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# **Early literacy in NSW public libraries:** Towards a context-sensitive framework for supporting literacy across NSW public libraries

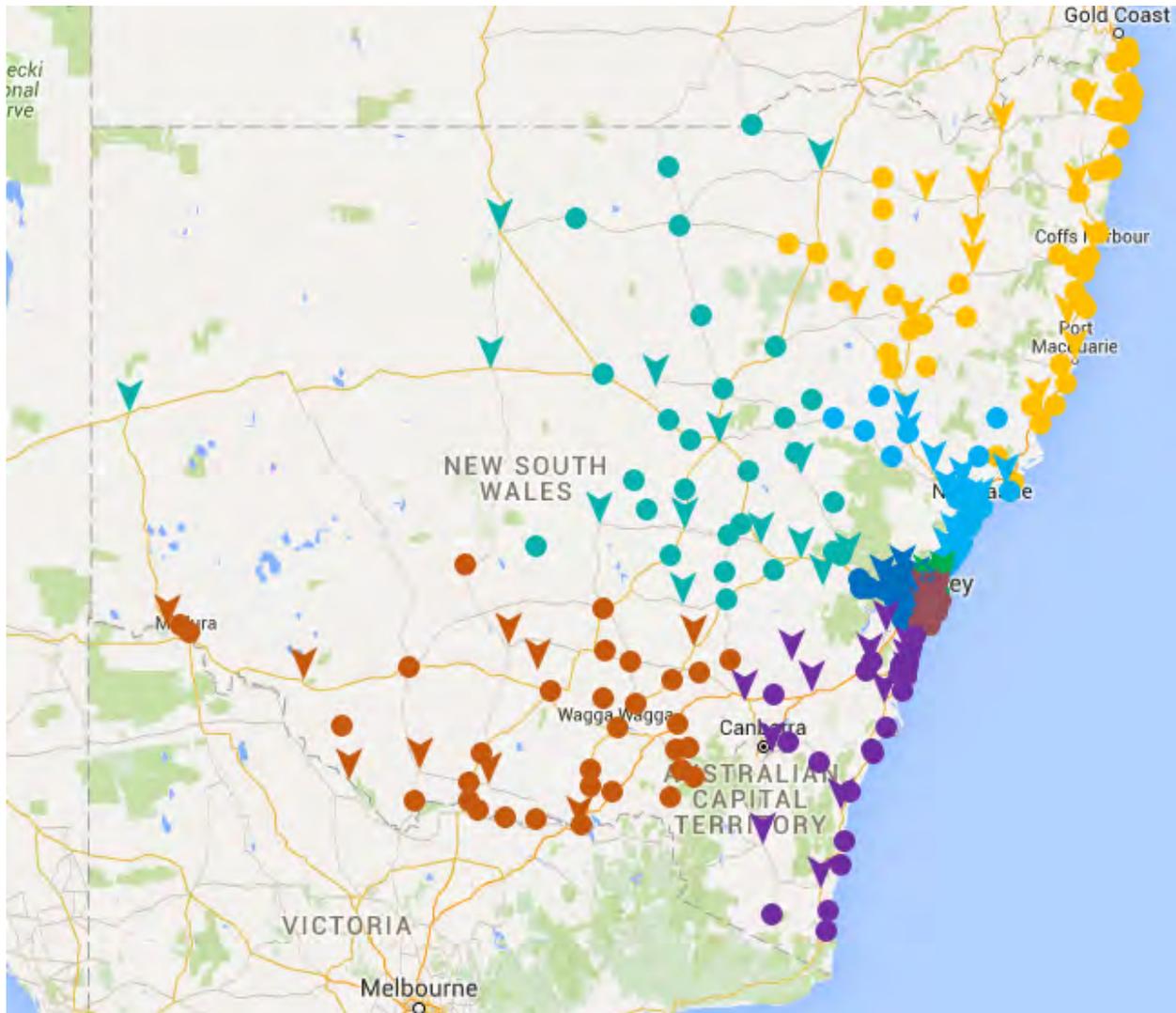
**Dr Emilia Djonov**

*Australian National Early Literacy Summit  
Canberra, 7 & 8 March 2016*

# Public libraries in NSW



A FREE RESOURCE FOR PROMOTING LITERACY IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES



NSW has 3 million library members (42% of the state's population of 7.5 million)

101 library services

367 libraries

35 million visits to libraries (2013/14)

1.5 million people attended library programs (2013/14)

Source: NSW net <http://www.nswnet.net/libraries>



# Early literacy and public libraries

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## Free access to:

- **resources** for children, their families and educators
- **programs**, library-based and outreach, that promote early literacy for everyone and include:
  - Sessions for **all** children and their families/caregivers (e.g. (Preschool) Storytime, Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time)
  - Information sessions for families and educators of young children

Strengths	Challenges
Libraries' strong connections with and knowledge about their communities	Diverse audiences, varying attendance rates and regularity
Council, statewide and national library networks and collaboration with various agencies	Considerable variation in experience and expertise among library staff involved in children's programs

# Early literacy in NSW public libraries

- **Aim**

To develop a context-sensitive framework that public libraries can employ to evaluate, develop and promote early literacy programs in ways that best support children and families in different communities.

- **Participants**

- Staff involved in early literacy programming in NSW public libraries
- 18 public library services in NSW (11 country and 7 metropolitan)
- Parents/caregivers attending early literacy sessions

- **Data:**

- State-wide survey of library staff involved in children's programs (133 responses)
- Video-recording and observation of 57 early literacy sessions for children aged birth-5 at 18 library services across NSW
- 42 interviews with the early literacy sessions' presenters and some library managers
- 539 parent/caregiver questionnaires

- **Mixed-method approach**

- quantitative & qualitative survey analysis
- qualitative analysis of interviews
- social-semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis of the sessions

# Baby Rhyme Time @ Blacktown City Libraries



ON YOUTUBE



# Library sessions for children aged birth to five and early literacy

Inspired and informed by advances in child development research showing the significance of the early years

- **Similarities**

- Designed for children and their parents/caregivers
- Reading of books in preschool and mixed-age programs and singing of nursery rhymes in sessions targeting babies and toddlers

- **Differences**

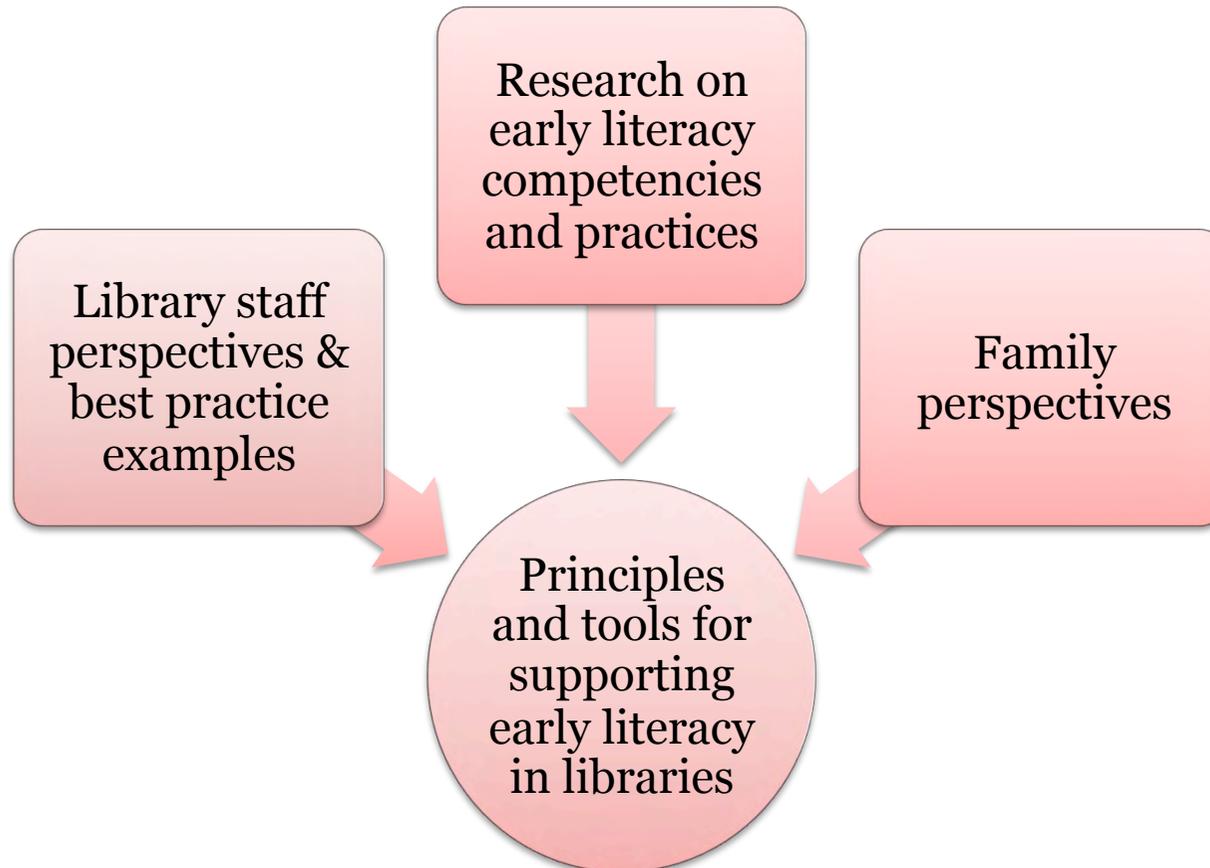
- frequency and size of sessions
- socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds of participants
- (non) use of books, musical instruments, music, drama and props/toys, play, craft
- physical environment
- presenter qualifications and style
- interactions before and after session



# A context-sensitive framework:

(HOW) CAN ONE FRAMEWORK FIT ALL?

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# Priorities in developing early literacy programs

## LIBRARY STAFF VIEWS FROM THE SURVEY

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- **Supporting children's learning** (90)
  - **Language and literacy** (40): language/communication (12) and emergent literacy (28)
  - **Other learning** (27): social skills (9), about the library (6), fine motor skills (2), numeracy (1), routine (1), play (1)
  - Age appropriate programs (12)
  - Music and nursery rhymes (8)
- **Engagement** (81): sessions (30); with books (28), language (5) and stories (4); environment (10); effective communication (4)
- **Educating parents** (29)
- **Promoting the library** (19)
- **Hard-to-reach groups** (10): e.g. new parents, fathers, working parents, non-library users, or families with low levels of literacy
- **Staffing and professional development** (14)
- **Community service** (9)

[133 responses, 370 tokens coded]

# Benefits of early literacy programs

## LIBRARY STAFF VIEWS FROM THE SURVEY

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- Supporting children's learning (165)
  - Children's early literacy (101)
    - Engagement with books, stories, songs and rhymes (21)
    - Language development (20)
    - Learn to read (5)
    - Love of reading (20)
  - Other aspects of learning (61): school readiness (11); social skills (19); new experiences, counting, spatial skills, exploration...
  - Providing a quality learning environment (3)
- Helping families support early literacy (41)
- Promote the library (41)
- Community service (37)
- Fun – Enjoyment (11)

[133 responses, 428 tokens coded]

# Challenges for early literacy programs

## LIBRARY STAFF VIEWS

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- **Resources** (102):
  - staffing (51)
  - funding (19)
  - space (10)
  - technology (2)
  - materials (3)
  - *poor use of resources: craft* (1)
- **Hard-to-reach** (28), incl. “preaching to the converted” (5)
- **Meeting demand** (24), incl. mixed-age groups (3)
- **Support from families** (24), incl. families with limited English (4) & borrowing (1)
- **Recognition** (11), from library staff, management, council, community
- **Promotion to wider community** (6)
- ...

[133 responses, 334 tokens coded]



“Incorporating a learning framework into program development and delivery”

# Addressing library staff concerns

FROM SURVEY AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

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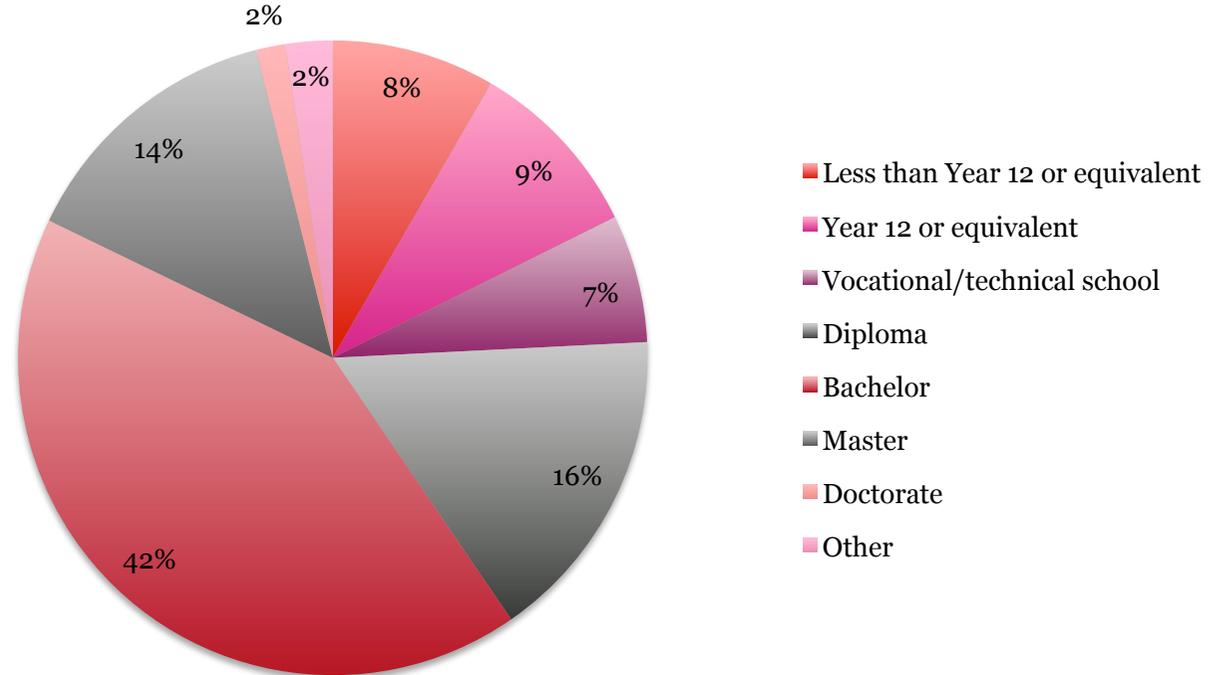
- Preaching to the converted
- Need for an early literacy and learning framework
- Appropriate use of limited resources: craft
- Staff development: Tools for thinking about language, literacy and context

# Family perspectives

“PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED”?



## Parent/caregiver’s highest level of education

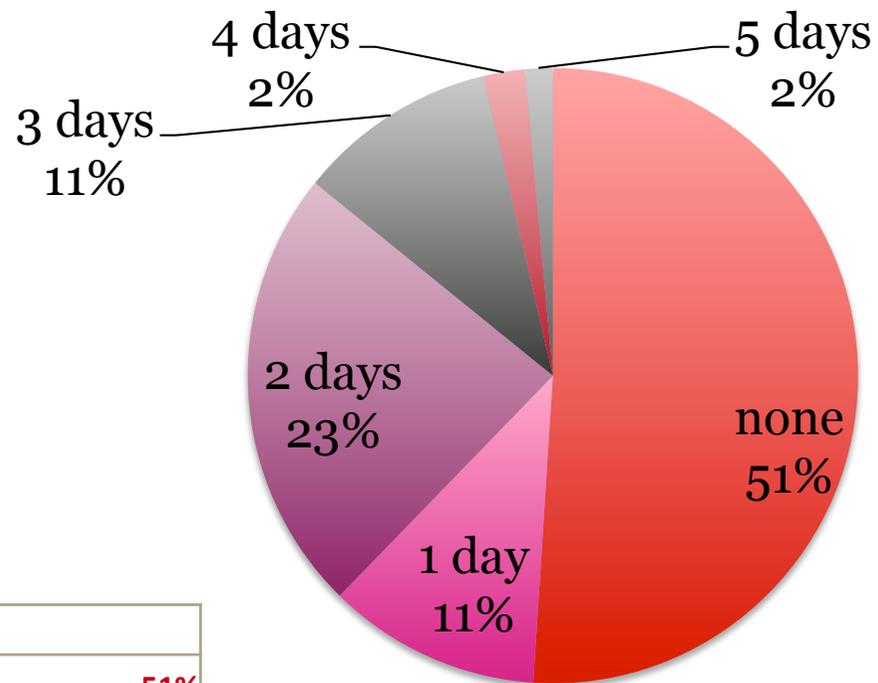


Parental education levels	# of respondents	% of total
Less than Year 12 or equivalent	45	8%
Year 12 or equivalent	50	9%
Vocational/technical school	35	7%
Diploma	87	16%
Bachelor	224	42%
Master	75	14%
Doctorate	8	1%
Other	13	2%
TOTAL	537	100%

# Family perspectives

“PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED”?

How many **days a week** does the child attend **child care**?



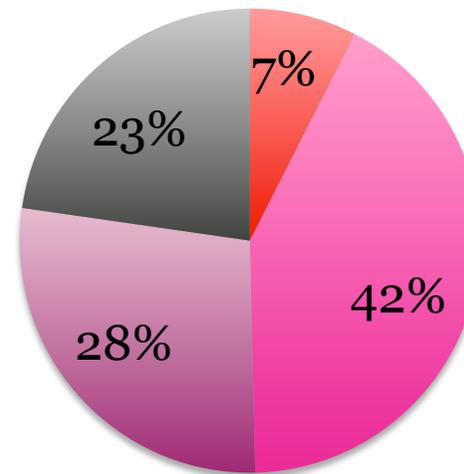
Days a week in childcare	# of children	%
0	348	51%
1	77	11%
2	160	23%
3	72	11%
4	15	2%
5	10	1%
TOTAL	682	100%

# Family perspectives

“PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED”?

On average, how many **books a day** does the child read or is read to at home?

■ Less than 1 ■ 1-2 ■ 3-4 ■ 5 or more



Books shared a day	# of children
Less than 1	51
1-2	285
3-4	187
5 or more	154
TOTAL	677

# Early literacy

## IN THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR AUSTRALIA

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**“Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms.** Literacy incorporates a range of modes of **communication** including music, movement, dance, story telling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing. Contemporary texts include **electronic and print based media**. In an increasingly technological world, the ability **to critically analyse texts** is a key component of literacy.

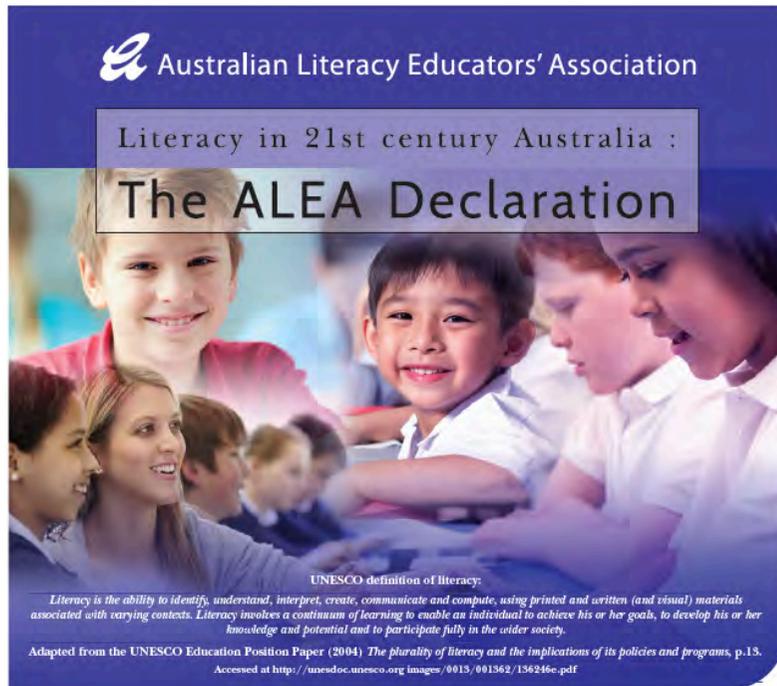
[...]

**Positive attitudes and competencies in literacy and numeracy are essential for children’s successful learning.** The foundations for these competencies are built in early childhood.” (p.37)

Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, being, becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* Retrieved from [http://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging\\_being\\_and\\_becoming\\_the\\_early\\_years\\_learning\\_framework\\_for\\_australia.pdf](http://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf)

# Literacy in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia

## THE ALEA DECLARATION



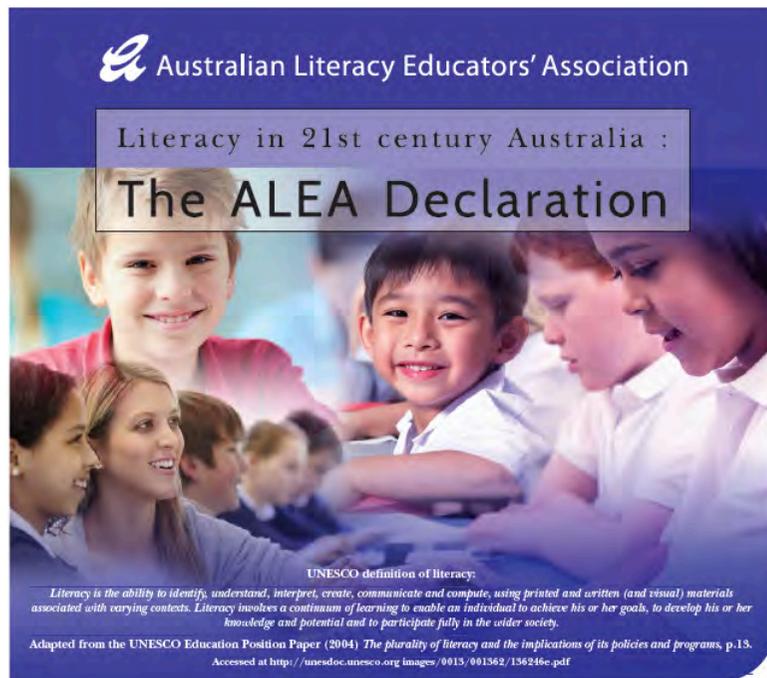
“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written (and visual) materials associated with **varying contexts**.

Literacy involves **a continuum of learning** to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, **to develop his or her knowledge and potential to participate fully in the wider society.**”

Adapted from the UNESCO Education Position Paper (2004) *The plurality of literacy and the implications of its policies and programs*, p.13. Accessed at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001362/136246e.pdf>

# Literacy in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia

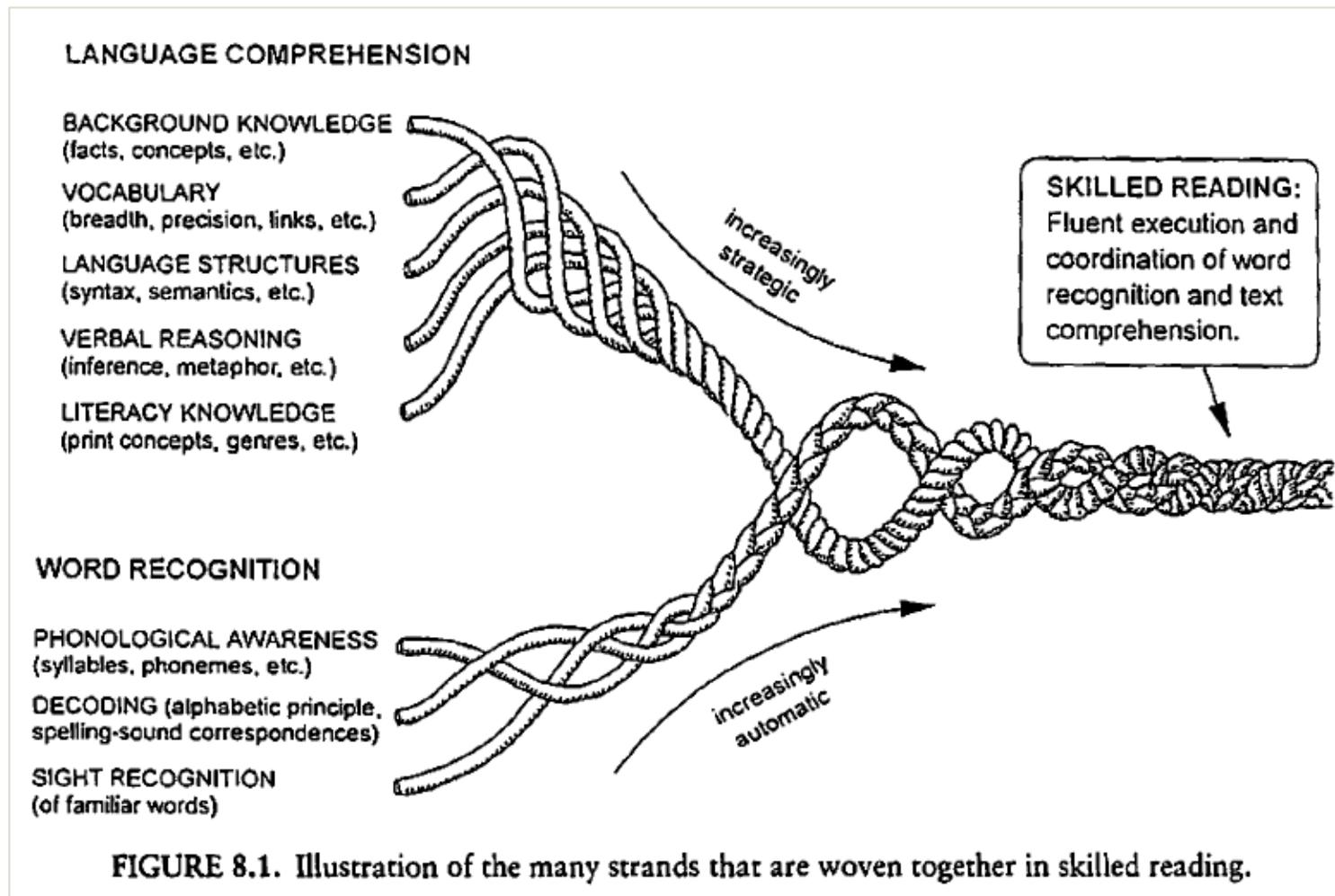
## THE ALEA DECLARATION STATEMENTS



- Literacy is a powerful, wide-ranging life skill beyond traditional notions of talking, listening, reading and writing.
- Learning to be literate plays a central role in determining an individual's life choices and life chances.
- Meaning making is at the heart of all literate practices.
- Access by all learners to strong, effective, and lifelong literacy education is a key feature of a society committed to equity.
- Educators lead literacy but do not have sole responsibility in literacy education.

# Literacy foundations

## LEARNING TO READ: COMPREHENSION AND EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS



Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 97-110). New York: Guildford Press. (p. 98)

# Advanced literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, language and background knowledge

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*“Children from families with more financial and cultural resources differ from their less advantaged peers, though, not just in knowledge of these early literacy skills but also in **access to knowledge about topics** related to the natural world (bugs, flowers, tidal pools), to astronomy (what shape the world is, why the sun sets), to current events (who the president is, what a mayor does, what a budget is), to history (why the Civil War was fought, who George Washington was), to human relations (how aunts and uncles are related to them, what divorce means).*

*These differences are **indexed by enormous social class differences in vocabulary and are produced by differential access to oral language interactions, exacerbated by differential access to engaging and language-rich books read aloud**, both in the home and in early child care settings. Early childhood programs that provide such engaging and language-rich experiences do exist, and preschool practices focused on developing language and enriching knowledge have been shown to be effective. Unfortunately, they are not widespread.”*

(Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012, p. 6)

Murnane, R., Sawhill, I., & Snow, C. (2012). Literacy challenges for the twenty-first century: introducing the issue. *The Future Of Children*, 22(2), 3-15.

# Storytime at Gilgandra - Pirates



# Language and learning: What is a 'traffic jam'?

## STEPHEN AGED 3;5 IN THE CAR WITH HIS MOTHER

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**3;5;8** (car waiting to turn right at lights)

S: Is this a traffic jam?

M: No, it's (pause) just waiting at the lights.

S: No, is this called a traffic jam?

**3;5;13** (car stationary at lights)

S: Is this a traffic jam, Mum?

M: Well –

S: Is this a traffic jam?

M: No, not really.

**3;5;14** (car stationary at lights)

S: Is this a traffic jam?

M: Not really, a traffic jam is when there's lots of cars.

S: But there is lots of cars, Mum; there is lots of cars and trucks; there is. That's a traffic jam.

**3;6;23** (M explains that now they are in a real traffic jam, because when the light goes green they still can't go because there are too many cars.)

M: A traffic jam is when you can't go even when the light is green.

(The car then stops again as the light ahead goes red.)

S: (?...) It means when it's green it's called a traffic jam, but this is not a traffic jam cause it's red; a green one is a traffic jam.

# Language and learning: What is 'retirement'?

OLIVER (6;10) AND LIAM (7;3)

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Oliver: When I'm in Year 2, I'll really miss Mrs Brown.

Mother: Yes, and she won't even be at the school because she is retiring.

Oliver: Retiring?

Mother: Yes, she won't be working any more.

Oliver: So is she just going to be lazy?

Liam's family is on holidays and drive past a retirement village. Liam reads aloud the sign 'Retirement village' and says about two teachers who had recently retired at his school:

"I hope Mrs Brown and Mrs Jones like it here."

# Language and learning



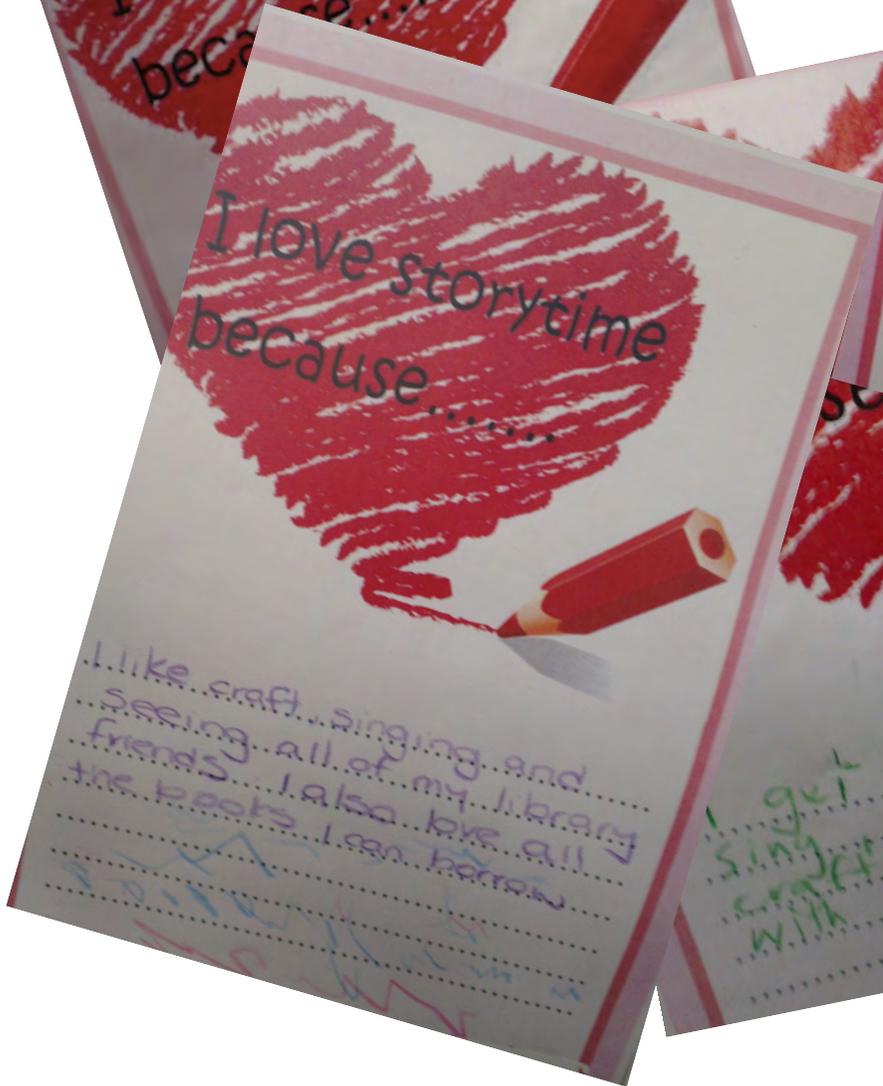
## HALLIDAY'S LANGUAGE-BASED THEORY OF LEARNING

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As children engage in linguistic interactions, they engage in:

- learning language
- learning through language
- learning about language.

Halliday, M.A.K. 2004 [1980]. Three aspects of children's language development: Learning language, learning through language, learning about language. In J. Webster (Ed.), *The Language of Early Childhood: Volume 4 in the Collected Works of M. A. K. Halliday*. 308-326. London/New York: Continuum.



# Can craft support early literacy?

A BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM PARKES SHIRE LIBRARY

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## What would you take to school in your lunch box?

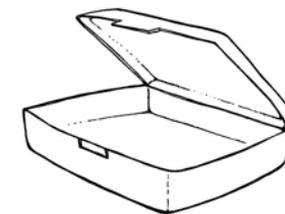
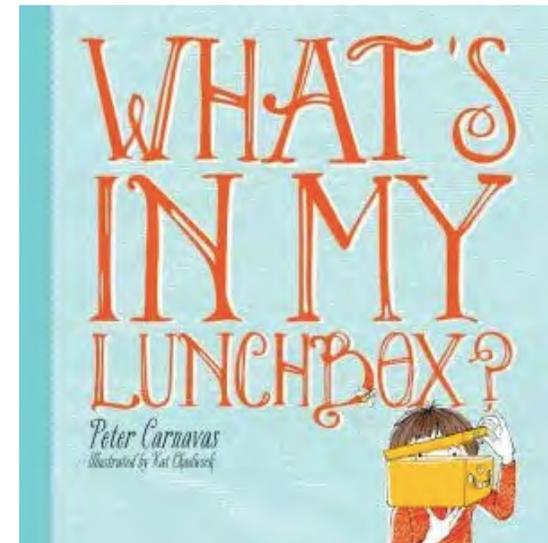
**Materials:** old, discontinued magazines, scissors, glue and an outline drawing of a lunch box on A3 sheet

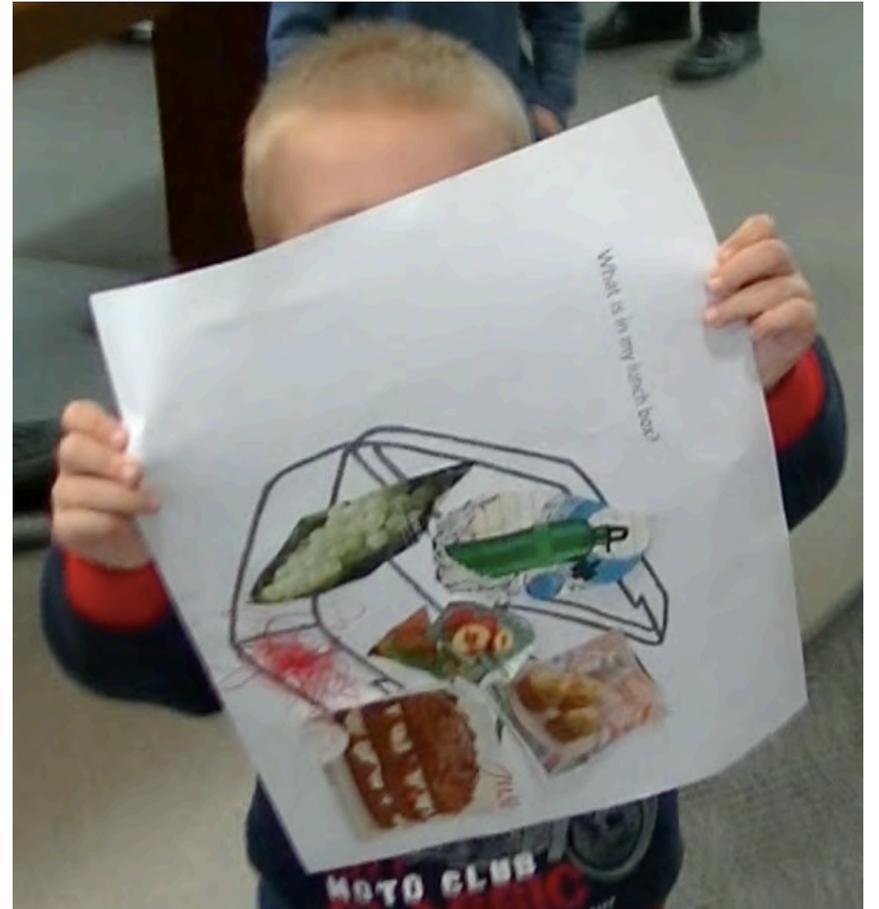
### Outcomes:

? Fine motor skill development

! Interactions with others:

- parents/caregivers during the activity
- library staff at desk after the activity





# Effective storytimes

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- Does reading more books per session equal success?
  - Should there be a theme?
  - Are there alternatives to craft?
  - ...

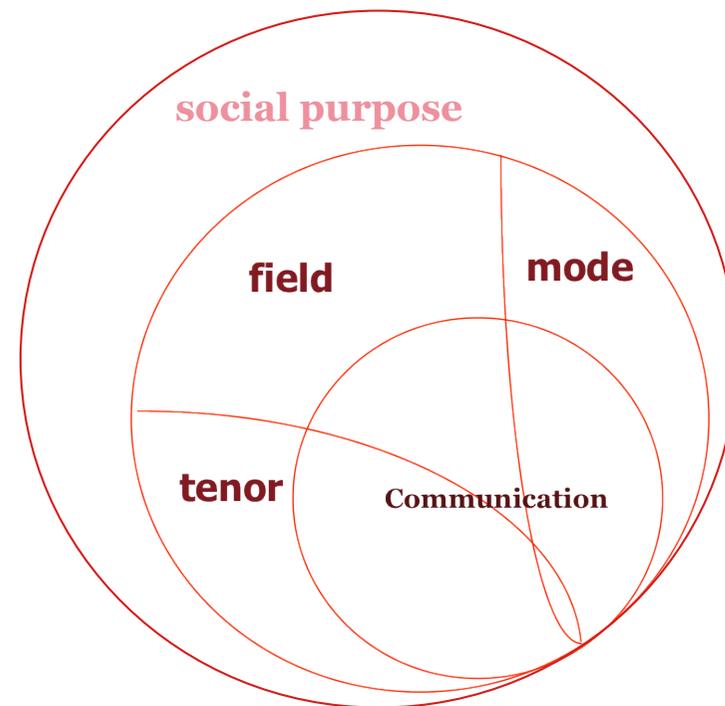
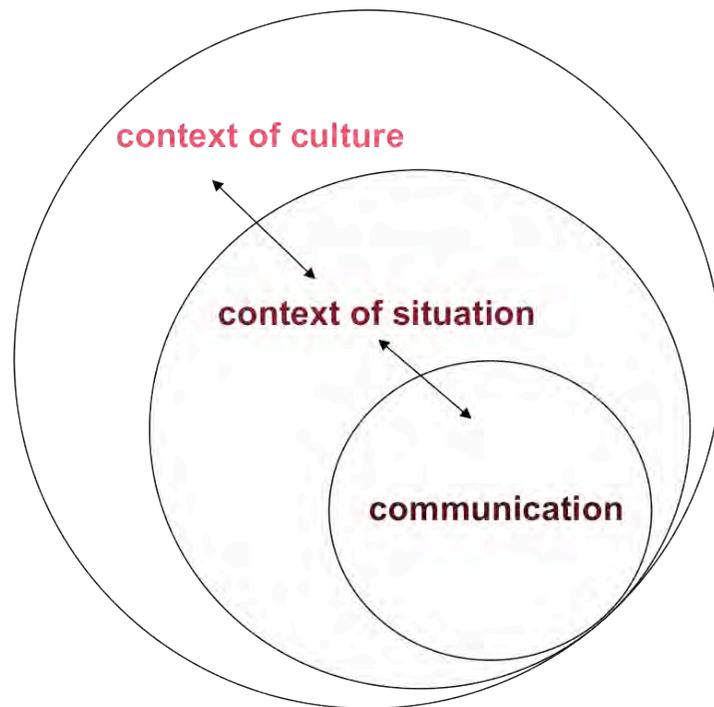
# Book sharing: quantity & quality

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“It is not just the presence or absence of book sharing with young children, nor even the amount of book sharing that takes place, but rather the interactional book-sharing conversations that are most beneficial to children’s language and literacy development”

Vander Woude, J., van Kleeck, A., & Vander Veen, E. (2009) Book sharing and the development of meaning. *In P. Rhyner (Ed.), Emergent literacy and language development: Promoting learning in early childhood* (pp. 36 – 77). New York: Guilford Press. (p. 39)

# Language, communication and social context



- Central to Halliday's (1993) functional theory of language and **language-based theory of learning**
- **Communication reflects and shapes social context**, i.e. their relationship is dynamic.
- **Communication is always multimodal** – we make choices from different communicative modes – language, images, gestures and movement, etc.

# Comparing early literacy sessions for babies & toddlers

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## **Bilby Library**

- Outer Sydney
- Large size and audience, many grandparents with little or no English, incl. some with limited literacy
- 6 sessions a week at main branch, 2 at each of the other 4
- Presenter style: 'Pied Piper'



## **Koala Library**

- Country NSW
- Small size and audience number, all English-speakers
- 1 session a month in a block of 3 sessions
- Presenter style: 'Scaffolder'

# Field

## ACTIVITIES, PARTICIPANT ROLES AND CIRCUMSTANCES, SUBJECT MATTER, KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING

Field	Bilby	Koala
Reciting nursery rhymes with actions	✓	✓
Singing and playing with musical instruments	✓ separate activity, and opportunity for individually interacting with each child	Instruments available for self-directed use before or during session
Dancing	✓ to recorded music	–
Reading	+ presenter reading to group + adult-child shared reading	+ presenter modelling ‘reading’ with individual child/toy
Story-telling	+ accompanied by actions performed by all	–
Educating families about early language and literacy	✓ modelling and snippets of advice => mostly commonsense knowledge	✓✓ modelling and extended advice, incorporating references to research => more educational knowledge
Borrowing	Encouraged in goodbye song, but no advice offered or available after session	Encouraged throughout by scattered board books and explicit advice on choosing books for babies & toddlers

# Tenor



## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE, LITERACY, READING AND LIBRARIES

<b>Tenor</b>	<b>Bilby</b>	<b>Koala</b>
<p><b>Contact</b> In all cases children attend with close others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter is familiar to many</li> <li>• Eye contact with each child during welcome and giving and collecting of books and musical instruments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All newcomers</li> <li>• Welcome song and introductions with names and physical action of passing a yellow ball</li> <li>• Setting constructed as ‘familiar’ through soft toys, rug and cushions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Status</b> Presenter has high status in all cases</p>	<p>Presenter as ‘pied piper’, performance and rallying people around it are foregrounded</p>	<p>Presenter as ‘scaffolder’, high status due to expertise and experience as a librarian and parent</p>
<p><b>Attitude</b> Towards other participants, books and reading, the library, presenter, participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much smiling, laughter, clapping after each song</li> <li>• Togetherness regularly reinforced (‘Ready? 1, 2, 3...’)</li> <li>• Strong engagement with presenter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library is explicitly presented as an understanding institution</li> <li>• Positive emotions explicitly emphasised (‘enjoy the experience’, ‘don’t worry’)</li> <li>• Personalised praise offered regularly</li> </ul>

# Concluding thoughts

## THE PLACE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN A NATIONAL EARLY LITERACY STRATEGY

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- Many libraries provide programs that promote early literacy in ways that best suit the needs of their communities.
- Developing a rich understanding of early language and literacy development, and how library programs support this development, will allow library staff to articulate and further promote these efforts, and collaborate with others to successfully bid for funding.
- Libraries need both simple benchmarks/indicators for evaluating their efforts *and tools to understand and articulate what works and why so as to better promote the contribution they can make to the national early language and literacy strategy.*

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# *Thank you*

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