Intergenerational Learning for CaLD Families; the Means to Improved Skills and Greater Integration

Mihaela Nicolescu
Linkwest
cdo@linkwest.asn.au

ABSTRACT

Higher levels of literacy and numeracy have been associated with numerous social benefits; including lower isolation, greater professional productivity, better health, and lower crime (Hartley & Horne 2006). Low literacy and numeracy skills in adults have a negative effect on their children’s success at school (Riley, Robinson, & Conaty 1993); a problem that is exacerbated within the CaLD context by the added dimensions of intrinsic language barriers and settlement challenges. The cycle of low English literacy, limited comprehension of the system, low community engagement, and isolation, in parents, thus has an unfavourable effect on their children. In order to break this cycle, a method must be applied, which addresses; basic skills, the local/national educational/social system, and community relationships, within the same model.

The Linkwest\(^1\) Families Learning Together Project (funded by the Office of Multicultural Interests) is an innovative intergenerational programme, targeting CaLD families and running at four WA family/community centres. This pilot seeks to establish the context where such a provision would be the most effective and the conditions necessary for success.

AIMS

1. Improved performance of participating CaLD children in school
2. Increased confidence in children to undertake homework tasks
3. Increased confidence in parents to provide educational and homework support for their children with homework through the delivery of a language course contextualised to the theme ‘helping your child to succeed at school’
4. Improved English language skills among participating parents
Additional Objectives:

- Provide information on the Australian education system to CaLD parents;
- Promote holistic integration though the intergenerational component that enables children and parents to learn from each other;
- Promote cohesion and positive relationships between CaLD children, parents, schools, libraries, and community centres.

Further, the programme will enable CaLD families to identify good habits in the support of their children's studies, and will promote better communication. The program will be evaluated using Results Based Accountability; a strategic thinking and a continuous improvement process, which enables appraisal of performance by considering desired outcomes, applied method, and the translation of data into action.

BACKGROUND

Linkwest received funding from the Office of Multicultural Interests to design, broker, and manage the Families Learning Together Project, to be delivered in partnership with WA Centres, in collaboration with schools and libraries. The goal was to coordinate a collaborative community centre and school project aimed at building language and learning capacity for students and parents from CaLD backgrounds. The project targets parents and their children 8-12 years who have been in Australia less than 2 years and have been identified as needing additional support to thrive academically. The project will deliver 12 courses across six Community Centres. The course framework is based on the family learning support model, which develops children’s and parents’ skills concurrently. The courses comprise a programme where children work with a teacher to support their study and homework skills, and parents work with an ESOL tutor to develop their understanding of how to support their children with homework and to gain knowledge about the Australian education system. Language development will be embedded into both programmes. Parents and children come together at the end of each session to carry out a shared activity to consolidate skills.

METHODOLOGY

Project Framework

Families Learning Together will deliver a study support program targeting students, between 8 – 12 years old, and parents from CaLD backgrounds.
Six Community Centres across WA will deliver two courses. The course framework is based on the Family Learning support model and comprises a six-week course (concurrent weekly 1.5 hour sessions for parents and children followed by a 30 minutes session where they come together to work collectively to consolidate and share new skills) with a target of 20 people per course. The courses focus on: supporting parents to develop language, an understanding of the education system and strategies to support their children and supporting children with language and study skills.

**Key Partners**

Broome Circle (Broome: 13.2% non-English native speakers)
Sudbury Community House (Mirrabooka: 54.3% non-English native speakers)
William Langford Community House (Langford: 41.7% non-English native speakers)
Collie Family Centre (Collie: 5.8% non-English native speakers)
Westerly Family Centre (Cooloongup: 7.9% non-English native speakers)
Christmas Island (Christmas Island: 59.0% non-English native speaking)

(Data from ABS 2011 Census)

**Project Variations**

Due to unexpected changes in circumstances relating to staff and capacity, two of the Centres: Christmas Island and Collie FC, had to drop out of the project.

William Langford CH took on these additional courses, to deliver three projects (6 courses), thus capitalising on their excellent track record in engaging CaLD communities and their experience in delivering Adult and Community Education programs (Linkwest Adult Community Learning Grants Impact Report, 2014).

In addition, the project end date was extended to 31 August 2014 (only preliminary results are discussed in this paper).

**Resource Development**

Comprehensive project resources were developed by qualified consultant teachers, on behalf of Linkwest. Resources included fully planned lessons for children, parents, and joint sessions; supporting material; handouts etc. All material allowed for adjustment by tutors to facilitate the learning of each individual group.
The image above illustrates the initial programme plan for Children’s and Adults’ sessions, 1 and 2.

**EVALUATION PROCESS**

Linkwest will develop common evaluation tools based on the Results Based Accountability, to measure how much, how well and the impact on the target group. These evaluation tools (in the form of pictorial questionnaires, feedback from schools, tutor assessments, and participant feedback) will inform our progress against project targets and enable us to set project benchmarks.

**Benchmark for Success:**

1. 70% parents feel more confident to support their children with homework
2. 70% parents have improved their language skills
3. 60% of children are submitting homework on time and to an improved standard
4. 70% retention of participants on programme
5. 70% children feel more confident to undertake homework skills
Preliminary results were collected from William Langford CH (Program 1; Course 1).

### Parents Registration Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 18 - 35 yrs</th>
<th>36 - 50 yrs</th>
<th>51+ yrs</th>
<th>Nationality Sudanese</th>
<th>Nationality Somali</th>
<th>Nationality Burmese</th>
<th>Nationality Sri Lankan</th>
<th>Sole parent</th>
<th>Not sole parent</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>No qualification</th>
<th>School Certificate</th>
<th>Trade Certificate</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Unemployed/looking for work</th>
<th>Employed/not looking for work</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Children Registration Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Under 8 years old</th>
<th>8 years old</th>
<th>9 years old</th>
<th>10 years old</th>
<th>11 years old</th>
<th>Enjoys homework</th>
<th>Does not mind homework</th>
<th>Favourite Subject: Writing</th>
<th>Favourite Subject: Art</th>
<th>Favourite Subject: Maths</th>
<th>Favourite Subject: Sport</th>
<th>Favourite Subject: Reading</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback

In addition to quantitative measures (number of participants, retention rate), the following qualitative points were addressed through the evaluation process:

**Children's Feedback %**

- "I like the Course"
- "I like the Teacher"
- "I have learned new things"
- "I am more confident speaking English"
- "I am better at doing homework"
- "I am more likely to ask for help with my homework"

**Parents' Feedback %**

- "The course was well organised"
- "The tutor was easy to understand"
- "I enjoyed the course"
- "I am more confident speaking, writing, and/or reading in English"
- "I am better able to understand English"
- "I am more confident helping my child with their homework"
- "I now know more about where to go to find information to help my child with their homework"
- "I now know more about how my child's school works"
- "I am more confident asking questions at my child's school"
As a result of the course 100% of adults felt more confident understanding, speaking, writing and reading English; supporting their child with homework; and asking questions at their child’s school. There was also 100% satisfaction with the course in terms of delivery and teaching. None of the adult felt that they knew more about finding information to help their child with homework.

100% of the children felt that they had learned new things; felt more confident speaking English; and were more likely to ask for help with their homework as a result of the course. There was 100% satisfaction with the course in terms of enjoyment and teaching. None of the children felt they were better at completing their homework as a result of the course.

**OBSERVATIONS**
These preliminary results relate to a small sample size though it should be observed that while both parents and children indicated no positive change in homework skills (information gathering and completion) all parents felt more confident supporting their children with their homework and all children were more likely to ask for help with their homework. The lack of positive change in terms of homework activities can be attributed to the lag, implicit in the learning process, between acquiring new knowledge/skills and consolidating these new knowledge/skills into changes in behavior. Six weeks (the duration of the program) can be concluded to be too short a time for complete assimilation of knowledge; thus no positive change in terms of behavior. Positive changes can, however, be observed in terms of attitude; with all parents feeling more confident in helping their children with homework (as a result of the course) and all children being more likely to ask for help with their homework (as a result of the course).

In terms of how successful each program was at engaging and retaining participants, a number of key factors can be observed:

1. CaLD population of area; Centres in areas with a CaLD population below 30% struggled with participation on the program (other factors, including school engagement, affected areas with a high CaLD population).
2. School collaboration was key to engagement due to the referral process; State Government cuts affecting education assistants/specialist assistants, meant increased pressure on schools that subsequently had to pull out of the project/were not able to commit.
3. Initial feedback suggests that the project requirement of families to have been in Australia for less than two years may be too soon after their arrival. As families have a support worker for their first two years, and are coping with housing, money, and transport issues, it may prove more effective to offer the program to families who have been in Australia for more than two years.
4. As the participants ranged from having no qualification to highly educated professionals, the successful delivery of the program relied on tutors having sufficient experience/confidence to adapt programs as required.

The main challenges can be summarised as:

Resource development – there was a significant delay involved in the design of the resource material for the project. The development of suitable resources, by a qualified consultant teacher, took longer than expected and was more complex in terms of achieving the high quality results required by Linkwest.

School engagement – as the program relied on school referrals and collaboration some Centres struggled to find schools able to commit, due to staff shortage and changes.
Retention – retaining participants has been a challenge for Centres, with two main causes identified. The first relates to scheduling, and the challenge of finding a suitable time to run the course that is convenient for schools, parents, children, and tutors. While weekday afternoons were deemed best, many parents struggled with attendance due to other appointments. The second issue relates to the level of difficulty of the course, in relation to the participants. While all participants had English as a second language, some were from highly educated backgrounds while some had no previous qualifications. This underlines the significance of courses being adapted by tutors prior to delivery.
REFERENCES


1 Linkwest is the State Association for Community, Neighbourhood and Learning Centres in Western Australia. Established in 1982, Linkwest’s mission is to support community, neighbourhood and learning centres to develop vibrant, inclusive and connected communities in Western Australia.

2 Linkwest brokered 22 Adult Community Learning Grants in 2013 (funded by the Department of Training and Workforce Development). The two programs running at William Langford Community House were the most successful in terms of engaging with the highest percentage of CaLD participants. The Centre’s Literacy with a Flavour program had 100% CaLD participants. This program successfully embedded literacy into cooking classes and formed partnerships with Foodbank and Financial Counsellors. Feedback from the participants highlighted the positive effects of the program as including; reduced isolation, improved literacy, and also maximised community assets by allowing the participants to take turns leading the class.