

Evaluation of the
Parents and Learning (PaL) program
in the Napranum Community

A report to the Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd (NPPG Ltd)
and Rio Tinto by the
Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographic Classification
BMA	BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance
CAPE	Community Activity Programs through Education
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CP	Community partner
DKCRC	Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
FAFT	Families as First Teachers
FAST	Families and Schools Together
FP	Facilitating partner
HIPPY	Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters
ILP	Indigenous Literacy Project
NPPG	Napranum Preschool PaL Group
NTCSA	Northern Territory Christian School Association
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAFT	Parents as First Teachers
PaL	Parents and Learning
PAT	Parents As Teachers
PCYC	Police Citizen Youth Club (Queensland)
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
YALP	Yachad Accelerated Learning Project

Evaluation of the Parents and Learning (PaL) program in the Napranum Community

Executive summary

Introduction and background

This report presents a case study of the Parents and Learning (PaL) program, based in Napranum on Cape York. The PaL program began at Napranum Preschool in 2001. The program and its materials are owned by the Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd (NPPG), which employs a Program Manager and other staff and is overseen by a board. PaL supports parents to engage in their children's learning and help them develop early literacy and numeracy skills. Rio Tinto, on behalf of the partnership between PaL and Rio Tinto, contracted Desert Knowledge CRC to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the PaL program using the Napranum community as the basis for a case study.

Methods

The research for this evaluation is based on a mixed-methods approach that draws on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data such that the quantitative data enlarges on an essentially qualitative study. The evaluators drew on a combination of documentary evidence, statistical data and a series of 18 semi-structured interviews of stakeholders, conducted in September 2008.

Findings

The external evaluators analysed these perceptions and were able to identify a number of outcomes for parents, children and the community more generally. These outcomes are summarised briefly as follows:

- All stakeholders reported that the program has led to increased confidence among participants (including parents, children and PaL employees), and that this increased confidence is the source of other outcomes.
- Parents reported increased parenting skills and knowledge, improved parent–child interaction and a range of employment and career outcomes.
- Stakeholders identified a range of literacy and learning outcomes for children.
- An important, though less frequently reported outcome related to the role of PaL in acting to support role models for the community.
- For those engaged as members of the NPPG board, there were indications that the program had built business skills.

Sustainability of PaL was a theme that was frequently raised by respondents. The need for ongoing funding was noted, but concomitant with this need was the importance of a number of underpinning factors and strategies required to provide the necessary leverage to attract future funding from sources outside Rio Tinto. The adaptability, local ownership and perceived value of the program were seen as critical factors supporting sustainability. However, the need for promotion, skills required for writing funding submissions and diversification of funding sources were seen as critical elements of strategies required to assure sustainability.

Board function and capacity concerns were also raised. Some respondents expressed concerns about the skill level of some members, and there was a perceived need for training of both PaL employees and NPPG board members.

The need for growth and expansion of PaL beyond its Cape York base was not universally accepted. The evaluators noted some concern about the potential loss of the local identity of the program. They also observed a sense of pride among some respondents in the wider roll-out of the program to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, the question of whether the program should be extended to other communities was beyond the scope of the evaluation. If NPPG does wish to proceed with the expansion of the program beyond its current base, there is clearly a need for additional support and mentoring, particularly in the area of promotion and marketing. Rio Tinto may be best placed to provide this support.

Conclusions

This case study report highlights the outcomes and the lessons learned, together with the emerging opportunities that have arisen from the PaL program delivered in Napranum.

The evaluators see an opportunity for NPPG to benefit from the development of an evaluation strategy for PaL. By engaging in reflective-practice processes and clarifying expected outcomes, the indicators of success would become clearer to the board and PaL staff. This may require some initial external facilitation.

In response to the evaluation questions posed, the following comments are made.

How does the PaL model work to build the human capital of Napranum? PaL builds human capital primarily through skill development of both parents and children, and it does so as a result of the confidence that emerges from the program.

What are the community development outcomes that are attributable to the PaL program? The community development outcomes attributable to PaL are somewhat limited. It could be argued that PaL serves as a model for the community and that the business skills imparted through the program are community development outcomes, but it could well be argued that these are merely capacity-building outcomes with limited scope.

What lessons can be learned from the development of PaL over eight years? The program has demonstrated what can be considered 'good practice' in terms of its application of principles of parent-child interaction as an essential ingredient of improved educational outcomes for children. There are risks for the program too. Limited engagement with Western Cape College may inhibit or limit the benefits. Development of strong local networks is very important for PaL. The expansion of PaL also presents challenges. These relate mainly to promotion, marketing and access to alternative sources of funding.

While the program does have its challenges, the evolution and sustained development of the program since its inception in 2000 is a testament to its success.

List of recommendations

Recommendations, as set out in the report, are listed below.

- Recommendation 1 To help facilitate a smooth transition from preschool to school, it is recommended that NPPG make contact with the school to find ways of working together.
- Recommendation 2 Further to Recommendation 1, it is recommended that parenting capacity in PaL communities be further enhanced by more intentionally offering opportunities for engagement with the local primary schools.
- Recommendation 3 It is recommended that NPPG continue to rigorously document the employment outcomes of PaL parents and tutors.
- Recommendation 4 In order to capitalise on the strength of the program in terms of its promotion of reading, it is recommended that NPPG either a) facilitate access to a range of books for purchase by the general community; or b) establish a book cooperative that parents could use to access discounted books.
- Recommendation 5 In order to increase the number of books in the community, it is recommended that that NPPG approach the Fred Hollows Foundation about forming partnerships between the two organisations.
- Recommendation 6 In order to improve community engagement with the program in Napranum, it is recommended that NPPG identify strategies that will a) build a greater sense of community ownership of the PaL program; b) establish a broader set of local connections with other organisations; and c) pursue opportunities for increased connection with disengaged sections of the community.
- Recommendation 7 Further to Recommendation 6, it is recommended that NPPG explore ways it can model and promote the positive outcomes of PaL to a broader cross-section of the community.
- Recommendation 8 It is recommended that a person be employed for a two-year period to promote sustainability by a) focusing on promotion and marketing; b) lobbying potential funders; and c) writing submissions.
- Recommendation 9 It is recommended that the NPPG look at creating a non-director role that acknowledges and respects the status of Elders within the community. This may be a Patron of PaL.
- Recommendation 10 It is recommended that all board members and directors immediately review their own understanding of their roles and responsibilities of being a board member of NPPG.
- Recommendation 11 Further to Recommendation 10, it is recommended that all board members and directors undertake training in basic governance, including board roles and responsibilities.
- Recommendation 12 Further to Recommendation 8, it is recommended that Rio Tinto provide support to the NPPG board by providing specific advice and support to identify marketing and promotion opportunities.

Recommendation 13 It is recommended that NPPG build internal reflective-practice evaluation strategies into the support processes for PaL employees.

Recommendation 14 Further to Recommendation 13, it is recommended that NPPG engage an external evaluation consultant to support it with a) development of a long-term evaluation strategy; b) training and mentoring in internal evaluation processes; c) data collection tools and strategies; and d) recording methods.

Evaluation of the Parents and Learning (PaL) program in the Napranum Community

1 Introduction

This report presents a case study of the Parents and Learning (PaL) program, based in Napranum on Cape York. The program began in Napranum in 2000 after representatives from the Napranum Preschool reviewed the Israeli-developed Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).

The Napranum community has been closely involved in PaL, which evolved from parents requesting guidance on how to help their children prepare for school. PaL supports parents to engage in their children's learning and help develop early literacy and numeracy skills.

PaL in Napranum was initially funded (2000–2002) by the Rio Tinto Aboriginal Fund. It now operates in Aboriginal communities in four states. Rio Tinto is the foundation partner of PaL and has provided both in-kind and financial support for more than eight years to assist the development and expansion of the program.

As the foundation partner of PaL, Rio Tinto is committed to supporting the early education of Aboriginal children to build capacity for Aboriginal people to take up opportunities for increased employment and enterprise.

In 2004, PaL commenced in Echuca, Victoria, with co-funding for two years from the Westpac Foundation. PaL has also been successfully established in Newcastle and in the communities of Hope Vale and Mapoon on Cape York Peninsula and Roebourne in Western Australia.

The PaL program and materials are owned by the Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd (NPPG), which employs a Program Manager and other staff and is overseen by a board. The major stakeholders in the PaL project, Rio Tinto and NPPG, have contracted Desert Knowledge CRC to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the PaL program using the Napranum community as the basis for a case study.

The case study report first considers relevant literature relating to PaL and its context in far north Queensland. A brief outline of the methodology used for the project then follows. The findings are then presented, with relevant quotes and recommendations included where appropriate. The case study report concludes with a discussion of the role of evaluation before returning to answer the evaluation questions. The current evaluation builds on previous evaluations conducted in 2003 and 2005 (Makin 2005, 2003).

2 Literature review

The literature reviewed here considers a range of issues relevant to the case study. Firstly, the context and background to PaL in far north Queensland is considered, with a review of relevant statistics drawn from census data. The literature review then goes on to discuss issues about parent–child engagement, parent–school engagement and models of community engagement, partnerships and community development. Sustainability issues are also discussed.

2.1 Context and background

Indicators related to the successful application of PaL programs could be considered in terms of a range of measures proposed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as they relate to early learning and care ((Pink 2007)). These include measures of participation, measures related to providers, financial resources, human resources, activity measures, outputs and outcomes and context measures. An evaluation such as this does not have access to a full range of these measures. However, it is important to recognise the current context of the PaL program and to represent the context in which the program is run. The major focus of this evaluation is on Napranum and Mapoon on Cape York. These two remote communities, along with Hope Vale, also on Cape York, are quite different from the context of Echuca and Newcastle, and comparisons between the mainstream sites and the remote communities cannot be made. Therefore the maps and statistics presented here will be limited to the main communities of interest on Cape York.

The contextual background provided here draws on ABS Indigenous Profile and Time Series Profile census data (ABS 2007a, 2007b). The geographical locations of Napranum, Mapoon and Hope Vale are shown in Figure 1. For data analysis purposes the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) Statistical Local Area boundaries used by the ABS are used, as shown on the map, which also serves to show the relative percentage of preschool-aged children (3–4-year-olds) in the population.

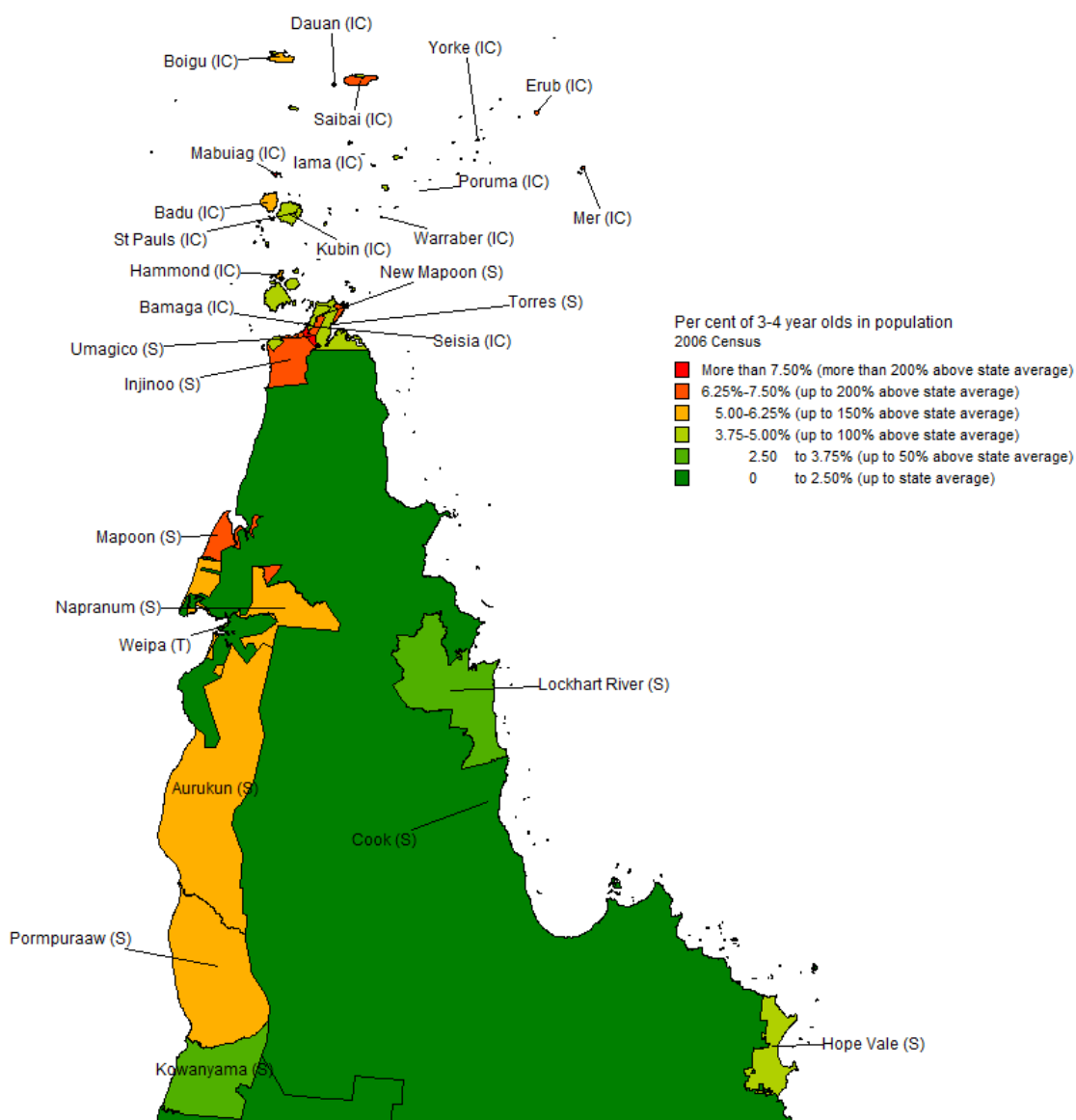


Figure 1: Location of Napranum, Mapoon and Hope Vale communities showing percentage of 3–4-year-olds in the total population

Source: ABS 2007a

Table 1 shows a selection of Time Series Profile data from the 2006 Census. Data from 1996 and 2006 from three communities are compared with aggregate data for Queensland (ABS 2007b). Note, however, that for Mapoon, no data is shown for 1996 as the Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council was only established in 2000. The table shows that while total population growth has been modest for Napranum and Hope Vale, the 3–4-year-old population has increased at rates several times faster than the state average. This is then reflected in relatively high proportions of 3–4-year-olds in the overall population of each of the three communities in 2006, with Mapoon showing 7.2 per cent of the population in this age group. In Napranum, census data shows that preschool attendance is notably higher than the state average, at 64.3 per cent, compared with 46.2 per cent in Hope Vale, 47.4 per cent in Mapoon and 57.8 per cent across the state.

Median household sizes in Napranum and Hope Vale declined in the 10-year period to 2006, down 0.4 and 0.8 persons per household respectively. Median age of residents in Napranum remained constant at 24 years, while in Hope Vale it increased from 22 to 27 years, and across the state it increased from 33 to 36 years.

Table 2 shows a selection of variables drawn from the 2006 Census Indigenous Profile for Indigenous people only (ABS 2007a). The data shows relatively low Year 12 completion rates compared with other Indigenous people in the state. While unemployment rates in each community are relatively low compared with the State average for Indigenous people, this is at least in part explained by relatively high participation in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). Relatively low labour force participation in Napranum also explains to some extent the low unemployment rate. The proportion of the Indigenous population in Hope Vale and Mapoon with Vocational Education and Training (VET) Certificate qualifications in 2006 was above the state average, possibly reflecting training carried out by CDEP participants. However, in Napranum the proportion of people with Certificate qualifications is just over half the state average.

In summary, the PaL sites in Cape York are characterised by:

- high numbers of young children in the population
- relatively low educational attainment
- strong participation in CDEP
- relatively large, but declining household sizes.

Napranum stands out differently from the other two communities with:

- lower levels of Year 12 educational attainment
- lower levels of labour force participation
- a younger median age
- relatively strong levels of preschool attendance.

This analysis should be treated with some caution because of year-to-year variations in small communities such as these. Also, in terms of preschool attendance, the levels may correctly reflect agreement with questions on a census form, but the consistency of that attendance should be verified with on-site observations. However, what does stand out quite incontrovertibly, is the high proportion of young (preschool-aged) children in the population. This would also suggest that demand for accessible programs that meet the needs of carers and their children *should* be high.

Table 1: Time Series Profile for Napranum, Hope Vale, Mapoon and Queensland, selected variables, 1996 and 2006 Census

	Napranum			Hope Vale			Mapoon*		Queensland		
ASGC Code	350105670			350103830			350104830		STE 3		
	1996	2006	Change	1996	2006	Change	1996	2006	1996	2006	Change
Total population	777	818	5.3%	706	826	17.0%	0	265	3368850	4046880	20.1%
Total Indigenous population	722	765	6.0%	668	743	11.2%	0	222	95518	127644	33.6%
Total 3–4-year-old population	25	42	68.0%	33	39	18.2%	0	19	98188	102486	4.4%
Per cent of 3–4-year-olds in total population	3.2%	5.1%		4.7%	4.7%			7.2%	2.9%	2.5%	
Preschool attendance	16	27	68.8%	22	18	-18.2%	0	9	48021	59186	23.3%
Per cent of 3–4-year-olds attending preschool	64.0%	64.3%		66.7%	46.2%			47.4%	48.9%	57.8%	
Median household size	4.3	3.9	-0.4	4.6	3.8	-0.8		3.4	2.7	2.6	-0.1
Median age	24	24	0	22	27	5		30	33	36	3

Mapoon Aboriginal Council was established in 2000

Source: ABS 2007b

Table 2: Indigenous Profile data for Napranum, Hope Vale, Mapoon and Queensland, 2006 Census

	Napranum		Hope Vale		Mapoon		Queensland	
ASGC Code	IARE 12005		IARE 12015		IARE 12019		STE 3	
Indigenous persons only	Census data	Per cent of 15+ population	Census data	Per cent of 15+ population	Census data	Per cent of 15+ population	Census data	Per cent of 15+ population
Total 15+ population	504		516		156		77954	
Total Yr 12 Completion	67	13.3%	87	16.9%	22	14.1%	19913	25.5%
Unemployment rate	7.7%		5.0%		4.1%		13.1%	
Labour force participation rate	45.9%		69.8%		61.8%		56.2%	
CDEP participants	155	30.8%	260	50.4%	63	40.4%	4560	5.8%
Certificate qualifications	44	8.7%	92	17.8%	27	17.3%	10955	14.1%

Source: (ABS 2007a)

2.2 Importance of parent–child interaction for early learning

The importance of parent–child interaction and engagement for early learning is well documented in the literature. The international literature strongly supports a view that the quality of parent–child interactions makes a difference to educational outcomes (e.g. Statistics Canada and OECD 2005, UNESCO 2006). The OECD asserts: ‘PISA 2000 [Programme for International Student Assessment] demonstrated the important relationship between parental involvement and children’s academic success’ (OECD 2004:166). Discussing international research on home influence on school performance, Field et al. (2007) state that:

Research shows that greater parental involvement in education encourages more positive attitudes toward school, improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism and dropout, and enhances academic achievement ... General support and involvement by parents, such as a display of interest in school programmes and discussing the student’s day at school, work best.

The Australian literature is consistent with this view. For example, the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al. 2006) report, in its Foreword, states that:

Re-engaging Aboriginal parents and caregivers as educators of their children in the first five years of life is critical if there is to be a strong relationship between home and school that can be utilised to develop common understandings, shared knowledge and mutual support in developing approaches to improving educational attainment. Aboriginal parents have always valued education. They want their children to succeed. (p. vii)

While there is strong agreement about the need to support Indigenous people in their interactions with their children in mainstream education programs, there is equal agreement that the way that support is provided is critical to the success of programs. Mainstream programs cannot simply be transplanted to Indigenous contexts. Programs must be culturally appropriate; relationships need to be built over time and non-Indigenous service providers need to be flexible in the way they provide support. Experiences from Communities for Children programs that are designed to support parent–child interaction confirm these considerations (Katz et al. 2007, Flaxman & Muir 2008).

2.3 School–parent engagement and learning outcomes

There are numerous programs that acknowledge the important role of parents and other family members as the child’s first educators. International programs include Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) and the Yachad Accelerated Learning Project (YALP), which both originated in Israel; and Families and Schools Together (FAST) and Parents as Teachers (PAT), which both originated in the United States.

Programs currently operating in Australia and specifically targeting Indigenous families include:

- Parents and Learning (PaL) in Napranum, Mapoon and Hope Vale (Qld); Newcastle (NSW); Echuca (Vic); and Roebourne (WA)
- Play & Learn Group in Arnhem Land (NT)
- YALP in Alice Springs (NT), Aurukun (Qld), Halls Creek (WA), North Adelaide (SA) and Shepparton (Vic)

- HIPPY in La Perouse (NSW)
- Families as First Teachers (FAFT) in Kuranda (Qld)
- Reading Discovery (Vic)
- Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) in Napranum (Qld).

The most significant difference between the different programs is the stage of child development that the program targets. Parents as Teachers (PAT) and the Play and Learn Group in Arnhem Land support families with children from birth to three years of age. HIPPY, PaL and Reading Discovery work with children at preschool age, generally three- to five-year-olds. PAFT and FAFT concentrate on young children already at school, five- to eight-year-olds. YALP works to develop teachers of all grades, so works with any child at school of five years and older.

PaL was developed in 2000 after community members had reviewed HIPPY and decided that while they believed in many of the underpinning concepts, they felt HIPPY was not an appropriate program for their community context.

Dean et al. (2007), in a review of Australian HIPPY research, point to the following findings from multiple evaluation studies conducted in a variety of contexts. They suggest that ‘relationships form the core of HIPPY’. That is, the relationships and networks formed as a result of engaging in HIPPY support increasing attachment of participants within their community. They also report increasing parent–child attachment as a result of participation in the program. Australian longitudinal studies reviewed by Dean et al. show that HIPPY has a significant impact on school readiness for disadvantaged children. It also produced significantly improved socio-emotional development outcomes. The evaluations show that parents report increased self-confidence in their own parenting abilities; they feel a greater sense of closeness with their child(ren) and ‘an expansion of relationships with others in the surrounding community’ (p. 14). Tutors also reported increased confidence and knowledge, with many taking steps toward further education. Stanley (2007), in pre-empting a further Australian national evaluation of HIPPY notes that:

Parents’ skills and confidence as their child’s first teacher are developed through these home visits and through gatherings with other parents. The intensive, extended contact with parents is an essential component in facilitating long-term development in these families.

Many of these findings are supported by a series of theses relating to HIPPY research reviewed by Victoria University (2007) and are echoed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which acts as an umbrella organisation for HIPPY in Australia (Gilley 2003). International studies and evaluations (e.g. LeMare & Audet 2003, Bakermans-Kranenburg et al. 2005, Barlow et al. 2007) draw similar conclusions, though there is some research suggesting that home-based programs such as HIPPY would be more effective if a ‘centre-based’ or institutional component was added to the program (e.g. (Blok et al. 2005). Also, there is some evidence to suggest that learning outcomes that emerge from home-visiting methods are not necessarily linked directly to the parents’ increased confidence (e.g. (van Tuijl et al. 2001, Rosenberg et al. 2002).

HIPPY is but one of many models being used in Australia, and to a large extent it is applied to disadvantaged families in mainstream contexts. However, there is considerable international support for many of the principles underpinning HIPPY methodology (e.g. OECD 2006, UNESCO 2006,

Keeley 2007). The need for such programs to address factors impacting on outcomes for disadvantaged families and children is also supported by national and international literature (e.g. Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family 2004, The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee 2004). Notable international reports such as the OECD's *Well-being of the Nations* (OECD 2001) and *PISA* (OECD 2003, 2004) highlight the significance and value of early interventions that support parents and young children – particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds – not only at school, but with targeted preschool programs that help parents and caregivers engage with schools and their children (Zubrick et al. 2006). HIPPY, while focusing on home tutoring as a vehicle for improving parent–child interaction, does not necessarily make the connection to parent–school interaction.

Like HIPPY, the Yachad Accelerated Learning Project (YALP) also comes from Israel. Yachad was developed by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in collaboration with schools (teachers, educators and students) and the wider community, including parents (YALP 2005). YALP began in Australia in 2005 as a three-year pilot program in Halls Creek (WA), Aurukun (Qld) and Shepparton (Vic) with the aim of improving literacy and numeracy outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in remote, regional and rural locations of Australia. While the emergence aspect of the model works with teachers and para-professionals to transfer the knowledge and skills of YALP methodology, the convergence aspect of the model works with the 'Community'. Specifically, YALP engages with the Indigenous community, parents and caregivers and local agencies through a process of consultations (YALP 2007).

Another international model being rolled out in Australia, which is being applied successfully in remote Indigenous contexts, is the FAST (Families And Schools Together) program. FAST does focus on the parent's relationships to school. FAST is an eight-week, early intervention/prevention program, designed to strengthen family functioning and so build protective factors in children. The program targets the whole family and participation is strictly voluntary. It is conducted in the context of a local school. The core of the program involves eight weekly multi-family meetings, usually held in the school, during which positive interactional experiences for families are structured and facilitated by a collaborative leadership team. The collaborative team consists of at least four members: a parent partner, a school partner, a community-based agency partner and a community-based partner.

FAST programs grew out of inner city Native American and First Nation communities in North America. The program was developed by Dr Lynn McDonald, a family therapist and academic at the University of Wisconsin. FAST targeted families with young children who were not succeeding at school. FAST has operated in Australia since 1996, mainly in Victoria and Western Australia, where it included urban Indigenous families. The FAST program's implementation in the Northern Territory communities in 2002 was part of a holistic approach to enhance educational outcomes for Indigenous students in that region. The Northern Territory Christian Schools Association (NTCSA), in partnership with local communities, established Woolanin Homeland Christian College, a regional secondary, residential school. From the earliest planning stage, community leaders identified lack of effective parenting as a key impediment to participation and success in schooling. This is supported by *Learning Lessons*, the Collins' Report into Indigenous Education (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). By the end of 2006, FAST had been delivered to over 11 communities in the Northern Territory and is continuing to be rolled out into more.

The efficacy of the approaches used by FAST is supported by a body of literature that includes evaluation and research conducted by FAST itself, internationally (Layzer et al. 2001, Caspe & Lopez 2006) and within Australia (Coote 2000; Datatab & Burgess 2003; Seiffert 2005, 2006) and by other research conducted more generically relating to application of FAST operational principles and practices. Some activities that illustrate the principles and practices of the program model (Wisconsin Center for Education Research 2007) are a shared meal, communication games played at a family table, time for couples, a self-help parent group, one-to-one quality play and a fixed lucky door prize in which each family wins once. The basis of these activities is drawn from an extensive array of research sources drawn from work carried out up to the early 1990s. The literature cited by FAST (McDonald 2000) describes the importance of parent–child interaction (e.g. (Dunst et al. 1988, Gettinger et al. 1992, Webster-Stratton 2002), child-initiated play (e.g. Barkeley 1987) and empowering parents to be involved in their children’s learning (e.g. Dunst et al. 1988, also cited in Rous et al. 2003). One explanation of why this works is related to the increased presence of social and cultural capital among parents. Berthelsen and Walker (2008), drawing on the findings of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, suggest that:

Families with more social and cultural capital tend to be more involved at school because these families are more comfortable with teachers and schools and are more likely to have supportive social networks. (p. 36)

As part of its East Arnhem Communities for Children program, Anglicare (NT) is developing a play and learn group activity, which is also designed to build capacity of parents and carers. However, this program is more of a health intervention model that depends on expertise of a qualified practitioner such as a Paediatric Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist to impart knowledge to parents and carers, either directly through home visits or through an intermediary local Indigenous coordinator. The programs are subject to evaluation, but a formal evaluation report is yet to be prepared.

Under the same program, Anglicare is also supporting another model of play and learn group on Bickerton Island near Groote Eylandt: The Milyakburra Mothers Club. The community of 150 people had never had a playgroup of this kind before. It has been running on the Island now for two years. Attendance varies, but typically six or seven parents and carers (who might be grandparents, aunts or other female family friends) bring their children along. Most participants speak English as a second language. The playgroup operates every day of the week and has a semi-structured program, which includes activities such as story time, cooking programs for mums, trips to the beach, collecting bush tucker and input from health clinic workers. The local evaluators noted that there is some evidence of improved engagement with the local school, and parents and carers are now recognising the value of intentional engagement with their children. It is anticipated that the project will lead to improved attendance in preschool and primary school.

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is another international early childhood parent education and family support program for families with children from birth to three years of age. Parents as Teachers began in 1981 in Missouri, after educators noted that children were beginning kindergarten with varying levels of learning readiness. Early childhood professionals suggested that a program to help parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development right from birth could help prepare children for school and life success (PAT 2005). PAT now operates in many countries,

including in Australia, with 14 PAT sites throughout NSW and the ACT (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2007).

PAT provides parents with child development knowledge and parenting support. This is achieved by trained and certified parent educators visiting the home and covering a lesson from the national PAT curriculum (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2007). Like PaL, HIPPY and other programs previously discussed, home visiting allows PAT advisors to model appropriate behaviour-guidance practices to help parents in their parenting role (Meldrum 2004).

The New Zealand version of the PAT program is called Parents as First Teachers (PAFT). Regardless of the name used, the basic educational component of the PAT/PAFT program is the home visit, in which a trained educator spends an hour each month helping parents to understand each stage of their child's development. In New Zealand, the government funds PAFT through Early Childhood Development for parents (Williams et al. 2002).

On the Cape York Peninsula, the Western Cape College Weipa Campus have an initiative also known as Parents as First Teachers (PAFT). Initiated in 2007, PAFT is a community engagement program that aims to increase awareness of the value of education and the positive life impact that school completion can have on economic independence, health and life outcomes to the close-by Napranum community (Western Cape College n.d.).

To achieve this, PAFT have been working with community service providers to build relationships with families and have hosted various activities to engage parents with their children's education, such as homework centres and workshops with visiting professionals (Western Cape College n.d.). An example of these relationship-building activities is the monthly Napranum Parents Afternoon Tea, a collaboration between PAFT, Western Cape College and the CAPE PCYC (Police Citizen Youth Clubs) Centre in Napranum (Cape York PCYC 2005).

Also operating in northern Queensland is Families as First Teachers (FAFT). Like PaL, FAFT is about helping families support their preschool-aged children's early literacy and numeracy development. The FAFT project operating at Kuranda District State College developed out of an identified need from Indigenous families through an initial reference committee made up of two community liaison officers, the principal and representatives from local Indigenous community organisations. In recognising that some families in the past have been reluctant or unable to come into the school grounds, FAFT is implemented in each of the five surrounding Kuranda communities by a team of Indigenous community workers and non-Indigenous teachers (Education Queensland n.d.).

FAFT parents and caregivers reported that they are more aware, confident and skilled in the learning that their children are doing at school. In addition, the Kuranda District State College reported the following outcomes:

- Attendance rates for Indigenous children improved by 40 per cent.
- Negative behaviour incidents were reduced by 74 per cent.
- There has been an increase in the employment of Indigenous staff from three in 2004 , five (2005), eight (2006) and 11 in 2007.
- There has been an increase in parents who feel the school is a good school. The proportion of parents who were satisfied or very satisfied rose from 62 per cent in 2004, to 76 per cent in 2005 and remained constant at 76 per cent in 2006. (Education Queensland n.d.)

Operating in Victoria with support from BHP Billiton is the Reading Discovery project, a family literacy program aimed at parents and their preschool children in marginalised rural groups. The Reading Discovery practitioners visit referred families for one hour per week to model shared reading and creative play with parents. There is a specific Indigenous Reading Recovery program that uses Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literature with Indigenous children (Reading Discovery 2008).

The literature in general supports a view that parent–teacher and parent–school relationships are important for promoting attendance at school and improving school–community outcomes (e.g. Bourke et al. 2000, Mellor & Corrigan 2004, Department of Education Science and Training 2006). Further, there is evidence that school readiness of children is not just dependent on the characteristics of the child or his or her parents. Rather, collaborations that link a number of partners engaged in school-readiness are needed. In a recent Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) topical paper, Sorin and Markotsis (2008) conclude that:

Strong, positive relationships between partners in the readiness process are essential. Effective communication between partners includes knowledge of each other's practices.

The literature review will now go on to discuss the issues relating to the role that learning plays in community development processes before returning to the issue of partnerships in the subsequent section.

2.4 The role of learning in community development processes

While capacity building may be a worthwhile goal in itself, another approach worth considering in remote communities is one that supports community development. This is fundamentally different from capacity building as the focus, and is more about empowering communities to take ownership and control of processes involving service delivery, education and governance rather than simply providing services. Ledwith (2005:73), for example, describes this as an approach that requires 'emancipatory action research', which leads to 'reciprocal, collaborative, transformative and empowering' processes. A crucial aspect of ownership and control is representation; that is: Who has authority to sanction and control cultural and community knowledge and decision making? and Who has the authority to represent this information?

Even a fairly generic interpretation of community development acknowledges the importance of involvement and participation. For example Green and Haines (2008) suggest that community development is not merely about the development of community assets:

Community development requires the involvement and participation of local residents in identifying the strategies they wish to use to improve their quality of life.
(p. 13)

The broad principle is that Indigenous people must control all representations and interpretations of their cultural, social and economic affairs. Talking to the 'right' people with the right knowledge is not always as easy as it sounds. The term 'community' suggests unity of purpose and opinion, but it can just as easily mean diversity. As a rule, people can and will speak for their own country and affairs based on clan and family affiliations but will not and cannot speak for others. Realistic

timelines are important to give the community time for familiarisation with the project and to be clear about its intent and the actions proposed. Time is needed for traditional decision-making practices to establish legitimacy and to make effective ongoing decisions about project management.

While on the surface the connection between PaL, adult learning and community development might appear to be somewhat tenuous, there is indeed a strong connection. Programs such as PaL operate at a number of levels: they offer outcomes for children, parents, communities, institutions and society more generally (Deutsch 1998). On the one hand they are designed to build the capacity of parents and children to improve early learning outcomes. However, a key consequence of the engagement of parents, tutors and children is the learning that occurs – mostly either informally or non-formally – which in turn builds the confidence of parents. Hammond (2004) describes this in terms of self-esteem and self-efficacy, identity, purpose and future, communication and competences and social integration. The increased confidence produces what could be described as an identity change that allows individuals to make choices and see opportunities that they previously did not have (Guenther 2008).

In the context of families, the relationship between parental and children's learning has been shown to have a number of positive effects. Brassett-Grundy (2004) observed several themes from research related to:

Valuing – as a result of their own participation in learning, parents came to give more value to their children's educational achievement
Supporting – parents were more able to offer support to their children, directly in their studies or indirectly by involvement in their school
Role-modelling – parents became model learners for their children
Reciprocating – children helped their parents, giving them motivation for or support in learning
Enjoying – children and parents learnt together as a highly enjoyable joint activity.
(p. 85)

This list suggests that a program such as PaL can be expected to have multiple outcomes that are not restricted to early learning or parent-child interaction outcomes. These outcomes could be seen as part of a community development process.

2.5 Partnerships for community development in Indigenous communities

Partnerships are generally considered to be a constructive way for organisations with a mutual interest to achieve outcomes more effectively. Collaborative partnerships are defined by both processes and structures (D'Amour et al. 2005). This distinction adds some fluidity to the definition and reflects the sometimes vaguely defined descriptions of collaborations. As a response to complex social challenges in which learning often plays a role, collaboration is believed to result in outcomes that are more integrated and holistic, and therefore more sustainable (Beyerlein et al. 2004, Keast et al. 2004, Carpenter et al. 2005). In much of the literature reviewed, the terms 'partnership' and 'collaboration' are used more or less interchangeably (e.g. Huxham & Vangen 2000, Takahashi & Smutny 2002, Gelade et al. 2006). Some research appears to suggest that collaboration is a characteristic of partnerships (Allison et al. 2006). Organisations may work together in a continuum of effort, with informal processes of cooperation and coordination at one end and more formal

processes of collaboration at the other (ARACY 2004). A 'collaborative partnership' then involves linkages of a stronger kind, built around a shared mission to pursue longer-term goals, and as such requires a higher degree of effort, commitment and alignment than some other forms of interaction.

Guenther and Millar (2007), in a review of collaboration in Communities for Children contexts, identified four different models associated with collaborative partnerships. They described these under headings of:

- 1) the resource broker
- 2) the team facilitator
- 3) the learning community
- 4) the strategic cooperative approach.

In terms of alignment with the NPPG–Rio Tinto PaL model, the resource broker fits most closely (see Figure 2). This approach to collaborative partnership draws on external funding to fund initiatives in communities, using community partners (CPs) via a central Facilitating partner (FP).

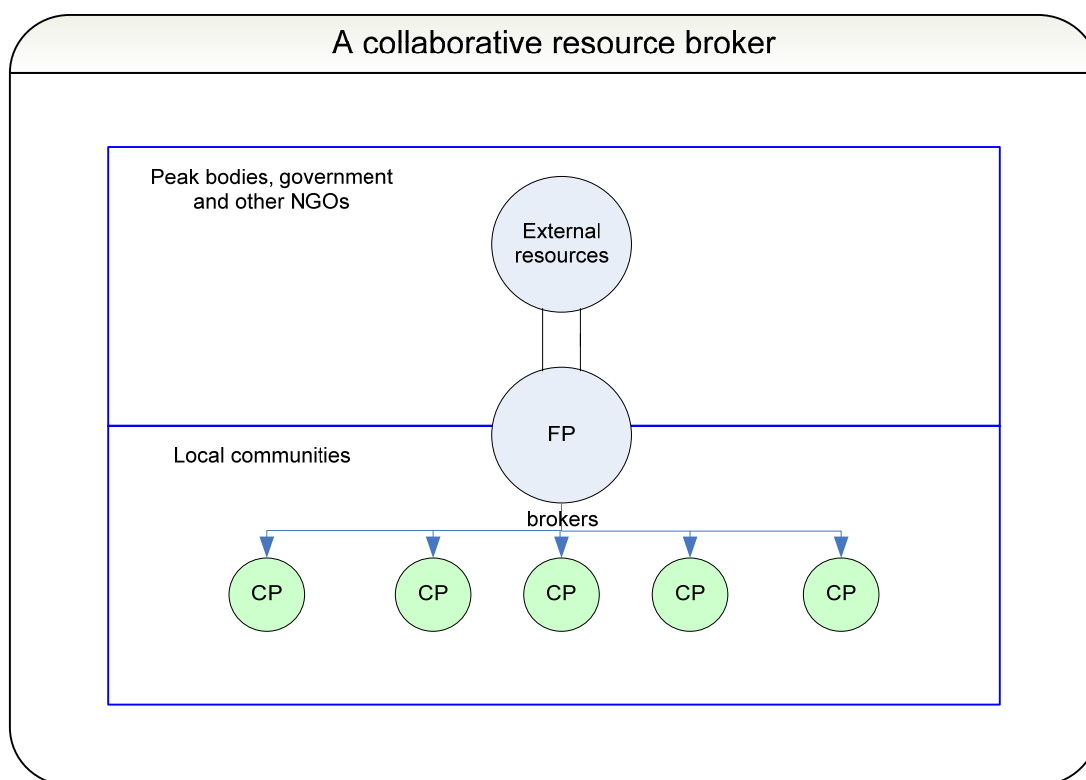


Figure 2: Guenther and Millar's (2007) resource broker model

Partnerships between mining companies and communities (using a model such as that shown in Figure 2) are not uncommon in Australia, especially those that promote outcomes with a sustained human- or social-capital–building element. Several examples are found in recent literature; some of these relate specifically to remote Indigenous communities. However, most of the examples relating to education are more focused on building capacity of individuals at school and vocational level (see for example Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2001, The Allen Consulting Group 2001, Robertson et al. 2004).

In central Queensland, BMA's Community Partnership Program (BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance 2004, Guenther et al. 2008) supports several community learning initiatives, including Learning Development Centres, designed to promote better literacy and numeracy outcomes for children in schools.

In the Northern Territory, Newmont Australia supports community development initiatives through an Indigenous training and employment program that is designed to develop a local workforce through capacity building (Young et al. 2007). Newmont partners with several organisations, including Central Land Council and Central Desert Training Pty Ltd. The program was developed as a part of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement.

The experience of Communities for Children programs under the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy initiative, as they have been applied in remote communities, also informs our understanding of what works in Indigenous contexts. An *Indigenous Theme Study* conducted in 2008 (Flaxman & Muir 2008) highlighted the importance of cultural appropriateness, appropriate staff skills and qualifications and an understanding of the local community context for effective service delivery.

In terms of what makes partnerships such as the above work, a number of factors emerge that are generic regardless of the type of partnership. Guenther and Millar (2007), for example, identified five underpinning factors that contributed to success: trust; strong relationships; open networks and communication; clear roles and responsibilities; and enabling leadership. In their review of Vocational Education and Training/Adult and Community Education (VET-ACE) partnerships in northern Australia, Guenther et al. (2008) identified a similar set of factors contributing to effectiveness: brokering leadership, local shakers and movers, relationships and trust, local resource-sharing, and access to external resources. This list is not dissimilar from a discussion of intersectoral collaboration success factors identified by Wakerman and Mitchell (2005) who commented on partnerships, with particular emphasis on those in remote Indigenous contexts, that 'Community involvement is almost universally acknowledged as key to successful intersectoral collaboration' (p. 15). Young et al. (2007), commenting on the Newmont case cited above, also highlight the importance of local community engagement and support from the mining company 'that extends from the corporate level to the local mine management and is reflected in both the financial commitment and management of the mine' (p. 32). The Allen Consulting Group (2001), in a report to the Business Council of Australia, suggested that there has been a shift in the nature of Indigenous and Community Partnerships from a 'paternalistic' first generation approach to a more holistic second generation approach. They note that:

Key characteristics of second generation activities are that they are based on well researched community needs assessment, systems and structures integrate the activity with core business decisions, results are measured and benefits tend to flow both ways. They aim to support Indigenous management and ownership of programs, which results in better and more appropriate outcomes. Sustainability is also becoming a central focus; companies and communities want the activities to have lasting and positive impact. Aiming for sustainability often involves a carefully designed three-way partnership between government, business and communities. (p. 124)

2.6 Sustainability

The issue of sustainability raised in the quote above is related to partnerships. In relation to this it is important to recognise that sustainability is not only about ensuring funding – that is, the economic capital of the program – though this is clearly important and is a major factor in predicting sustainability of programs (Savaya et al. 2008). Rather, it is also about the legacy of the program in terms of the human and social capital that is retained (Rogers & Williams 2008). This may be expressed in terms of:

- changed behaviours (healthier, less risk-taking)
- embedded and acculturated values
- increased capacity (in terms of skills and capabilities)
- greater trust, improved collaboration
- improved effectiveness.

Underpinning sustainability of programs and outcomes are a set of prerequisite processes. Following an examination of sustainability of educational programs, Nocon (2004:729) suggests that the ‘process of sustainability is collaborative, communicative, creative, and continuing’. In saying this, she points to the factors that are required for longevity of programs. With regard to the latter, she notes that long-term commitment is required. Scheirer (2005), in an evaluation of 19 empirical studies on health promotion programs, found five common factors that contribute to sustainability. These, she noted as:

(a) A program can be modified over time, (b) a “champion” is present, (c) a program “fits” with its organization’s mission and procedures, (d) benefits to staff members and/or clients are readily perceived, and (e) stakeholders in other organizations provide support. (p. 320)

A study of 100 Australian programs conducted by Savaya et al. (2008) shows that while ongoing involvement of an auspicing organisation is critical for sustainability, diversity of non-financial support and broad support from partnerships are also important. This study showed some counter-intuitive results also: that low community ownership increased the likelihood of extending programs to new target groups; and that a perception of program effectiveness reduced the likelihood of sustainability. They posit that the reason for this could be that partnerships overcome the weaknesses posed by low levels of community ownership; and, where programs are deemed effective, their ongoing need might not be recognised.

2.7 Summary of literature

The context of the PaL program, particularly in relation to its base in Napranum, is of particular significance. The contextual data review at the beginning of this section shows that demand for children’s services ought to be high. There are high proportions of young children in the population of the three remote communities on Cape York; the educational attainment levels and capacity of the community in terms of qualifications, is relatively low. Of particular note is the median age of the Napranum population, at just 24 years. This fact points to the likelihood of high numbers of young parents and a growing preschool and school-aged population. The need for support of young carers is presumably, therefore, very high.

The international and Australian literature is unequivocal about the importance of quality parent–child interactions as a precursor to strong educational outcomes. However, the way that these interactions are supported – particularly in remote contexts – is still being debated.

There are numerous examples in the literature of programs that follow the premises of PaL. HIPPY, for example, on which the original idea of PaL was built, has been widely adopted in Australia and is considered an example of promising practice in mainstream contexts. FAST, which has an emphasis on parent–school engagement, is also considered good practice. It has been successfully applied to remote Indigenous contexts and is expanding throughout the Northern Territory. Communities for Children initiatives in remote contexts offer some lessons for broader application of good practice principles.

An important aspect of the PaL model is the partnership that it is built on. Partnerships of this kind – where large organisations support communities in capacity-building initiatives – are not uncommon in Australia. The ‘resource broker’ model used by Rio Tinto and NPPG fits well with accepted ways of addressing community needs. The literature identifies several principles of good practice for collaborative partnerships of this kind. In particular, the importance of appropriate leadership, strong relationships and trust, community engagement and ownership all stand out as factors that contribute to successful partnerships where attempts are made to build capacity in Indigenous contexts.

The question of how programs such as PaL achieve sustainability is frequently raised. The literature considers this in terms of both programs and outcomes. A key factor that contributes to program sustainability is the strength of partnerships associated with a program. Achieving program longevity, however, does not necessarily relate directly to sustained impact, as achievement of outcomes may be interpreted by funding bodies as satisfaction of need. Sustainability, then is a complex issue that is not just about accessing more funds. It requires long-term commitment, local ownership and a mix of strong local and external linkages.

Ultimately, the end goal of a program such as PaL may not just be about building capacity, but rather more about community development. The literature distinguishes between these terms, and this distinction may be important for proponents of the PaL program. Capacity building is about increasing the capitals (social, economic, human, identity etc.) of a community, while community development can be seen as a process of empowerment that builds ownership and local control.

3 Methodology

3.1 Evaluation approach

The research for this evaluation is based on a mixed-methods approach that draws on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data such that the quantitative data enlarges on an essentially qualitative study (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998:44). As a case study, the 'unit of analysis' (Yin 2003) here is defined as the system, which encompasses the PaL model. That is, the scope of the study is bounded by the various stakeholders: the funding body, the program provider, the tutors, parents, children and the community to which they belong. The case study design draws on empirical data from the following sources:

- a) interview data from key stakeholders
- b) review of relevant documents and reports made available to the researchers
- c) consideration of past evaluation findings.

The shape of the interview instrument was determined during the preparation and planning phase and was dependent to some extent on what was deemed appropriate to those at the site. A local facilitator was employed to liaise with local community stakeholders. Interviews were conducted over a one-week period in September 2008. Recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed in qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 8), using standard procedures for thematising and coding data (Silverman 2000), which were related directly and indirectly to the evaluation questions.

Further, the case study draws on contextual data (e.g. ABS census data) for the community at a Statistical Local Area level and the region for comparison purposes. Attempts were made to gather relevant local quantitative data about school attendance, community organisations and other indicators of community capacity such as employment. This was ultimately not made available to the evaluation team.

The 'triangulation' (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007) of qualitative and quantitative data sources will build the strength of the findings and implications. In effect, one source helps to validate the other.

3.2 Evaluation questions

The interviews and methodology more generally were framed around the following questions.

1. How does the PaL model work to build the human capital of Napranum?

- a. What are the factors that work for and against the program to build skills and knowledge of home tutors, parents and children?
- b. What kind of outcomes can the program point to as indications of the success of the program?
- c. What are the contextual issues that contribute positively and negatively to these outcomes?

2. What are the community development outcomes that are attributable to the PaL program?

- a. What evidence is there that expected community development outcomes have been achieved?
- b. Are the community development assumptions on which the program is built, correct?
- c. How do the different stakeholders view 'effectiveness' in terms of community development?

3. What lessons can be learned from the development of PaL over the last decade?

- a. How does this program fit with the theories about parent engagement programs, particularly as they apply to Indigenous contexts?
- b. What are the underpinning principles of this program that could be applied or tested in other remote or Indigenous contexts?
- c. In what ways have the model succeeded (or failed), which would help in its replication in other contexts/locations?

The findings presented in the following section are drawn primarily from the qualitative interview data following standard 'grounded theory' approaches to data analysis (Charmaz 2006), which allow data to be presented as gathered, rather than being constrained by a more prescriptive hypothesis testing approach frequently used in quantitative data analysis. The evaluation, however, does return to the evaluation questions in the subsequent section (see section 5.2).

4 Findings

The findings presented in this section relate primarily to the themes that emerged from interview data. Recommendations are presented as they emerge from the findings.

4.1 Sample characteristics

Table 3 summarises the sample's attributes. Note that some interviewees fitted within several stakeholder groups. For example, it was possible that a respondent was interviewed as a PaL tutor, but at the same time gave accounts of his or her role as a former parent involved in PaL and/or as a member of the community involved in other activities.

Table 3: Sample characteristics (n=18), multiple stakeholder roles allowed

Site	Parents	PaL employees	NPPG board members	Rio Tinto employees	Other community member
Napranum and Weipa	7	4	6	4	5
Mapoon	2	2			1
Hope Vale					1
Newcastle	1	1			
Total	10	1	6	4	7

4.2 Program outcomes

In broad terms, the data show outcomes for parents and children and for the community as a whole. These will be discussed in turn below. The findings begin with an overarching outcome that does not relate specifically to any one group of respondents or stakeholders: confidence and pride.

4.2.1 Confidence and pride

A recurring theme from respondents was that children and adults involved with the PaL program had developed self confidence and pride in their own abilities. A number of respondents reported that they had observed children's confidence increase as a result of participating in PaL. One community representative observed:

I just think it's excellent for the kids. I can see an improvement between kids who are doing it and kids who aren't. Children who are doing the PaL seem to be very confident, they're not as shy. Whereas children who aren't doing it, you can see the difference.

This increased confidence was very noticeable when it was time for the children to start grade one at school, with several respondents noting that it gave children a head start. A past PaL parent commented:

Definitely from seeing my son and my nieces and nephews who have done PaL and gone into grade one and have really brightened up.

In addition, a number of parents reported that the PaL program had increased their confidence in helping their children with their education. For example, a past parent and tutor noted that:

Yeah, the parents feel really good ... It builds their confidence knowing I've put my hand up to help my child in this way.

One parent explained how doing PaL with her youngest child gave her the confidence to deal with the school that she didn't have with her three older children.

The older three, I would never go to school to talk to the teachers about report cards or any other issues. With the youngest one it gave me confidence in going out to the school and questioning teachers about homework or other issues. Before, the older three, I never went to the school at all.

Several respondents reported that the PaL program had given parents the confidence to participate in employment and further study. For example, two respondents observed that:

What it certainly does is builds people's self confidence. People begin to get self-belief; I can get a job, and I can do this.

and,

PaL has ... also given confidence to the mums. One of the mums started work at the school canteen and then went on to do a childcare course.

PaL tutors conduct weekly home visits to give parents the books and activities. Each week the home tutor visits the PaL parents and shows them how to use the resources. Many of the respondents who have been or are currently employed as home tutors said that PaL had increased their self confidence. One of the tutors described her increasing confidence:

You get more confident, you go and talk to other parents and meet their families. You're really active with the children as well. You see them progress through the year, that was a high.

Within Napranum several of the NPPG members have been involved with PaL at all levels as parents, home tutors, coordinators and/or as a member of the parent company, NPPG. Over the years people's confidence has continued to increase, and respondents explained how they were now doing things that they had never believed possible, including giving presentations to hundreds of people. For example, one NPPG board member described her progress:

I could not get up and talk in front of people, even at the home tutor training, I found it awkward. Going out to these conferences built my confidence.

When asked how she felt after giving a presentation another respondent said:

Big and strong. The adrenalin is up there and you feel really knowledgeable. You feel more able to answer questions that come after the presentation.

Two of the respondents who have been involved with PaL for more than five years explained the positive impacts flowing from their greater self confidence.

It's made me stronger. I've been able to speak up for myself if things aren't happening the way it should be. I bought my house and I wouldn't have felt confident about doing that five years ago. This mountain of paperwork would have daunted me.

I wouldn't have done that if I hadn't gone through PaL, all the training and things like getting my licence ... I ended up going and getting my licence and it opened up new doors for me.

PaL is also a program that the whole Napranum community can feel justly proud of, as explained by one of the PaL coordinators:

We feel really proud. It's a program that was born out of this tiny little community and everybody wants it. It's very popular and people want it. It makes us feel good within ourselves because it's something that we developed.

The selection of comments shown above reflects the importance of building confidence among the range of stakeholders involved in PaL. The outcomes that emerge from this – whether they be related to employment, formal and non-formal learning, community leadership – are equally worth noting.

4.2.2 Outcomes for parents

Outcomes of parents are divided into three main areas that emerge from the data. These relate to parenting skill and knowledge, parent–child interaction and employment and career outcomes.

Parenting skills and knowledge

Perhaps the most direct benefit that emerges from PaL is for parents in terms of parenting skills – that is, the capacity of parents to effectively support, nurture and encourage their children, particularly in relation to their education and wellbeing. The rationale for this important outcome is given by one Rio Tinto representative who suggested that this is achieved through personal support.

It's really important from the perspective of empowering the parents to get involved with their kids' education from an early time and encouraging the parents to accept that role and giving them tools to perform that role. I think it's a very personal program. They give a lot of one-on-one support.

One former PaL parent commented how the program gave her:

... the skills to help me to teach him. I used to write on a piece of paper 1 + 1, little shapes and things and give it to him. We'd do puzzles together. When

PaL came in I thought it was great. PaL has given me skills to get him to carry on.

The ability of a parent to engage with schools has been shown from the literature to be a critical factor that supports improved outcomes for children. PaL, through the support it provides parents, may enable them to more easily engage with school. One respondent suggested that parents would benefit from having a transition program designed to help them assist their own children to make the transition from preschool to school.

By encouraging and getting parents developed ... It could be like a transition. Some schools have transitions from primary to secondary, why not have a transition for parents? They feel comfortable, meet teachers each year. It builds up a better rapport between parents and teachers.

This might be a useful way of thinking about the connection between PaL and Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) and providing a workable transition for parents.

Recommendation 1 To help facilitate a smooth transition from preschool to school, it is recommended that NPPG make contact with the school to find ways of working together.

Respondents also reported increased awareness of parent understanding of children's stages of development. One respondent commented on his observations:

What I've most noticed over the years is parents being more aware of what the child's learning capabilities were. They took things home and it was all homework they had from school and it was hard, but they used that to see this is what their child did well at, as opposed to this is what their child struggled with. Looking back at the younger years, it always surprised them to see what their child did know rather than what they didn't know. It was a pleasant surprise for them to know: this is what my child can do.

Some caution needs to be applied to these findings about increased parental efficacy. It is possible that PaL parents are already more inclined to engage with school and learning than other parents. If this is the case, then what PaL does is to provide the resources and support needed for the transition to the formal school environment. The efficacy that emerges from PaL may be more about confidence than it is about skills required to negotiate barriers to engagement with the education system. Some respondents did acknowledge that parents who had been involved in PaL were more likely to be able to understand what was happening at school and, as a consequence, were more likely to be actively engaged in school.

It helped prepare children for formal learning, as indicated by the following quote:

It's another strategy of ... giving some help to those kids so that when they do go to school, they're up to the same level they should be.

It may be useful for NPPG to recognise the potential synergies that exist between the various services working to provide services for children and parents in Napranum and then

to find ways of working together with the Western Cape College in Weipa, Preschool in Napranum, Rio Tinto and PAFT. However, rather than trying to tackle all this at once, as Recommendation 1 suggests, a first point of contact is quite logically, Western Cape College.

Parent–child interaction

One of the strongly stated outcomes of PaL among stakeholders was the impact that it had on parent–child interaction and, indeed, whole family interaction. Evidence from interviews suggests that family cohesion is strengthened:

What I found with PaL is it brought the whole family together. The girls, we would do stuff, but when I'm not at home, Nanna would jump in and help. The kids have got Playstation, but homework comes first.

And another quote suggests that the PaL activities are used by older children as well:

I reckon it's good because sometimes you can get people who can't read, which can be a hinder on the family because they don't want people to know. I think having the PaL thing in the house, it can have the rest of the family interacting in that and it can help them. Even though you're doing it with the child, there will always be other kids who will probably interact. The other kids go into it and so do the parents, the parents are learning as well. You never stop learning. I think that if you have older children in the house who are having problems with reading or writing, PaL would be good for them too.

The above outcomes point to strengthened family cohesion and resilience, with an increasing recognition of the importance of early learning.

While the findings about parent outcomes suggest that efficacy is increased in terms of improved confidence, better family resilience and cohesion and potentially improved employment prospects, parents interviewed were not able to make the connection between PaL and their local school.

Recommendation 2 Further to Recommendation 1, it is recommended that parenting capacity in PaL communities be further enhanced by more intentionally offering opportunities for engagement with the local primary schools.

Adopting this recommendation would mean that in addition to offering home tutoring and support for parents with the PaL materials and resources, a required part of the tutor role would be to begin a process of intentionally connecting the parent with staff and other parents at the local school.

Employment and career outcomes

One of the themes that emerges from the data relates to the connections between PaL and employment and future careers. Respondents from all sites consistently reported that PaL had given parents the confidence to gain employment within their own communities. Sometimes the employment path was through PaL itself as a Home Tutor and Coordinator.

Data were collected on the past Home Tutors from Napranum. Of the 13 people who were previously employed as a PaL Home Tutor at Napranum and were still living in Napranum or Weipa, 10 are currently in paid employment (the other three are full-time child carers). Of the ten people currently in paid employment, half are employed by Rio Tinto.

While we cannot definitively say that being part of PaL leads to employment, we can say that many of those who were interviewed for the evaluation and who were employed had previously been either PaL parents and/or PaL tutors. Some suggested that PaL gave them the confidence required to find employment. For example, one former PaL parent commented:

I didn't feel confident about doing that but because I have had that little bit of experience doing books. When ... the business manager at Rio at the time said I might have a job for you, I said ok I'm up for it, and I went from there. A year later I'm still there and enjoying it.

There were several illustrations in the data that suggested that gaining confidence to apply for a job was a key outcome for parents involved in PaL. An important stepping stone for some parents was the opportunity to first become a tutor. One respondent with a long history of involvement in PaL and NPPG related an account that serves as an example of the way tutoring has led to other jobs.

We had a lady come through. She had two children through PaL. She was really quiet. She has five children. We took her on board as a tutor, then she moved on to Rio to drive trucks, which is really amazing, because she was a stay at home mum as well and really quiet, just coming through PaL and going out, doing visits, it built her confidence as well. We were really surprised when she said she applied to Rio.

This phenomenon was recorded at all sites, including the Newcastle site where the respondent noted that home tutors had gone on to complete training courses and moved to paid employment with other employers.

The home tutors have gone on and done other things. One lady did a hairdressing course; PaL gave her the confidence to do that. Another lady went on and became a childcare assistant. Another lady worked in the school canteen and other casual work, including sometimes working as a Teacher Aide.

The evidence from interviews suggests that the connection from PaL to employment is about confidence (see section 4.2.1). This confidence increase does not happen by chance, however. One Rio Tinto representative pointed to the role that education has in developing this confidence. It is quite likely that the majority of the learning that parents engage in is largely non-formal or informal. However, consistent with the literature about the role of all forms of adult learning, it is apparent that 'education' is indeed critical.

Education is critical in giving people confidence to participate in society. I wouldn't be surprised if people who are participating in the program with their kids are gaining confidence to think about what else they could do.

Recommendation 3 It is recommended that NPPG continue to rigorously document the employment outcomes of PaL parents and tutors.

Adoption of this recommendation will ensure that the multiple outcomes of PaL can be highlighted in reports and funding submissions, which are integral to the sustainability of the program and its impact. It will form a critical component of future evaluation activities (see discussion of this in section 5.1).

4.2.3 Outcomes for children

Outcomes for children are divided into two main areas: literacy and reading; and engaged learning.

Literacy and reading

The most frequently reported outcome related to early literacy and reading.

By the time they get to school they're very confident in being able to do what they're able to do at school instead of them being backward. PaL prepares them for school because what it does with the puzzles and interacting with the stories is very good. Some of the mothers who have children who do PaL, the kids are always wanting to read. They're learning to read and look after books at an early age.

One of the strengths of PaL is that it engages parents and children in reading. However, books are not readily accessible in Napranum.

Recommendation 4 In order to capitalise on the strength of the program in terms of its promotion of reading, it is recommended that NPPG either a) facilitate access to a range of books for purchase by the general community; or b) establish a book cooperative that parents could use to access discounted books.

It may be possible to link with the Indigenous Literacy Project, an organisation that provides books for remote communities. The Indigenous Literacy Project (ILP) is a partnership between the Australian Book Industry and The Fred Hollows Foundation. The Fred Hollows Foundation purchase and supply books and other culturally appropriate learning materials to remote communities where the Foundation works. Communities select and order reading material from catalogues and sample books provided by The Australian Booksellers Association. The Fred Hollows Foundation staff also identify other literacy needs. The books are then supplied to schools, libraries, early learning centres such as crèches, Women's Centres and other identified institutions to enhance their pool of literacy resources (The Fred Hollows Foundation n.d.).

Recommendation 5 In order to increase the number of books in the community, it is recommended that that NPPG approach the Fred Hollows Foundation about forming partnerships between the two organisations.

Engaged learning

PaL engages children in learning. There is good evidence from the data to suggest that children enjoy the activities and learning associated with reading and engaging with parents and tutors. For example, one respondent commented on the enthusiasm of a child for the PaL activities:

When I see him I say you've got to do PaL and he'll run for the PaL folder and set it up and ask his little sister to come and play. They were here all night last night doing the PaL.

PaL is much more than just a reading program – it is an early literacy learning program. The activities ensure that the child is engaged in the learning, even for children who may be reluctant readers.

He's not much of a reader but because the activities are in there it makes him want to do it. If it's a real good book he'll sit and listen to it, but it doesn't matter what book it is, the activities he will definitely do. I think it's the more hands on. He doesn't just sit there and listen, he gets to do something with it.

The combination of enjoyment and interaction with other peers appears to be a factor that contributes to strong engagement. For example, one parent commented on the way that learning is shared with other children:

With [my son], he never used to speak much with other children, but when he was starting PaL, he got more into interacting with other children because some of the games, he has to play with another child. We were staying across the road and his cousin was in the same group. They used to work together all the time. I took notice with [my son], he's learning a lot from PaL. He's learning to write his name and speak Standard Australian English.

Another parent commented on the enjoyment that followed from participating in PaL activities:

When we started the PaL program and when he started school, it was really good. It got him talking a lot more and reading books, he'd try and read along with me. He's really picked up at school and with PaL. He likes it. He's picked up a lot.

Other parents and tutors made similar comments. The common elements that appear to increase children's engagement in learning are:

- enjoyment of and engagement with the activities
- peer interaction
- play as a learning activity in its own right.

Perhaps more significantly, some respondents commented on how they had observed that engagement carrying over into school.

You can tell the PaL kids; they're more engaged at school, and their parents are supporting them better at school. They know the jargon that school uses. The whole thing with PaL, I think it is getting the children to understand print-based literacy they have at school. PaL is doing it.

It would seem that the exposure to books and learning activities is a great advantage to children. Parents recognise this.

4.2.4 Community development outcomes

Community development outcomes were not so readily identified by respondents. However, some interviewees commented on the way PaL enabled tutors and parents to become role models; it provided access to a range of networks, and for some of those involved in NPPG, it facilitated acquisition of business skills.

This may be in part because the approach taken by PaL is more of a service delivery model than one that fosters a whole of community approach. One community representative alluded to this very issue:

PaL should be driven by the community and the parents and have a good working relationship instead of just saying to the parents: 'You have to go to school now'. If they've had an unfriendly experience there, the parents will never go there. Therefore, parents involved in education doesn't occur.

This respondent went on to suggest that PaL was relying on the school to engage with the community and that the institutional nature of schools and teachers limits the possibilities for real community engagement. A representative from Rio Tinto expressed similar sentiments:

I think their product, what they sell or what they've got to offer people, is probably a bit countercultural for that community. For people to step up and say, 'Yes I'd like to participate' – they're not overwhelmed with participants. When they talk about how people are participating I think. 'Oh, they could find more families than that. What they do is of value. I suppose it's that countercultural thing. It's not the first priority for Indigenous families, how we're going to get our kids educated ... I think times are changing, but I still think there are challenges there in terms of getting people engaged about that particular program.

There was some acknowledgement that NPPG is community owned. However, this does not appear to translate into a community development mode of operation. NPPG is clearly operating as a business and as such is in effect 'selling a product', as the respondent above suggested. If, as some respondents suggest, PaL should attempt to connect with parents who have some difficulty engaging with education and employment opportunities, it may be that a shift toward a more inclusive approach to service delivery may be required. This shift will require something of a reorientation for the board and PaL staff.

Recommendation 6 In order to improve community engagement with the program in Napranum, it is recommended that NPPG identify strategies that will a) build a greater sense of community ownership of the PaL program; b) establish a broader set of local connections with other organisations; and c) pursue opportunities for increased connection with disengaged sections of the community.

Young people will be the future parents in communities. It is conceivable that a 14- or 15-year-old will, in a year or two, be a parent, and therefore be in need of PaL's services. Adopting this recommendation would necessarily require a set of skills that may not currently be present within the NPPG. It may, therefore, be necessary to facilitate the acquisition of these skills externally. A first step may be to identify models that do support high levels of community engagement.

Providing role models

There was a perception among some respondents that PaL provided opportunities for role modelling, not just within families but across the whole community. That is, they felt that their role in PaL as tutors or parents was demonstrating the importance of education in the community:

Yeah, and also for giving the opportunity back to the parents and be in control of the importance of education. Education leads to good jobs. We're seeing role models for our kids. I tell my kids to go to school and do your homework so you can finish your education and get a good job. It's been great, I enjoyed PaL.

This is an important observation as it recognises the important role that parents play as influencers of their children's educational and career outcomes.

Recommendation 7 Further to Recommendation 6, it is recommended that NPPG explore ways it can model and promote the positive outcomes of PaL to a broader cross-section of the community.

This recommendation firstly acknowledges the value that PaL parents gain from being involved in the program. However, it also recognises that in order for the benefits to be extended to parents who do not have the capacity required to effectively support their children in the program, creative ways of promoting the benefits to other parents should be considered. For example, NPPG could consider some of the following:

- holding a community open day incorporating a community barbecue that showcases the program (possibly acting as an enrolment day)
- using the local radio to interview PaL parents about their experiences
- having a 'bring a friend' celebration night at the end of the school year
- combining with other community groups (such as the PCYC, Clinic, School, Church, Council) to promote the importance of the early years.

A key to the success of these strategies is building relationships. In part, the PaL coordinator provides a potentially catalytic role in this. However, the NPPG board should be willing to experiment with ideas that will expand the reach of PaL more broadly in the community.

Business skills

For some board members in particular, involvement in NPPG had created a unique opportunity to learn business skills. These skills resulted from activities such as:

- promoting PaL in forums such as conferences
- visiting other communities to determine whether a PaL program could be adapted in other contexts
- preparing financial statements, recording minutes and general bookkeeping for NPPG
- chairing meetings and participating as a board member.

There is limited evidence from the data to suggest that in some cases these skills are being applied more broadly for the benefit of the community. However, in order to build on the skills gained, board members and directors would need more in the way of training and mentoring. These issues are discussed in more detail in section 4.3.2 below.

4.3 Lessons learned and opportunities

Two main lessons emerged from the findings of the evaluation. The first relates to sustainability, the second to management of the NPPG board.

4.3.1 Sustainability

Sustainability is often thought about simply in terms of funding; that is, in order to have a sustainable program, basically all that is required is more and/or continued funding. This view was reflected in a number of comments on this issue. For example, one respondent expressed the view that she would:

... like to see it be something that can be rolled out in other places other than just Rio sites, but that falls back to funding and amount of resources.

Some respondents recognised the need to access funding from sources other than Rio Tinto, potentially looking to Education Queensland and a range of other possible sources to ensure the longevity of the program.

However, sustainability is not only about funding as noted in the literature review (see section 2.6) and this was also acknowledged. The factors that will contribute to PaL's sustainability are outlined below, with references to relevant quotes. Note that some of the quotes are phrased in the negative – that is, 'PaL would be sustainable if ...'.

a) its adaptability and flexibility:

The fact that we're able to be adapted to suit any Indigenous community, I guess that's one of our major strengths.

b) its perceived value in the community:

... it's probably sustainable from the perspective of it will feed itself if the community perceives and the people involved perceive it's getting good outcomes. It will continue to have a role. I think it's an incredibly important program.

c) the promotion of the program:

We'd need to go about it, just take it out more.

d) community ownership (described below as community 'investment')

If they thought it was going to benefit their children, all the parents are working well and the kids are benefiting from it, everything's up and going, why isn't the community investing in that?

e) a range of skills required to write funding submissions:

It is the hardest thing and I wondered too whether they've the skills to, for example, look for funding, or how to apply for funding.

f) expansion to new target groups:

I'd like to see it be something that can be rolled out in other places other than just Rio sites, but that falls back to funding and amount of resources.

g) diversification of funding sources:

... they're trying to get some funding because there's a girl here with learning disabilities and they're trying to get funding so I can have her for two hours a day and help her. That's one thing we don't have here. Maybe PaL could go into that.

All of the above factors are consistent with the literature on sustainability cited earlier in the report. This analysis does not suggest that PaL is inherently sustainable. It could be argued that without support from Rio Tinto, the program is quite vulnerable. Based on the above, and the literature, it is reasonable to suggest that in order to sustain the program without Rio Tinto's support, a number of actions need to take place. These include:

- increased promotion of the program (see discussion below), so that it is recognised and identified as worthwhile to a national audience of potential funders
- active lobbying of potential funders at a state and national level (this will invariably involve political lobbying)

- active and ongoing submission writing/funding applications to accompany the promotion and lobbying
- consideration of target groups outside the Rio Tinto sites where it currently has a presence.

The skills or time required to do this may not currently be present within the NPPG board. Therefore, it may be worthwhile employing an appropriately qualified person to carry out these tasks.

Recommendation 8 It is recommended that a person be employed for a two-year period to promote sustainability by a) focusing on promotion and marketing; b) lobbying potential funders; and c) writing submissions.

At the same time, it may be worthwhile accessing professional development opportunities for some members of the board to provide skills relating to submission writing, lobbying, developing relationships with high-level government agency representatives and marketing.

4.3.2 NPPG Ltd Board of Management

Corporate governance

The formation of the Napranum Preschool PaL Group Ltd (NPPG) has given people in Napranum the opportunity to further develop their business skills as explained by one non-Indigenous respondent:

I've been talking to the women as well ... just about where they see themselves within the community and being on the board, and talking about what they're doing in PaL. Some of them are saying they couldn't imagine before PaL they would have ever done something like that.

When asked about the formation and operation of NPPG, the Indigenous board members generally referred the interviewer to Rio Tinto and non-Indigenous board members for information.

All the work for that was done by Rio Tinto, all the paperwork. I helped with gathering information as they needed it. When the company was officially formed we put our hands up to be members and directors and whatnot, hence the company was formed.

Staff from Rio Tinto Weipa helped the board with preparing a business plan for NPPG, and one of the directors indicated that there was an ongoing need to develop financial management skills:

We had a day with [Rio Tinto employee] and she did up a business plan and our goals were for the year. We talked about budgeting and that was all new for me, budgeting for a whole financial year. I was still trying to understand all that.

One of the directors explained that she had learned new skills from being part of NPPG. This director indicated that they had not undertaken any formal governance training and that they 'picked it up as we went along'.

I've learnt to sit around and have board meetings, discussing agenda items. It was a whole new experience for me ... We picked it up as we went along, making important decisions. After talking about it, all the board members sitting down, having a yarn, coming to a decision, it helped.

Another board member was concerned at this approach, as she believes that board members are going along with what they believe is the consensus.

If the loudmouth says no, everyone else will say no. It is functional, but it's not functional in the way proper business is.

Some board members felt the company had grown very quickly, and that not everyone in the company agreed this was the best approach.

A thing that is making us a bit scared ... it is scary that we are growing and growing and none of us can hold on to the reins that tight.

Roles and activity of board members

The NPPG is overseen by a small group of people who constitute the board. Currently there are ten board members, of whom three are non-Indigenous people who do not currently live in Napranum or Weipa. At least one of the Indigenous board members does not participate in board meetings, which means the board currently has six Indigenous people as members.

There's another board member, I haven't seen her for the last three years in PaL. I haven't seen her physically inside in a board meeting.

While a small board may have its advantages, it does limit the available pool from which the three directors can be drawn. This is an important consideration because 'the business of the company is managed by the directors' as stated in the Constitution. One of the NPPG directors, when asked about her role as director, said she saw it as being one of support for the staff and younger board members.

I feel I'm part of it now. I've been with PaL for so long. I guess the girls look up on me, [when] they're going to other communities, as an elder ... Sometimes they feel uncomfortable going to other communities without me. I understand language. I feel I'm here for the girls, to support them.

One of the board members expressed concern that the directors do not fully understand what their liabilities would be if the NPPG were to get into financial difficulty.

If ever this company folds or something happens to this company, it's not [a board member] who gets in trouble, it's the directors.

Recommendation 9 It is recommended that the NPPG look at creating a non-director role that acknowledges and respects the status of Elders within the community. This may be a Patron of PaL.

Adoption of this recommendation would overcome the difficulties posed by having people with limited business skills occupying positions requiring financial accountability.

Training for PaL employees

Both the PaL Coordinators have undertaken training at a Certificate III level and both have a strong desire to undertake further training, especially to increase their financial literacy skills.

I did a [Certificate] III in Business ... I'm leaning towards a [Certificate] IV in Financial Services. I'm leaning towards the financial side of things. I am very passionate about making sure and I feel really good when my [Business Activity Statement] is perfect.

One of the PaL Coordinators has undertaken ongoing training in an accounting software package.

We started QuickBooks with a trainer who was based in Cairns. We went to a two-day course ... I do [the BAS statements] but there's a lot of help from the company in Cairns, just to make sure I haven't done anything wrong. So far I'm ok, but I still, I may still use them until the end of the year. They're a good company, I like them. Very easy to work with.

Training for other PaL board members

Some respondents were concerned that as board members they did not fully understand their roles and responsibilities in the company.

You can't just put someone as a board member and have no idea how to do that. They need to know the impact of what they say. When you second a motion, it's not just for the fun of it; they need to know why that's all done. They need to know why you can't just say, 'Oh yeah'; everyone has to agree on it. There is a reason why you take down meetings when you chair the meeting.

It was felt by some respondents that training in corporate governance would help board members and directors to understand their responsibilities and would empower the Indigenous people to have a greater input into the decision-making process.

Number one, a company needs to have all these roles and positions. We do need training in whatever role we're taking. Like we said, directors are only directors in name. They're not doing anything physical, like writing down. One of the things I would like to see is training for that.

Recommendation 10 It is recommended that all board members and directors immediately review their own understanding of their roles and responsibilities of being a board member of NPPG.

Board members may wish to refer to the following document as an appropriate outline for this kind of training:

http://www.orac.gov.au/run_close_corporation/good_corp/INFOSHEET_Top-ten-tips.pdf

Recommendation 11 Further to Recommendation 10, it is recommended that all board members and directors undertake training in basic governance, including board roles and responsibilities.

Rio Tinto would be well placed to offer advice on an appropriate training provider to deliver this training.

4.3.3 Promotion and growth

There are clearly opportunities for the promotion and growth of PaL beyond its current base. Assuming this is the direction that NPPG do want to take – and there is some concern about whether this should be the case – one of the key issues for the NPPG (which also related directly to the question of sustainability) is getting the message about PaL out to a wider audience. Along these lines, one respondent put it quite succinctly:

We'd need to go about it, just take it out more.

It was noted in section 2.6 (on Sustainability), that the longevity of the program is, to some extent, dependent on its promotion outside its immediate locus of operation – in this case, a selection of Rio Tinto sites. There should be no doubt that this evaluation has found that there is considerable value in PaL as a tool to increase literacy levels, improve parent–child interactions, improve parent–school involvement and better engage people in mainstream employment. The need for programs such as PaL in remote communities is clearly great, and in this case one of the strengths of the model is that it is locally driven. There is no reason to believe that potential funders will not also see the worth and potential impact of PaL and want to support the ongoing development of the program. Other similar programs such as FAST and HIPPY (see descriptions of these in section 2.3 on 'School–parent engagement and learning outcomes') have been successful in marketing their programs to governments to ensure the extension of their respective models to other contexts. PaL could do the same.

Marketing, promotion and relationship development do not necessarily come easily for people who are focused on service delivery. Additional support and mentoring for the board to pursue the opportunities available will be required. In this there is a clear role for Rio Tinto.

Recommendation 12 Further to Recommendation 8, it is recommended that Rio Tinto provide support to the NPPG board by providing specific advice and support to identify marketing and promotion opportunities.

Without wanting to pre-empt the support suggested in the above recommendation, a number of general promotion activities could be immediately envisaged. These include:

- completion of a PaL website so that information is readily available to the broader public
- presentation of PaL to a number of potential conferences and forums where interested and influential audiences are present
- presentations to the local state and federal Members of Parliament
- connections to regional development and partnership groups (e.g. Cape York Peninsula Development, Cape York Partnerships) and government-sponsored groups (e.g. Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council)
- exploration of possible linkages with Education Queensland that might emerge from 'Bound for Success' (Strategic Policy and Education Futures 2006).

If Recommendation 8 is not followed, it may be possible to use state coordinators as a vehicle for promotion and marketing. However, if this is the case additional training and mentoring would be required. In relation to the option of presenting at conferences, the evaluators would welcome the possibility of working with the board to prepare a presentation on the basis of this evaluation's findings.

5 Discussion

Before returning to the evaluation questions, the discussion presented in this section will first consider the role of evaluation in building the evidence base for PaL. This is important, as it relates to the outcomes that cut across all the areas reported on in previous sections.

5.1 Evaluation to support building further evidence

This case study represents one of several attempts by NPPG to evaluate the PaL program. Previous evaluation reports (Makin 2003, 2005), which analysed quantitative data relating to attendance and educational outcomes, were largely inconclusive in their assessment of the efficacy of PaL for a number of reasons. To a large extent the methodologies used, applied to such a small sample, were unable to provide any evidence of significant differences between PaL and non-PaL participants. The current evaluation is similarly unable to make definitive statements about the efficacy of the program in quantitative terms because of the qualitative focus of data collection.

While there is, of course, value in engaging external consultants to conduct evaluations of this kind, it may be helpful for the company to consider alternative approaches to evaluation. In particular there may be value in building internal reflective practice evaluation approaches into the organisation. Such approaches offer several advantages. These include:

- an opportunity to critically reflect on practices, processes and outcomes
- learning together from this critical reflection and building the capacity of all those involved
- building continuous improvement cycles into the program to make it better
- building strategies that capture solid evidence about the outcomes of the program
- improving data collection methods and improving the reliability of data
- supporting the promotion of the program
- ultimately, reducing reliance on external evaluation.

Recommendation 13 It is recommended that NPPG build internal reflective-practice evaluation strategies into the support processes for PaL employees.

The idea of internal evaluation can be somewhat daunting to those who are not familiar with the methods used. In the short term, such an approach may require some external facilitation from a consultant who is experienced in these methods.

Recommendation 14 Further to Recommendation 13, it is recommended that NPPG engage an external evaluation consultant to support it with a) development of a long-term evaluation strategy; b) training and mentoring in internal evaluation processes; c) data collection tools and strategies; and d) recording methods.

In the light of this recommendation it may be helpful for the board to consider a program-logic model that could help develop such a strategy. Program-logic models are increasingly

used to evaluate programs. The approach makes assumptions about the outcomes of a project based on what results and impacts are anticipated from running a program (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2004). Proponents of program logic suggest that this ‘theory of change’ approach helps to identify measurable indicators that can demonstrate evidence of outcomes (Pawson 2003, 2005). An example of what a logic model for PaL might look like is shown below at Figure 3.

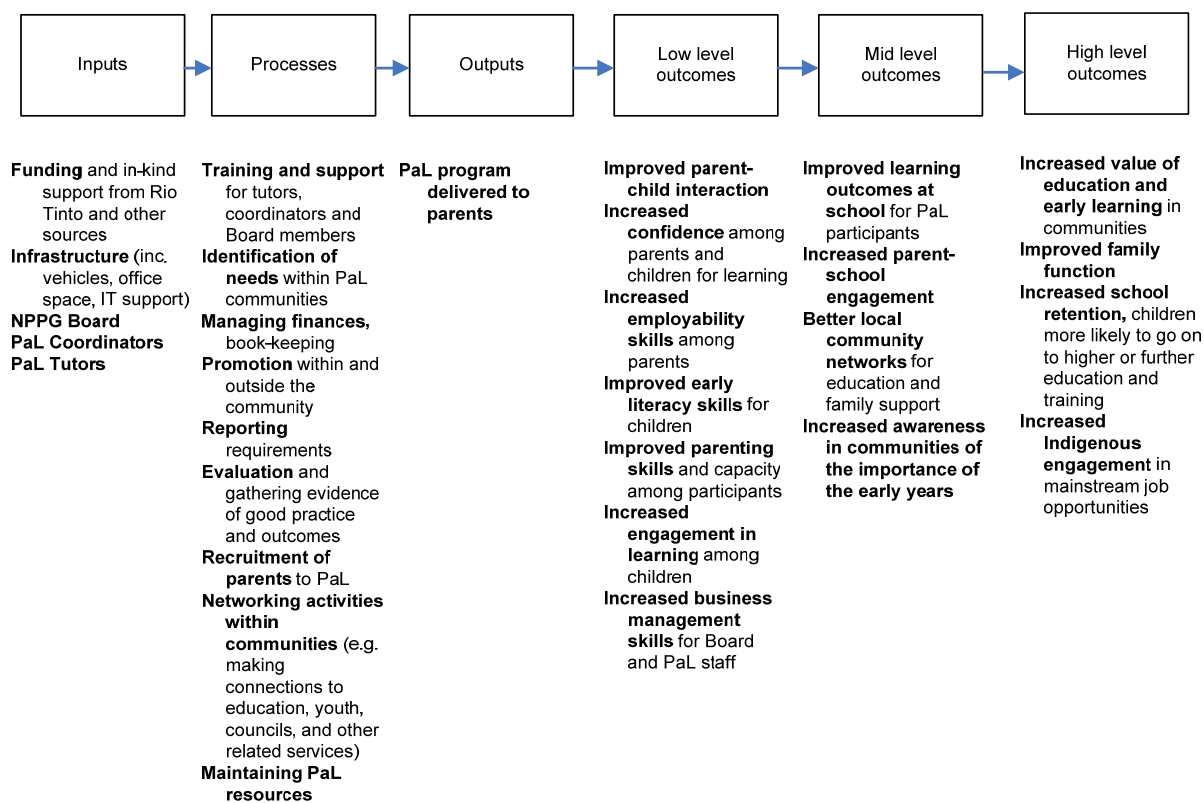


Figure 3: Possible program logic model for PaL

Ultimately, the goal of Recommendation 14 would be to reduce the reliance of NPPG on external evaluation methods, instead building the capacity of staff to do the main tasks of evaluation themselves. This is not an unrealistic expectation and there are many examples of locally based programs such as PaL that are increasingly developing a sound evidence base from data gathered by the program itself.

5.2 Returning to the evaluation questions

The discussion now returns to the evaluation questions to offer a focused response. Sub-questions shown in section 3.2, ‘Evaluation questions’, are not repeated here for ease of reading and because of the overlap of some of the issues.

5.2.1 How does the PaL model work to build the human capital of Napranum?

All people interviewed for this evaluation agreed that the PaL program had increased the knowledge and skills of the children, parents and home tutors. Respondents

consistently reported that the program had empowered people through building confidence and pride. The factors that work for the program include:

- community control and ownership
- parents choosing to be involved in the program
- opportunity for paid employment in the community.

The formation of the NPPG Ltd company has the potential to build the business skills of both staff and board members of NPPG. There is evidence to suggest that PaL employees (who are also company members) have increased their skills and knowledge in some core operational areas such as meeting procedures and bookkeeping. There is, however, an urgent need for all directors and employees to understand both the operational and strategic aspects of running a company. Board members, directors and staff need a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Training and mentoring, together with practical experience in running NPPG, would build the human capital of Napranum.

There is agreement that PaL has been and continues to be a successful program in Napranum and other communities where it is operating. This success needs to be routinely measured and reported at least annually to the broader community and other partners. Outcomes that point to indications of success of the program would include collecting, collating and reporting the following information:

- preschool and Year 1 school attendance rates for PaL children
- PaL parents undertaking further study and/or employment
- PaL tutors and coordinators undertaking further study and/or employment
- NPPG board members undertaking further study and/or employment
- partnerships and activities with other organisations
- interest and uptake of program by other communities.

Many of the above points relate back to some of the contextual issues raised in the literature review (see section 2.1, 'Context and background'). Firstly, the underlying demand and need for PaL will be driven to a large extent by the high proportion of young children in the population and the relatively low median age of the population. This, in turn, means that there are many young parents in Napranum, many of whom may be struggling as parents of their young children. Secondly, in terms of the modelling that occurs with PaL, the importance of skill development and employment is critical for future community development and for intergenerational educational and employment outcomes. While it will undoubtedly take considerable time, it could be reasonably expected that this modelling process will have an impact on school retention rates and Year 12 completion rates. Thirdly, the need for ongoing skill development for the NPPG board and PaL employees is critical, given the relatively low proportion of people in the population with vocational (Certificate level) qualifications.

PaL is just one program working in Napranum and Weipa that aims to empower Indigenous people. Factors and events outside the control of PaL and NPPG can and will lessen the potential positive impact of the program. Consequently, it should be anticipated and expected that the outcomes will vary from year to year and from site to site.

5.2.2 What are the community development outcomes that are attributable to the PaL program?

The responses to this question must first be prefaced by a reiteration of the definition used for 'community development' introduced earlier (see section 2.4, 'The role of learning in community development processes'). Community development is not just about building community assets, whether they be social, economic, human or environmental. Rather, community development is a highly participatory process that engages the community in a process of change that leads to quality of life improvements as identified by the participants.

Ultimately, the success of the PaL program from a community development perspective will rest on the community's ability to build on PaL's foundation of empowering parents. To achieve the continued community development outcomes for Napranum and Weipa, it has been recommended that NPPG forge partnerships with other local organisations such as Western Cape College, Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) and the CAPE (Community Activity Programs through Education) PCYC, which runs the breakfast club and homework centre. In addition, recommendations have been made for NPPG to develop partnerships and links with other organisations that can help NPPG to further develop the potential of people in Napranum and Weipa (including Indigenous Community Volunteers and the Indigenous Literacy Project).

This potentially presents a dilemma for NPPG and Rio Tinto in terms of what each means when it talk about 'community'. For example, Rio Tinto is a global organisation, and its 'community' includes people living near its mining operations. For the Indigenous people of Napranum, the 'community' is the people of Napranum and Weipa and possibly other Cape York communities where they have family links and ties such as Mapoon and Aurukun. Consequently, when NPPG extends PaL out to places such as Roebourne in Western Australia, it is extending the program to a Rio Tinto community, not an NPPG community. It also means that while NPPG members are putting their time and energy into Rio's communities, they are not putting their time and energy into further developing their own community. Therefore, there may be a mismatch in the community development assumptions as they are understood by Rio Tinto and NPPG, and these should be revisited.

There is an urgent need for the NPPG board directors and members to undertake some strategic planning to determine what future directions they want for NPPG. It is recommended that NPPG employ an independent facilitator who can work alongside the board to provide technical support and mentoring. It is recommended that NPPG talk to Indigenous Community Volunteers about finding a suitably experienced volunteer.

While these cautions form some of the challenges associated with PaL, there was broad acceptance that confidence and pride underpins the potential for community development outcomes associated with the program. While stakeholders were generally somewhat vague about the community development outcomes – and for that matter, about the notion of effectiveness in relation to this – this should not

discourage Rio Tinto or NPPG from pursuing a range of community outcomes and engaging the community in this process.

5.2.3 What lessons can be learned from the development of PaL over the last decade?

It is evident that PaL draws on the theories and principles of good practice that can be found in the literature. In particular, the program assumes correctly and builds on:

- the importance of parent–child interaction as a vehicle for improved social and learning outcomes (for example following the research literature from FAST, HIPPY and YALP)
- connections with local educational infrastructure to smooth the transition to school.

Further, one of the program’s key strengths (at least in Napranum, where it originated) is that its foundation is built on local community ownership and involvement. This approach is consistent with emerging models of good practice that are being demonstrated in other promising practice in Indigenous communities, for example, as has been shown in many remote Communities for Children initiatives in recent years or FAST. That is, programs that are aimed at engaging children and families must work *with* the local context and adapt mainstream processes aimed at facilitating change to that context. At the same time, they should draw on the expertise of local people to lead and drive activities forward. To a large extent, PaL in Napranum applies these principles of good practice.

There are some risks and challenges for NPPG, however, as it aims for growth and sustainability. Collaboration with local organisations is an important challenge – particularly with Western Cape College, but also with other stakeholders working in the field of early learning services. Marketing of the program to a wider audience (thereby enabling it to attract additional funding and increasing its visibility to governments and other potential funding bodies) is a major challenge, which will require focused attention by the board.

Another major challenge is to maintain the local ownership and identity of the program as it replicates itself to other contexts. Indeed, while it may not be wise to be too prescriptive about the criteria that should be applied to Indigenous communities wanting to use the PaL model (because a one-size-fits-all approach is not necessarily desirable); a set of key questions could be asked of potential PaL communities before the program is rolled out. These might include:

- How broad and deep is the support for the idea within the community? Are there a number of potential champions?
- Has the community considered strategies for the sustainable development of the program? What is the community’s record in being able to attract funding or garner support from other agencies?
- Are there existing linkages between early learning and parenting skills service providers (including the local preschool and primary school) that could be applied to the operation of PaL in that context?
- Does the community recognise the importance of the underpinning principles that drive successful outcomes (particularly in relation to the importance of parent–child interaction, parent–school involvement and community development processes)?

Notwithstanding the cautions noted above, PaL in Napranum does serve as a model of good or promising practice for other communities wanting to use the program. The fact that it has evolved and grown since 2000 is a testament to its success. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that some strong outcomes for parents and children are emerging. However, as the program continues to evolve, the need for building a strong evidence base to support the marketing of the program increases. An evaluation framework that supports the continuing improvement of PaL will be essential to do this. The evidence from the evaluation also suggests that strengthening connections to Western Cape College will also be critical if the learning outcomes anticipated by the program and shown in the logic model (see Figure 3) are to be sustained or achieved. It appears that some of the early connections with Western Cape College have been lost to some extent. The impetus for collaboration at this level therefore must be restored. These successes and challenges are very important for the ongoing development of the model.

6 Conclusions

This case study report highlights the outcomes and the lessons learned, together with the emerging opportunities that have arisen from the PaL program delivered in Napranum. Using a case study evaluation methodology has allowed key stakeholders to express their views about the value of the program and its challenges. The external evaluators analysed these perceptions and were able to identify a number of outcomes for parents, children and the community more generally. These outcomes are summarised briefly as follows:

- All stakeholders reported that the program has led to increased confidence among participants (including parents, children and PaL employees), and that this increased confidence is the source of other outcomes.
- Parents reported increased parenting skills and knowledge, improved parent–child interaction and a range of employment and career outcomes.
- Stakeholders identified a range of literacy and learning outcomes for children.
- An important, though less frequently reported outcome related to the role of PaL in acting to support role models for the community.
- For those engaged as members of the NPPG board, there were indications that the program had build business skills.

Sustainability of PaL was a theme that was frequently raised by respondents. The need for ongoing funding was noted, but concomitant with this need was the importance of a number of underpinning factors and strategies required to provide the necessary leverage to attract future funding from sources outside Rio Tinto. The adaptability, local ownership and perceived value of the program were seen as critical factors supporting sustainability. However, the need for promotion, skills required for writing funding submissions and diversification of funding sources were seen as critical elements of strategies required to assure sustainability.

Board function and capacity concerns were also raised. Some respondents expressed concerns about the skill level of some members and there was a perceived need for training of both PaL employees and NPPG board members.

The need for growth and expansion of PaL beyond its Cape York base was not universally accepted. The evaluators noted some concern about the potential loss of the local identity of the program. They also observed a sense of pride among some respondents with regards to the wider roll-out of the program to other Indigenous communities. However, the question of whether the program should be extended to other communities was beyond the scope of the evaluation. If NPPG does wish to proceed with the expansion of the program beyond its current base, there is clearly a need for additional support and mentoring, particularly in the area of promotion and marketing. Rio Tinto may be best placed to provide this support.

The evaluators see an opportunity for NPPG to benefit from the development of an evaluation strategy for PaL. By engaging in reflective practice processes and clarifying expected outcomes, the indicators of success would become clearer to the board and PaL staff. This may require some initial external facilitation.

Briefly, in response to the evaluation questions posed, the following comments are made.

How does the PaL model work to build the human capital of Napranum? PaL builds human capital primarily through skill development of both parents and children, and it does so as a result of the confidence that emerges from the program.

What are the community development outcomes that are attributable to the PaL program? The community development outcomes attributable to PaL are somewhat limited. It could be argued that PaL serves as a model for the community and that the business skills imparted through the program are community development outcomes, but it could well be argued that these are merely capacity-building outcomes with limited scope.

What lessons can be learned from the development of PaL over the last decade? The program has demonstrated what can be considered 'good practice' in terms of its application of principles of parent–child interaction as an essential ingredient of improved educational outcomes for children. There are risks for the program too. Limited engagement with Western Cape College may inhibit or limit the benefits. Development of strong local networks is very important for PaL. The expansion of PaL also presents challenges. These relate mainly to promotion, marketing and access to alternative sources of funding.

While the program does have its challenges, the evolution and sustained development of the program since its inception in 2000 is a testament to its success.

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