
01	Staff numbers	5 FTE including both full time and part time		
02	Staff levels	Generous		
03	Staff interest	Programs Team well experienced		
04	Staff experience and training	Variety of backgrounds. BB training completed.		
05	Staff qualifications	Not discussed		
06	Number of books	According to SLWA standards		
07	Suitability of books	Selected by qualified city librarian		Board Books of strong cardboard or plastic. Few pages each with simple picture. Words in large, clear fonts and surrounded by free space. Some had tactile aspects such as being furry, soft,

				<p>fluffy, bumpy, smooth.</p> <p>JK books with illustrations, and short stories of interest to the age groups. Shelved face-out for ease</p> <p>Junior Non-fiction: Books with bold illustrations on topics of interest. Shelved with other junior books</p>
08	AV materials			<p>Audio-visual formats for young children consisted of movies in digital, Blu-ray and DVD formats, and talking books in digital, MP3 and CD formats. Talking books were sometimes accompanied by a print book</p>
09	Number of toys	Removed due to Covid-19		
10	Suitability of toys	N/A		
11	Kits	BB kits available for borrowing		
12	Suitability of kits	Yes		
13	Technology	In adjacent adult area		
14	Suitability of technology	N/A		

3. ACTIVITIES

Ref. No.	Item	Description: frequency, literacy content	Flyers etc.	Notes
01	Library Storytime	Once a week during term time;		Digital display of words in large format
02	Library Rhymetime	Twice a week during term time;		Digital display of words in large format
03	Library Playtime	No		

04	STE(A)M and other	No		
04	Off-premises sessions			
05	Irregular events	Holiday activities in-house		
06	One-off events	Being planned by new co-ordinator		
07	Linked events	Being planned by new co-ordinator		
08	Incentives	Incentives to attend multiple story-times or read to their children had been developed by literacy experts, culminating in a small ceremony and book prize		

4. DOCUMENTS AND ARTEFACTS

Ref. No.	Item	Description	Example collected?	Notes
01	Flyers/leaflets	No. On screen only		
02	Brochures/pamphlets	No. On screen only		
03	Booklists	No		
04	Posters	No		
05	Newsletters	No		
06	Newspapers	Yes		
07	Websites	Yes – city-based		
08	Social media	Facebook, Instagram		
