Effective literacy teaching for Indigenous students: Principles from evidence-based practices

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ABSTRACT

Success in literacy is critical to effective learning outcomes for all children, however for many Indigenous students who move variously between their Indigenous languages, Aboriginal English, and Standard forms of English the teaching of language and literacy has heightened significance and requires distinct, concentrated attention. This paper will consider principles for practice that have been derived from the adaptation of teaching programs implemented to effectively support Indigenous students' (English) literacy learning. The three programs discussed: the Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) for preschool children, the Literacy Acquisition for Pre-primary Students pilot program and Reading Recovery, a literacy intervention for students after one year of school. From the evidence presented, successful literacy outcomes for students can been related to engaging with and connecting to Indigenous communities and families, teachers' professional skills and knowledge, the provision of responsive teaching interventions and investment in well-researched proven programs.

Without doubt, there are multifarious, compounding circumstances that in many cases perpetuate cycles of underachievement impacting on Indigenous students' levels of educational attainment generally and literacy learning specifically (ACARA, 2013). The issues are complex. Coexistent are understandings that simplistic and mechanistic approaches to curriculum are inappropriate (Cummins 2007; Luke 2001). Rather a range of response factors, layered and interconnected are necessary to redress forms of disadvantage especially for 'school dependent' children, those reliant on educational systems, schools and classrooms for support to disrupt trajectories of failure (Comber & Barnett, 2003; Delpit, 2012).

To date, Government initiatives to redress Indigenous educational disadvantage have had inadequate impact, at best. In response, in 2008, the *Council of Australian Governments* (COAG) agreed to six ambitious targets to address the disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians. Included was the goal to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018 (COAG, 2009). Despite continuing efforts, national testing results indicate that by

Year 3 there remains a significant gap in literacy measures between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students (Ford, 2013). This has resulted in recent initiatives, such as the implementation of Direct Instruction based on the Cape York *Aboriginal Australian Academy Initiative*, to strengthen literacy in Indigenous communities. The ACER report (2013) on the Cape York experience indicated it is not yet possible to conclude from the available test data whether or not the initiative has had a positive impact on students' learning (see also Luke, 2014). However there is evidence, from a number of other programs that have contributed to successful outcomes for Indigenous students emphasising the effect of rich community, school and teacher support and resources. These include targeted programs to support the development of students' linguistic and literacy knowledge, such as Accelerated Literacy (Rose, Gray & Cowey, 1999; Cowey, 2005) alongside those that build on students' cultural resources to ensure meaningful connections to the curriculum (Bennet & Lancaster, 2013; Rennie, 2006) within an envelope of mutual respect and links to the local community.

At the broadest level the literacy acquisition

discussion focuses on the early years as it is widely recognised that early literacy success has a significant effect on students' early and subsequent achievement (Rowe & Rowe, 1999). A child's early learning experiences has a profound impact on their development and educational outcomes and the substantial benefits that accrue to the individual, to families and the community from investments in early childhood (DEECD, 2008). The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Reading, DEST (2005) acknowledged the importance of the years before school in giving children the best start to their literacy development. 'It is also important to build on the benefits of early childhood education throughout the remainder of the schooling years and to provide opportunities to those whose early childhood experiences were less than optimal' (Ockenden, 2014, p. 3).

To complement the corpus of extant positive practice in the field and the benefits of early intervention, that gives authority to practice with young learners, this paper aims to examine key practices of three programs implemented in remote communities that have beneficial outcomes for young Indigenous learners. The programs selected as illustrative examples of practice have each received strong community and financial support, no doubt factors contributing to their success albeit while not without criticism (Chapman, Tunmer & Prochnow, 2001; Reynolds & Wheldall, 2007). The programs vary in approach and emphasis and combined they offer insights into effective practices specific to early literacy learning. Moreover the author has knowledge of these programs and is encouraged by the positive impact and continued possibilities each affords to make a difference for young Indigenous students.

The three programs discussed in this paper are introduced briefly below.

The Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) devised by Sparling and colleagues, with input from theorists, teachers and parents, involves a suite of teaching and learning strategies to support high quality early childhood education and the later academic achievement of children from at risk and under-resourced families (Sparling, 2011). Research is currently being undertaken to link the Abecedarian Approach with local Indigenous strengths and cultural realities so that both the strength of the culture and proven school-preparation effectiveness are retained. The study will also consider processes of program implementation, family and child participation, and adult/child interaction in order to understand their relationships to child and family outcomes (Sparling et al., 2012).

The Literacy Acquisition for Preprimary Students (LAPS) program is based on the Language, Learning and Literacy (L3) program developed by the New South Wales, Department of Education and Training (NSW DET, 1999–2000). Students receive daily, explicit instruction in reading and/or writing strategies in small groups and then rotate to independent individual or group tasks. A pilot program has been implemented in the West Kimberley funded and developed by Waardi Limited and Gumbarr Limited (Waardi, 2014b).

Reading Recovery (Clay, 2001) provides daily teaching for students identified as making the slowest progress in literacy learning after one year of instruction. Reading Recovery was introduced in the Kimberley region of Western Australia in 2006 to provide some of Australia's most geographically isolated students access to programs offered to students in other locations (Scull & Bremner, 2007). This supplementary program aims to promote literacy skills and foster the development of reading and writing strategies by tailoring individualised lessons to each student (WWC, 2013).

Each subsequent section explores aspects of the three programs, drawing on research and professional sources to identify practices that support Indigenous students' learning. Building from this discussion of effective teaching practices, that enhance Indigenous students' opportunities to learn, principles to guide program design and implementation are articulated. While the discussion focuses specifically on the successful adaption of these programs for Indigenous learners it is intended that the principles apply to teaching and learning beyond the three programs described. There are six general principles in all. While the principles are presented separately the power lies in the integrated practices that contribute to positive outcomes for young Indigenous literacy learners.

Language learning

The maintenance and development of children's first/home language is essential for developing a child's sense of identity as well as promoting language and cognition (Clarke, 2009; Cummins, 2001). Further there is strong recognition of Indigenous peoples' right to use, develop and access education their own languages as outlined in *Articles 13 and 14* of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UN, 2008). Grimes (2009) highlights the large evidence base pointing towards the fact that literacy programs are more effective when skills are supported in the home/first language while Cummins (2001) outlined evidence of language learning interdependence, showing that second language skills are assisted by first language learning. Further, Clarke (2009) outlined two essential pre-requisites to bilingual children achieving the learning outcomes as documented in the national Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009),

maintenance of their first language and progress in learning English as a second language.

Consistent with these understandings, Lo Bianco and Freebody (1997, p. 61) state:

> For effective literacy teaching for Indigenous children, including urban children, there must be a clear understanding of the social and communicative functions of Aboriginal Englishes and pidgins, and their lexical and grammatical structures, in order that teachers understand that these language forms are a foundation on which to build in bridging to SAE rather than a source of interference into the learner's use of school English.

Many Indigenous children being raised in remote communities experience complex language environments, exposed to various language codes, including traditional languages, non-standard varieties of English (such as various English-based creoles) or Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English (Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes, 2011). The 3a implementation acknowledges the value of multilingualism and the many English dialects known by the children of Aboriginal communities, as integral to the success of the approach. In this approach the maintenance and development of children's first language is strongly supported; parent and early childhood educators are encouraged to engage with the children in home languages.

This view of language learning gives rise to the first principle in regard to effective literacy learning. This principle highlights opportunities for children to develop proficiency in a range of languages as a basis for ongoing literacy learning.

Principle 1 – Maintain children's Indigenous languages and ensure opportunities to become proficient speakers of English to build dual language competence as a strong foundation to successful literacy learning outcomes.

Community connections

Connections between community, home and school have long been recognised as a key element in achieving literacy success for vulnerable students (Comber & Kamler, 2005). To this end, McCoy (2008) provides a powerful description of a school and community, in the Kimberley, working together to support and nurture Indigenous children. Specifically McCoy uses the term 'holding' to evoke the 'image of security, protection and nourishment' (Myers, 1982 cited in McCoy, 2008, p. 19). Despite common tensions and issues the school achieved significant gains in literacy as measured by national and state educational indicators. Much of this attributed to the provision of a 'contemporary, culturally appropriate and meaningful holding context for

the children and also for the local, community teachers' (2008, p. 35). A positive supportive, respectful relationship had been established.

The 3a program is established on a strong premise of community engagement, respect and support. The program in the Northern Territory will be implemented through the Families as First Teachers playgroups, home visits, and transition to preschool programs. Building from this, the 3a research task is to link Indigenous people, practices, knowledge, and skills with the research-validated learning strategies that are known to increase school performance, building a learning bridge to preschool in two remote Northern Territories communities (Sparling et al., 2012). The contributions from Indigenous culture are designed to help children hold fast to aspects of identity, culture and language and to use these strengths in educational contexts.

Connectedness is also emphasised by Rennie (2006) with reference to Indigenous students stating that schools need to explore ways of connecting home and community literate practices to school literacy practices. Reading Recovery teachers are encouraged to demonstrate a genuine interest in their students' out-of-school experiences and use these as a focus for their teaching conversations, making links to texts read and those written by students (Clay, 2005). In a study of Reading Recovery Indigenous students' writing the teachers used the content-rich language embedded in the students' world-life experiences to support transitions to the context-reduced language of literate discourse (Scull & Bremner, 2013). Notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that a two-way exchange and communication processes can be strengthened to enhance learning outcomes.

With regard to creating contexts for strong literacy learning, the second principle highlights community engagement and involvement in the design and delivery of teaching priorities and curriculum.

Principle 2 – Value and respect Indigenous practices and connect the curriculum to community knowledge and experiences to allow students to see the relevance of literacy learning.

Levels of early intervention/prevention

When listing factors worth fighting for Cunningham and Allington (2007) identified early intervention as a key strategy to ensure the 'reasonable and responsible goal that all children learn to read and write' (p. 1). However, it is useful to consider the concepts of prevention and intervention in a tiered or staged pattern of response to address children's learning needs. Pianta describes prevention as a viable alternative to special education services and states in a highly stressed service delivery system with limited resources

'including prevention in the reform debate make sense' (Pianta, 1990, p. 306). Similarly the Response to Intervention approach to prevention reform efforts in the US have gained momentum, aimed at improving the performance of students at risk of poor academic outcomes (Gilbert et al., 2013). Dorn and Schubert (2008) describe a Comprehensive Intervention Model as an effective response to intervention and detail how layers of teaching fit within a tiered design. The approach highlights multiple levels and intensity of teaching so that the most appropriate intervention is provided to meet the immediate needs of students. Particular to this, the dynamic and complementary role of small group and one to one teaching, as tiers within the model. The model presents as a 'conceptual framework for aligning intervention across classroom and supplemental programs, ensuring consistency for the most fragile learners' (Dorn & Schubert, 2008, p. 40).

Systems and schools implementing early interventions acknowledge the costs associated with providing quality teaching programs, with the cost of providing early intervention clearly outweighing the immediate benefits (Gross, Hudson & Price, 2009, p. 29). However, this is part of a larger issue of education funding reform (Scull & Raban, 2011). The Every Child a Chance Trust (England) prepared a cost-benefit analsyis to estimate the return on investment of early intervention to address literacy difficulties (Gross et al., 2009). The results indicate the long term savings to be substantial, there is now strong evidence to suggest that preventative programs are cost effective.

The Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) provides a clear example of practice intended as a model of primary prevention. Designed for children aged from birth to year three, Abecedarian researchers claim waiting until a child enters schools to begin preparation for formal learning is too late (Campbell, Helms, Sparling & Ramsey, 1998). While this does not mean school-like tasks need to start early, it is necessary for children to experience language learning and early literacy concepts underpinning later academic performance. Exposure to the social contexts in which literacy is a component and familiarity with the complex set of attitudes, understandings and behaviours associated with early literacy supportive of children's learning and development (Fleer & Raban, 2010; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) are important.

The 3a program, intended as a comprehensive approach to prevention, is designed to overcome the odds of developmental delays and the academic failure of children born into low-income families (Campbell et al., 2012). The 3a approach has a number of key components, that all focus on ways to promote quality adult-child interactions, demonstrated as effective in supporting children's cognitive development in the early years and promoting the skills associated with success in school (Sparling, 2011). These include *LearningGames*® that are designed so that parents can incorporate them into daily care giving routines. Also *Conversational Reading* is based on the concept of joint attention and interactive text reading. Further the approach emphasises *Enriched Caregiving* with language use emphasised throughout the day as educators and parents endeavour to create extended conversations with individual children.

Well integrated into the 3a approach is the practice of book reading and subsequent language learning. The benefits of early book reading are well documented. As Dickinson and colleagues (2012, p. 1) state:

> Programs implemented in different countries that put books in the hands of parents and young children and that equip parents with effective strategies for using books consistently have been found to be effective methods of fostering language acquisition and improving children's early reading success.

Form a different approach but with the same end the LAPS program emphasises prevention with practices to disrupt patterns of failure. Borrowing heavily from the successful *Language, Learning & Literacy L3* program developed by the NSW DET (1999–2000) a pilot project with seven Kimberley schools commenced July 2014 (Waardi, 2014b). The intention of this program is to support teachers to strengthen children's language and literacy acquisition skills, as children read and create texts. The program engages classroom teachers in professional learning, and school teams in 'onsite' coaching and mentoring. Central to the program's design is the provision of daily focused small group teaching for every student and the close examination of students' assessment data to inform teaching.

In the prevention model articulated by Pianta (1990) Reading Recovery might be best described as a form of secondary prevention, providing a second chance to learn for students beginning to fall behind in literacy learning yet before the problems accentuate. Particular to secondary prevention is the targeting of a select group of students who show early signs of need. Reading Recovery is designed to work with students in the lowest achievement band in a given school. Where available, 10–20% of students in the second year of school receive this high level of one-on-one support. The individual teaching has been demonstrated to be critical factor in the success of Reading Recovery. For example, Schwartz, Schmitt and Lose (2012) report research findings that identify group size as 'an important factor with respect to the literacy outcomes for

these students, with the 1:1 instructional context providing the most support for their literacy learning' (p. 561). The individual teaching context is necessary as Reading Recovery teachers make moment-by-moment decisions, based on their close observations of students' behaviours, to inform their teaching and foster accelerative learning (Clay, 2005).

With regard to enhancing Indigenous students' literacy outcomes, the third principle avoids a 'one size fits all' approach that assumes that all Indigenous learners are the same, rather this recognises the need for differentiated levels of support and teaching responsive to individual needs.

Principle 3 – Provide multiple levels of teaching support, of increasing intensity, to ensure the best designs for meeting Indigenous students' literacy learning needs are available.

Complex literacy processing theories

When children are building confidence and skill as readers they need to attend to the many knowledge sources available in texts (Harrison, 2004). Clay (2001; 2005) argues that a focus on one source of information when children are learning to read and write could be problematic. She states that using a single source of information 'can distort a complex process unless its learning becomes patterned with other key variables, and opportunities are provided to work on the interplay between variables' (Clay, 1991, p. 314). Clay's Literacy Processing Theory (2001) integrates a wide range of language knowledge sources, including story structure, language structure, words and word structure, letters, and the features and sounds of letters (Doyle, 2013). As McNaughton (2014, p. 90) stated, with reference to the influence of Clay on the development and retuning of instructional practices:

> The broader import for classroom instruction is the concern for a strong oral language base for literacy learning and an instructional and assessment focus on enabling increasing control over language forms and functions, especially important in bilingual and indigenous contexts.

The work of Clay informs both Reading Recovery and the LAPS program. Reading Recovery and LAPS lessons incorporate oral language teaching as foundational to and facilitative of literacy (Clay, 2001). Instruction, based on Literacy Processing Theory, supports students to integrate a range of knowledge sources to read and write texts while building skill and problem-solving strategies (Clay, 2005). As strategic readers, students flexibly monitor and adapt the effectiveness of their reading and writing, while also drawing on a range of skills automatically, with speed and without

conscious decision-making, to extend literacy competence (Alllerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008, p. 368).

Research specific to remote Indigenous students' learning promotes complexity over simplicity (Rennie, 2006). Likewise, Delpit (1988; 2012) argues for programs than provide depth and breath, which incorporate a wealth of diverse strategies. She describes programs that address the needs of vulnerable children as those that assure all children gain access to basic skills; the conventions and strategies that are essential to literacy learning while at the same time instructional programs must demand critical thinking and 'ensure that the school provides children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society' (Delpit, 1988 p. 285). Indeed, there appears to be broad agreement that the quality, scope and depth of curriculum makes a difference for at risk learners (Comber & Barnett, 2003). This discussion of literacy leads to yet another principle specific to curriculum and program design.

A principle based on understandings of literacy as a complex process that integrates the explicit teaching of the range of factors that work together in a mutually facilitative manner to support the construction of messages from text.

Principle 4 – Recognise the complexity of literacy acquisition processes and assure all Indigenous students gain access to the skills and strategies that allow them to engage in critical, constructive literacy practices.

Expert teaching

Teacher quality is a key determinant of students' experiences and outcomes of schooling (Hattie, 2003). Yet to meet the differential needs of students the 'provision of quality teaching and learning in literacy, supported by on-going teacher professional development, must be given the highest priority' (Rowe, 2003, p. 17). Integral to the LAPs program and Reading Recovery is the extensive opportunities for teacher professional learning. Sharratt, Coutts and Fullan (2013) state Reading Recovery training provides teachers with professional knowledge that results in more effective teaching of all students. Reading Recovery teachers are experts in using interactive, responsive teaching skills to make a positive difference for the most at-risk learners (Sharratt et al., 2013).

Key to the success of Reading Recovery with Indigenous students is the teachers' understanding of the importance of building on the students' cultural resources and connecting experiences from the children's world to the curriculum (Delpit, 2012; Rennie,

2006). Reading Recovery teachers carefully mediate the language of the text, linking from the known to the new and providing each student with the opportunity to hear and use new vocabulary and structures as required. The tutorial support, based on the teachers' understanding of the student's 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992), provides the entry point for intervention.

Although Reading Recovery teachers work within a lesson framework, their interventions build on this design to deliver a distinct series of lessons for each individual child. The varying skill profiles and understanding of literacy tasks of students require the teacher to match teaching to students' particular learning needs. The complexity of this teaching is emphasised by Wood (2003, p. 7) who described tutoring as a complex human activity that involves the 'bringing together and integration of a range of competencies and skills in order to tutor others'. The two excerpts that follow are provided as examples of this expert teaching from an empirical study of Reading Recovery teacher scaffolding techniques (Bremner, 2009; Scull & Bremner, 2013).

Transcript 1 below is illustrative of a pre-reading teaching conversation. In this example the teacher, working with a young Indigenous student explores the language associated with celebrating birthdays. The student's language *'might get crazy'* skilfully appropriated to *'excited'* and the child's knowledge of birthday cards discussed to ensure meaningful engagement with the text.

Transcript 1 – Pre-reading, Bingo's Birthday (Bremner, 2009)

Teacher	What do you think's going to happen on Bingo's birthday (child's name)?
Child	Um he might get, he might get, um ting, he might get crazy.
Teacher	He might get a bit excited do you think?
Child	(Child nods)
Teacher	Mmm He's looking for something to eat And what else has she made for Bingo?
Child	He's biting it. Um a book.
Teacher	Do you get one of these? *(pointing to picture)* You open it first before you open your present.
Child	Mm, you read them first before you open the present
Teacher	Yeh, It's a birthday card.

Similarly, Reading Recovery teachers also prompt Indigenous students to extend and elaborate oral texts, developing their linguistic competencies, to support

their gradual use of written discourse. Transcript 2, is an example of a pre-writing conversation. The teacher re-focuses the student on his father's discharge from hospital and his return to the community, importantly allowing the student to formulate and articulate his ideas. The text produced, '*My dad was at the hospital and the doctors fixed him up*' triggered by the teacher's prompt to move from conversational language to the composition of a written text (Scull & Bremner, 2013). This example highlights the teacher-assisted shift from oral to written discourse structures.

Transcript 2 – Pre-writing, Dad in hospital (Bremner, 2009)

Teacher	What's dad doing today?
Child	Um. He may be buying me something.
Teacher	Is he still in hospital or is he out of hospital?
Child	Um, he's he was out of hospital um um yesterday.
Teacher	Yesterday?
Child	Mm, and he um he's and him get picked up by um I think um my tidda mob thing um Rquia mob.
Teacher	They picked him up from hospital?
Child	Yeh because um my mum ringed them up to get picked up my dad.
Teacher	Yeh
Child	And my dad um he was thing um and they fixed him up. And he was right and that's why he is gonna fly down today.
Teacher	So do you want to write about what dad is doing today?
Child	A-ha *(nods head)*
Teacher	How could you put that in a sentence?
Child	Um, my dad was, my dad was feeling good and nah my dad was at the hospital and the doctors fixed him up.

The analysis of the two lesson transcripts provides evidence of the strategic, contingent teaching based on teachers' highly informed understandings of literacy acquisition processes and their knowledge of each student, modifying teaching as appropriate to ensure successful learning outcomes.

This discussion suggests another principle relevant to enhanced literacy learning, which prioritises quality

teaching and recognises the significant role skilled teachers play in improving performance outcomes for Indigenous students.

Principle 5 – Acknowledge the importance of expert teaching and provide ongoing teacher professional development to ensure quality literacy teaching and learning for Indigenous students.

A strong research base

To invest in the implementation of literacy programs, systems, schools and communities need to be assured of the programs' claims and require demonstrated evidence of the cost benefits and impact on students' learning outcomes (Gross et al., 2009)

The Abecedarian Program has a long history of replication studies and longitudinal research (Campbell, Helms, Sparling, & Ramey, 1998; Campbell, et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2002; Ramey et al. 1992; Wasik, Ramey, Bryant & Sparling, 1990). Research evidence supports the positive effect of intensive, child appropriate interventions by experienced child-care staff on children's cognitive development (Wasik et al., 1990, p. 1693). A study by Ramey et al. (1992) reports increased IQ and decreased behaviour problem scores for children who participated in the comprehensive Abecedarian program, linking the intensity of intervention services with positive cognitive outcomes for high risk infants. The claims of reduced educational failure are also substantiated. Campbell and colleagues (1998) report that five years of Abecedarian intervention significantly impacted the early environmental context of children and follow up studies seven to ten years later confirmed the earlier significant academic advantage associated with the preschool program (1998, p. 162). More recently a follow up study showed the effect of the Abecedarian Project on educational attainment extended well into adulthood. At age 30, about four times as many individuals in the treatment group (23.5%) had earned college degrees, a rate 4.6 times greater than their non-treatment counterparts (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 1040).

Reading Recovery is also well researched with Australian and international data providing evidence of the intervention's successful outcomes over time (Boocock, Scull, Gomez-Bellenge, Huggins & Douetil, 2009; Schwartz, Hobsbaum, Briggs & Scull, 2009; WWC, 2013). In New South Wales, Australia, the percentage of students who successfully complete Reading Recovery is consistently high, with a completion rate of 85% reported (NSW DEC, 2014). Further NSW Reading Recovery students have been tracked and their literacy learning monitored against data from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), data from 2010 showed that 89% of Year 3 students who successfully completed Reading Recovery were still at or above minimum standard two years later (NSW DEC, 2014). In the USA a meta-analysis conducted by D'Agostino and Murphy (2004) indicate lasting program effects, and students' gains on broad reading skills were maintained through to the second grade. Holliman and Hurry (2013) report Reading Recovery outcomes for students in the UK and state 'children who received the RR intervention three years earlier were still performing at a higher level in reading and writing than comparison children in RR schools and comparison children in non-RR schools' (p. 729).

The Kimberley Reading Recovery data shows strong outcomes for this group of students; with students' impressive text reading gains in the first year of implementation (Scull & Bremner, 2007). Data collected annually indicates approximately 75% of Kimberley students exposed to Reading Recovery meet year level expectations and achieved an average text reading level of 17 (Kimberley Success Zone, 2012). Student cohorts have also been tracked to State and national testing. The data shows that the 85% of the students who successfully completed their Reading Recovery series of lessons in 2006 and participated in the Year 3 Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment reading test in 2007 were at or above the Year 3 reading benchmark (CEOWA, 2010). The sustained gains made by students also evident in NAPLAN 2011 reading data, of those students who had previously benefitted from Reading Recovery support, 81% at Year 3 and 82% at Year 5 achieved results at or above the national minimum standards (Kimberley Success Zone, 2012).

The final principle has been formulated to reject short-term, piecemeal interventions that are not funded adequately and to ensure resources and energies are directed towards programs that show a positive impact on students' literacy learning.

Principle 6 – Invest in programs with a record of success and engage in research to monitor and improve the effectiveness of teaching and programs specific to meeting Indigenous students' learning needs.

Conclusion

The personal and community benefits of achieving high levels of literacy are widely recognised, as are the costs of low achievement (Gross et al., 2009) with educational opportunities considered a critical factor in closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (Ockenden, 2014). The three programs discussed in this paper provide prevention and intervention opportunities to strengthen Indigenous students' early literacy learning

outcomes as a strong foundation for future learning. The principles derived from the discussion of these programs are intended to inform early years teaching design and practice. That said, systematic, high quality instruction must continue into the middle years of schooling to ensure all students leave school-education systems with adequate levels of literacy, enhancing both their employment and life-style options. Collective, continuing discussions to address the issues faced by our young Indigenous learners might be useful for all concerned, in shedding light on what support is required in specific instances and how this intended support meets the very specific needs faced by these learners.

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