

**The Cuthill Family Foundation Early Years Literacy Roundtables:
Report – Discussions and Recommendations**



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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge, with deep respect to the Palawa people, as the traditional owners of the seas and waterways of lutruwita (Tasmania).

The Palawa people belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. They cared and protected Country for thousands of years. They knew this land, they lived on the land and they died on these lands. We honour them.

For many years the Palawa people referred to this land as palanwina lurini kanamaluka meaning ‘the town near river Tamar’.

We acknowledge that it is a privilege to stand on Country and walk in the footsteps of those before us. Along the river banks, among the gums and seas that continue to run through the veins of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

We pay respects to elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make elder status and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continue to care for Country.

We recognise a history of truth which acknowledges the impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal people resulting in the forcible removal from their lands.

Our Island is deeply unique, with spectacular landscapes with our cities and towns surrounded by bushland, wilderness, mountain ranges and beaches.

We stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history. And a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.



Abstract

Early years literacies encompass a vital area of development that can impact lifelong outcomes. This remains an issue for children and adults at global, national and local levels – including lutruwita Tasmania, where low literacy rates endure. It is acknowledged that research, policy initiatives and agendas are often influenced by social, economic, cultural and political conditions and positions. As a result, diverse perceptions and approaches can shape the work of literacy advocates across various sectors, such as education, health, family, community and Indigenous services. There is a growing need for literacy advocates to identify the strengths and barriers to literacy learning, and develop strong and collaborative partnerships to address existing challenges.

This Report conveys findings from an *Early Years Literacy Roundtables* event undertaken by the *Early Years Living Lab* and *School of Education (University of Tasmania)* in partnership with *The Cuthill Family Foundation* during *National Literacy and Numeracy Week 2023*. The Roundtables took place over two consecutive days upon lutruwita country in Launceston, Tasmania. Important members from early childhood education and care [ECEC], education, health, Indigenous, family and community sectors came together to explore diverse early years literacies and how these approaches can support strong beginnings for Tasmanian children, families and communities.

The Roundtables raised meaningful questions concerning how early years literacies are being defined, purposed and made visible. Panel Experts and Participants shared their diverse perceptions and lived experiences of early years literacies. These significant perceptions and experiences have been methodically documented and analysed by the Roundtables curators from the University of Tasmania's Early Years Living Lab. This report offers some contextual background, along with key discussions, findings and recommendations from this important event. It is anticipated that the Roundtables event and the subsequent Report can continue the momentum and inspire greater action through the development of interdisciplinary partnerships and approaches for improving early years literacy outcomes across lutruwita Tasmania.

A Message from our Head of School: An Education Perspective

To our fellow Early Years Literacy Advocates,

To be literate is to have the skills, knowledge and capacity to access and produce various types of text for a range of purposes. In a society such as ours, which is text dependent, being literate is essential for successful life outcomes and for playing an active role as a citizen.

But what do we mean by 'literate'? What is the threshold between literate and illiterate? What are the core skills upon which a lifetime of working with texts - visual, printed, multimodal - depends and how best do we ensure that all our citizens have them?

As educators, the debate about what skills and capacities constitute core literacy and how to ensure our young people develop them seems never-ending and at times, exhausting. But this is a good thing. The ways in which our society creates and uses forms of text continues to evolve, the ways in which we understand our children learn most effectively shifts over time, the social and cultural contexts that give meaning to texts and their interpretation continue to change. The ways in which we talk about being literate, teaching and learning literacies should also be in continual discussion and debate.

We are a state with educational challenges. But we are also a state that allows us to have direct dialogue across disciplinary, ideological, experiential lines that are not possible in other places. We can sit in a room, together, and listen and talk and share our ideas. We can build understanding and a shared vision of the literate practices and skills that our citizens - young and old - need to take part in our economy and society. We can use that shared vision to build complementary programs across our different areas of activity. We can share resources and expertise.

This is what the generosity of the Cuthill Family Foundation allowed us to do. We were supported to bring together educators from all areas, allied health professionals, parents, community group and early years providers to share our perspectives and experiences around building those early literacy skills and capacities that will build towards a lifetime of access and success. This was a conversation about literacy in Tasmania. It was unique and it will lead to even more conversation, collaboration and we hope, a shared vision.

Sincerely,

Professor Victoria Carrington
Dean and Head of School, Education
University of Tasmania.



Introduction

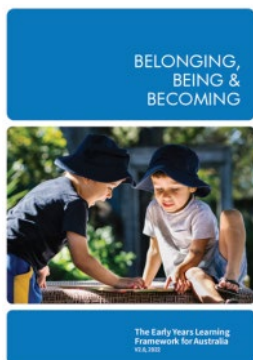
As co-curators of *The Cuthill Family Foundation Early Years Literacy Roundtables* event held in August 2023 at the *University of Tasmania*, Launceston, Tasmania, we are excited to present a final report. This report offers some contextual background, along with key discussions, findings and recommendations from this important event.

Context for early years literacy learning: Australia's *Early Years Learning Framework*

It is well understood that there is an urgent need to improve literacy outcomes at global, national and state levels. However, it is also essential to rethink what constitutes literacy. This is particularly important for educators and teachers working in Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] services, as well as members of other education, family, health, welfare and community services. It is our understanding that we can learn so much from the multilingual lives of children, families and communities, and when we acknowledge language as multimodal and listen carefully to the diverse knowledges and understandings of literacy, we can consider new ways to define and address it. When examining the way in which *Literacy* is now being defined within the *Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] for Australia – Version 2.0* (ACECQA, 2022):

“In the early years, literacy includes a range of modes of communication including music, movement, **gesture**, dance, **song**, drama, storytelling, visual arts, **digital literacies, and media**, as well as **listening**, talking, **signing, viewing**, reading and writing” (ACECQA, 2022, p.67).

As highlighted in **red**, there has been a shift in the space available to rethink this definition since the previous version of the EYLF was released (DEEWR, 2009). According to the latest definitions visible within this new framework:



“**Being literate** is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms through written, oral, visual and auditory. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, **composing**, reading and writing. **Active listening and a strong foundation of oral language is key to ongoing and lasting literacy learning. Children enjoy and learn from different texts.** Contemporary texts include electronic and print-based media. **In an increasingly technological world, the ability to critically analyse texts is a key component of literacy**” (ACECQA, 2022, p.57).

This framework supports Early Years educators and teachers to understand the importance of embedding literacy learning in all its forms in their programs with young children prior to, and during their formal school years. Additionally, it acknowledges how literacy learning can build upon children's experiences within their families and communities, and “extends their social worlds.... encouraging children’s positive attitudes and competencies in literacy” as “essential for “successful learning” (ACECQA, 2022, p.57). This indicates that there is a need to explore how literacy (in all its forms) is being understood and accommodated across our Tasmanian communities.

Background

Literacy plays a fundamental role in life. Research confirms that the development of literacy begins in the early years of life and is an important focus for children and families – from conception and prior to transition to formal schooling – enhancing opportunities for strong beginnings and successful outcomes. There is a current spotlight on early years literacy (and literacy more broadly) at global, national and local levels. The sections below provide some contextual background and understanding for the purpose, focus and design of *The Cuthill Family Foundation Early Years Literacy Roundtables*. This was largely influenced by developing strong understandings of the current literacy contexts within Tasmania and across Australia.

The National Literacy Context

Improving literacy outcomes for all Tasmanians is a current priority for the Tasmanian Government and there has been substantial investment in this area. During National Literacy and Numeracy Week in late August this year, the University of Tasmania’s School of Education and the Early Years Living Lab curated an Early Years Literacy Roundtables Event in partnership with The Cuthill Family Foundation in Launceston, Lutruwita, Tasmania. This event aimed to contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue to improve literacy levels in Tasmania with a specific focus on early years literacies.

Key members of early years education, family, community and health sectors came together for two consecutive roundtable sessions to explore diverse early years literacy for strong beginnings, as well as the benefits of storytelling and digital literacies for young Tasmanian children and their future outcomes. The event foregrounded significant questions relating to how literacy is defined, practiced, and made visible within the early years. The morning session each day was composed of two panel presentations, Q & A and a Tasmanian story that showcased local innovative experiences in early years literacy. The afternoon sessions provided the opportunity for a focused response from invited experts, including the panel speakers, to the event’s framing questions.

National literacy levels continue to be a priority and challenge within Australia. A previous OECD Report found that “some 12.6% of adults in Australia attain only Level 1 or below in literacy proficiency” particularly impacting language-diverse Australians and those with specific socio-demographic characteristics (OECD, 2012, p.3). According to a media report earlier this year, “a new national study will soon be launched to better understand the challenge, but business groups, teachers, economists and literacy campaigners have warned the figure could now be much higher, especially in Tasmania” (Belot, 2023, para.3). In terms of the Early Years, we can also see evidence of risks and vulnerabilities in the literacy-related domains from the AEDC’s latest 2021 Report (see **Figure 1**), where “In 2021, there were increases in the percentage of children who were developmentally vulnerable in three out of the five domains”: including in “language and cognitive skills”, and also in “communication and general knowledge” (AEDC, 2021, p.13).

		2009		2012		2015		2018		2021		Critical difference	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	2009 vs 2021	2018 vs 2021
 Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	On track	190,298	77.1	226,260	82.6	242,518	84.6	247,870	84.4	237,499	82.6	Significant increase	Significant decrease
	At risk	34,579	14.0	29,072	10.6	25,597	8.9	26,291	9.0	29,091	10.1	Significant decrease	Significant increase
	Vulnerable	21,933	8.9	18,564	6.8	18,533	6.5	19,417	6.6	21,107	7.3	Significant decrease	Significant increase
 Communication skills and general knowledge	On track	185,484	75.0	204,702	74.7	219,023	76.3	227,163	77.3	222,056	77.1	Significant increase	Significant decrease
	At risk	39,027	15.8	44,633	16.3	43,415	15.1	42,473	14.5	41,882	14.5	Significant decrease	No change
	Vulnerable	22,701	9.2	24,520	9.0	24,475	8.5	24,232	8.2	24,064	8.4	Significant decrease	Significant increase

Figure 1: National trends by literacy-related domain, all collections (AEDC, 2021, p.19).

The AEDC 2021 Report also emphasised national trends of Developmental Risk and Vulnerability among our Indigenous, language-diverse, low socio-economic status and rural/remote cohorts (AEDC, 2021). Notably, this latest AEDC data offers “an early insight into the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on children’s development” (AEDC, 2021, p.25); however, it was also recognised that further research is needed in this area.

We are also aware of the scrutiny our latest national NAPLAN results have generated (see **Figure 2**), and the impact this may have on literacy outcomes for young children and their progress throughout formal schooling and into adulthood.

Australia	Average NAPLAN score (confidence interval)	Exempt	Needs additional support (NAS)	Developing	Strong	Exceeding
Reading	404.6 (±1.1)	1.9%	9.1%	22.2%	48.5%	18.3%
Writing	416.3 (±1.0)	1.8%	6.1%	16.0%	66.9%	9.1%
Spelling	403.7 (±1.2)	1.9%	11.1%	26.2%	44.1%	16.7%
Grammar & Punctuation	410.8 (±1.2)	1.9%	13.3%	30.5%	45.7%	8.6%

Figure 2: NAPLAN national achievements for Year 3 literacy-related domains (ACARA, 2023).

More broadly, results from a previous *Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) survey found that around 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills and 1 in 3 (30%) Australians have literacy skills low enough to make them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion.... and has intergenerational effects on families, children and communities” (Adult Learning Australia, n.d., para.1). These factors illustrate the current state of the national context regarding literacy outcomes in Australia. However, it is also necessary to examine this within the context of lutruwita (Tasmania).

The Tasmanian Literacy Landscape

In the state of lutruwita, Tasmania, a dismal percentage of literacy and low literacy rates endure. According to a key network that has been working to improve adult literacy and numeracy outcomes across Tasmania, “48% of Tasmanians do not have the literacy and numeracy skills they need for life in a

technologically-rich world” (26TEN, n.d., para.3). If we reflect upon the previous Adult Literacy in Tasmania report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006b), “around half of Tasmanians were assessed as having adequate prose (51.0%) and document literacy skills (49.3%), compared with 53.6% and 53.2% respectively for Australia” (para.3).

More recently, it was discovered that “intergenerational and regional disadvantage as well as lower education attainment among young people have been identified in numerous reports into the state of the Tasmania economy as areas of current challenge in Tasmania. Almost one in two Tasmanians of working age are functionally illiterate” (Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance, 2021, para.2).

Tasmania’s NAPLAN results (see **Figure 3**) have also been under fire, with the media reporting that “Tasmania’s literacy levels are the worst in the country” (Mercury, 2023, para.1).

Tasmania	Average NAPLAN score (confidence interval)	Exempt	Needs additional support (NAS)	Developing	Strong	Exceeding
Reading	396.6 (±5.7)	2.5%	11.8%	23.4%	45.5%	16.8%
Writing	398.5 (±5.2)	2.5%	10.0%	19.3%	62.8%	5.4%
Spelling	383.6 (±5.3)	2.5%	15.6%	30.0%	40.4%	11.5%
Grammar & Punctuation	389.4 (±5.5)	2.5%	18.0%	35.0%	40.5%	4.0%

Figure 3: NAPLAN achievements for Year 3 literacy-related domains in Tasmania (ACARA, 2023).

When exploring the AEDC (2021) data of our youngest Tasmanians (see **Figure 4**), there are some clear trends in terms of the literacy-related domains and their increases in developmental risk and vulnerability.



Figure 4: Tasmania trends (2009 – 2021) – literacy-related domains (AEDC, 2021, p.61).

A Multimodal Approach to Literacy in Tasmania

Improving literacy outcomes for all Tasmanians is a current priority for the Tasmanian Government and there has been substantial investment in this area. In 2021, a commitment was made by the Tasmanian Government to reach an expected reading standard for all Year 7 students by 2030. Simultaneously, the *Literacy Advisory Panel* [LAP] was established to make specific and targeted recommendations for

achieving this. Following consultation, the Literacy Advisory Panel released its *Final Report – Lifting Literacy* (2023). This report highlighted key recommendations, involving a value for literacy, targeted supports and measures for Families, Early Years, Schools, Adult Learners and Libraries.

The LAP (2023) has now established a *Community-wide Framework* (see **Figure 5**) that aims to “provide a shared understanding for the whole community, guide decision making and funding, and if implemented well, will help all Tasmanians to improve their literacy skills or the skills of others” (p.37). This Framework reflects an *Ecological Model of Learning* which acknowledges “the importance of understanding the contextual environment within which learning (including developing literacy) occurs. These contextual factors, although outside the specific Terms of Reference, need to be recognised to ensure learners have the greatest opportunity to thrive. Learning does not happen in isolation – the wellbeing needs of individuals can act as barriers or enablers to engaging in learning” (LAP, 2023, p.25).

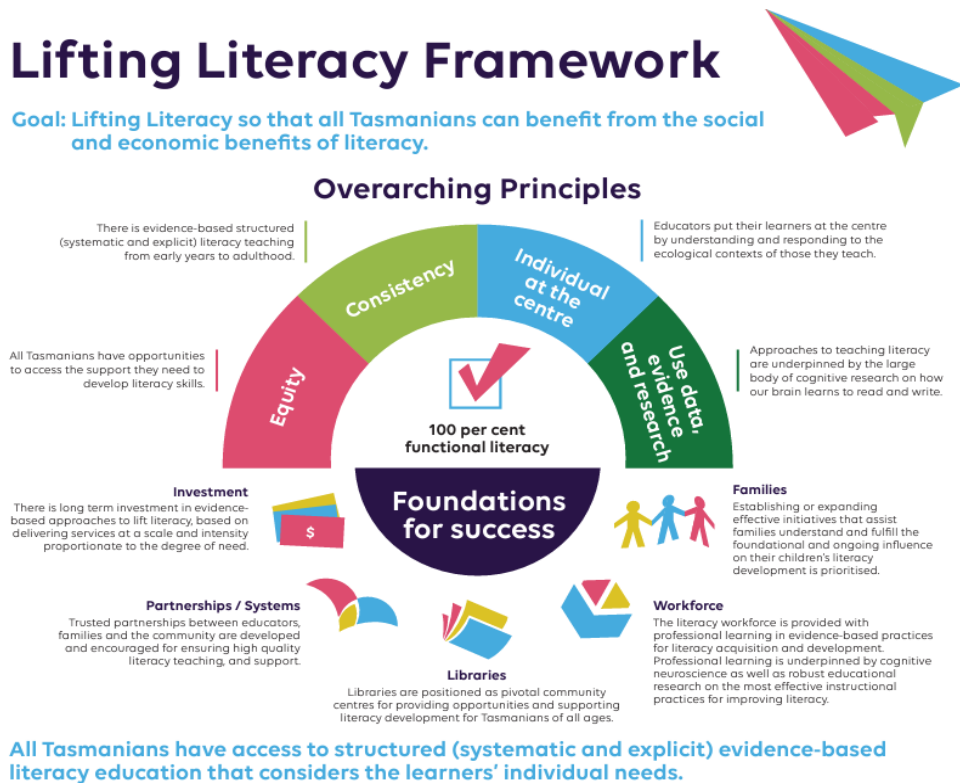


Figure 5: Lifting Literacy Framework – Overarching Principles (Literacy Advisory Panel, 2023, p.39).

Tasmania’s *Department for Education, Children and Young People* [DECYP] have now funded a large-scale project to provide training in ‘structured literacy’ and the ‘Multi-Tiered System of Support’ [MTSS] for all Tasmanian educators and teachers from Kindergarten to Year 12 to undertake in early 2024 (Ashton & Upton, [DECYP], 2023). This current literacy focus within Tasmania provided an opportune time to develop and implement a multi-disciplinary event with key stakeholders from across our communities.

It is evident that a range of social, cultural, political and economic factors have influenced the prioritisation and development of policies for improving literacy outcomes for all children and adults

residing in Tasmania. However, there is a consensus regarding the need to better understand the specific strengths and barriers among Tasmanian communities that can impact the effectiveness of diverse, place-based approaches to literacy.

Establishing a Partnership for the Roundtables

The Cuthill Family Foundation generously contributed to the *Early Years Literacy Roundtables* event. For context, this Foundation was established by Harvey and Suzanne Cuthill as an independent philanthropic trust based in Tasmania, with their Board now comprising three generations of Cuthill family members who offer an ongoing commitment to engage with local projects. This commitment encompasses a clear vision and aims to reduce barriers of disadvantage and enhance Tasmania's contributions to research and outcomes in areas of health, education and the arts.

Through a preexisting relationship between *The Cuthill Family Foundation* and the *University of Tasmania* [UTAS], a team from the *School of Education* [SoE] within the *College of the Arts, Law and Education* [CALE] was asked to develop and implement an *Early Years Literacy Roundtables* event. This event was held between August 29-30th at the University of Tasmania's new River's Edge Building, Inveresk campus in Launceston, Tasmania.

Objectives of the Roundtables

Based on the contextual background of literacy in Tasmania and our collaboration with our philanthropic partners, some key objectives were developed. This event aimed to:

1. Contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue for improving literacy levels in Tasmania with a specific focus on early years literacies;
2. Bring together early years literacy researchers, educators, key Tasmanian stakeholders, national organisations, policymakers, allied health professionals and community-based literacy initiatives to discuss and unpack early years literacy for strong beginnings;
3. Offer important contributions and new insights into literacy learning and outcomes for young children and their families in Tasmania.

The event comprised two separate yet interrelated Roundtables. Each of these Roundtables encompassed a specific theme and three overarching questions that framed the discussions for each day.



Roundtable 1

Early Years literacy for strong beginnings in Tasmania

Framing questions:

1. What does diverse early literacy development look like and what does it mean to be literate?
2. How can we strengthen and support early literacies for all children from the very beginning?
3. How do different disciplines come together to respond to complex literacy challenges in Tasmania?

Roundtable 2

Knowing the world through storytelling:

Exploring place-based and diverse literacies for enhanced literacy outcomes in Tasmania

Framing questions:

1. What can place-based, embodied, digital, sensory and non-verbal languages contribute to children's knowledges and expression of their worlds?
2. What can we learn from listening to Country and to more-than-human literacies with children to support rich oral literacies?
3. How can these approaches strengthen and support future literacy outcomes in Tasmania?

These themes and questions informed the focus and direction of panel presentations and roundtable discussions, and the key contributors and invited guests who attended each of these Roundtables.

Attendance and Contributions – In-person and online

The Roundtables were attended by approximately 35 in-person guests per day at the River's Edge Building of the University of Tasmania, Launceston. The attendees included representatives from Lady Gowrie Tasmania, Playgroup Tasmania, Independent Schools, Tasmanian Department of Health, 26TEN, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for Education, Department for Education, Children and Young People [DECYP], Goodstart Early Learning, Public Health Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPaC], Ravenswood Discovery Early Learning Centre, and the University of Tasmania, among others.

The event was also attended by 44 online participants over the two-days. Online participants joined the event from Tasmania and interstate. There were representatives from Catholic schools, Speech Pathology Tasmania, Libraries Tasmania, Department for Education, Children and Young People [DECYP], Department of Education Victoria, Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation, Rural Health Tasmania and the University of Tasmania, among others. The morning session on Day 1 was moderated by Professor Victoria Carrington, Dean for the School of Education (SoE), University of Tasmania (UTAS). The morning session on Day 2 was moderated by Professor Iris Duhn, Lead for the Early Years Living Lab (SoE, UTAS).

The online event was moderated by Greg Marshall, CALE's Manager Engagement and Partnerships, and the chat was moderated by Dr. Lauren Armstrong from the in-person venue, creating opportunities for deeper engagement for online participants. Some of the comments made by the moderator in relation to the online event were that it was a diverse online audience with people from different disciplines and generations and they had a high level of involvement in the discussions. They were very active throughout the event providing comments and diverse perspectives, which included: very strong support for what the panel discussions were about, the balance required between enquiry vs explicit teaching as we have tended to oscillate between both, interest in different ways of thinking about literacies in Tasmania and beyond.

Early Years Literacies – Emerging themes

The sections below provide a summary of the panel presentations and key themes that emerged from collective discussions among our panel contributors and our in-person and online participants during each day of the event (Roundtables One and Two).

Panel Presentations and Discussions – Roundtable One

“Roundtable One – Early years literacy for strong beginnings in Tasmania” created opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogues. The panel presentations were framed by the following questions:

1. What does diverse early literacy development look like and what does it mean to be literate?
2. How can we strengthen and support early literacies for all children from the very beginning?
3. How do different disciplines come together to respond to complex literacy challenges in Tasmania?



The panel presenters included professor Natalie Brown from the Peter Underwood Centre, Associate Professor Alison Holm and Dr. Samuel Calder from the School of Health Sciences of the University of Tasmania and Ms. Courtney Dunbabin, speech pathologist and literacy advisor panel member from DECYP who addressed ‘Tasmanian Literacies.’ From a neuroscience and speech pathology perspective, presenters emphasised the critical time of the early years for literacy acquisition. A theme that emerged from the first panel was that **interdisciplinary responses to literacy issues are critical**, specifically in reading and writing.

In the following panel Ms Jodi Upton and Jennifer Ashton from DECYP shared the investment that the Tasmanian Government is making to fund a large-scale project to provide training in ‘structured literacy’ and the ‘Multi-Tiered System of Support’ [MTSS] for all Tasmanian educators and teachers from Kindergarten to Year 12 to undertake in early 2024. Ms Raylene Foster, Director of Connected Beginnings Lutruwita explained how Connected Beginnings, a Closing the Gap national initiative, works in Lutruwita/Tasmania to support Aboriginal children to be school-ready. She strongly emphasised the **importance of community in Aboriginal children’s literacy development**.

The last panel presenter, Associate Professor Jane Scull from Monash University responded to the Tasmanian context from a broader Australian perspective on literacy in ECEC. Her presentation explored evidence that suggests that **there is an urgent need to improve literacy outcomes**, but also **the need to rethink what constitutes literacy, with a particular focus on diverse contexts**.

Some of the discussions in the day 1 Q&A explored the **tensions between explicit and inquiry-based learning in ECEC**. Different disciplines were perceived as **working in silos**, and **the need to come together to listen to each other and find ways to collectively address issues** that affect young Tasmanians is paramount. An online participant questioned:

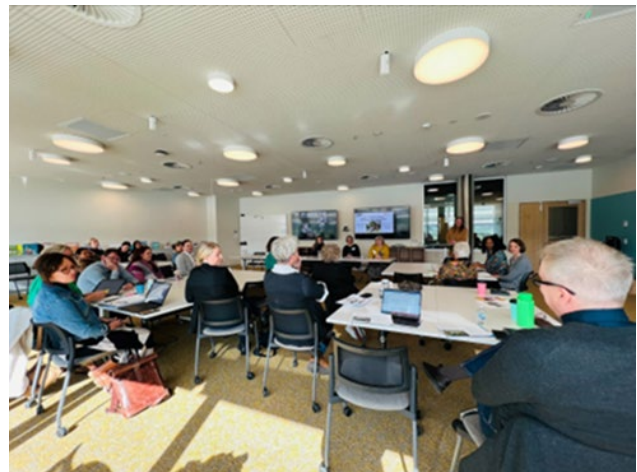
“We have done the same things for decades with dwindling outcomes and expectations. It will take more than goodwill to solve silos. Is there a structural response required re. resources – How do we engage Gov and DECYP/Ed Departments + other organisations?”

Based on the participant responses that ensued, this was certainly a complex and multifaceted question in need of serious attention moving forward.

Panel Presentations and Discussions – Roundtable Two

“Roundtable Two – Knowing the world through storytelling: exploring place-based and diverse literacies for enhanced literacy outcomes in Tasmania” opened spaces to expand the notion of literacy into plural literacies. The framing questions of the day were:

1. What can place-based, embodied, digital, sensory and non-verbal languages contribute to children’s knowledges and expression of their worlds?
2. What can we learn from listening to Country and to more-than-human literacies with children to support rich oral literacies?
3. How can these approaches strengthen and support future literacy outcomes in Tasmania?



The panel presenters Dr. Jane Merewether, Ms Lou Kirkwood and Ms. Chloe Woolnough offered rich perspectives on place-based literacies in Tasmania and Western Australia. Dr. Merewether explored more-than-human literacies in her presentation. A key point made was about literacies – that goes beyond “the traditional ways of understanding literacy”, but even these traditional ways acknowledge that “there is no one literacy. There are multiple literacies...reading and writing, and speaking and listening, and viewing, but we also have digital literacy and visual literacy... So those are literacies. But all of those...focus on the human. In more-than-human literacies, literacies are expanded beyond conventional textual forms to encompass the vast array of entities that exist within our shared ecosystems, and our common worlds.

Ms Kirkwood from New Horizons (private ECEC in Nipaluna/Hobart) elaborated on these multiple literacies with an experience of place-based literacies in Taroona beach, where young children were part of a year-long process of connecting to place and learning to look after Country. This presentation was followed by Ms Woolnough from Connected Beginnings Lutruwita, who shared how Tasmanian Aboriginal children attending TACINC early childhood centre were developing their own connection to

Country and how connecting to the land and water provided opportunities to develop creativity and literacies not only in English, but also in Palawa Kani, and how this process of learning flew from children to their parents and families.

In the following panel, Mr Ashley MacPherson from Bruny Island District School spoke about his experiences of embedding digital literacies as a form of the Reggio Principles and One Hundred Languages that are transferrable throughout the school years. He shared a whole school inquiry project undertaken for *NAIDOC's Minecraft Education World Challenge*. In collaboration with an Indigenous digital technology company called *InDigital*, children developed and signposted a digital world as Thinkers, Communicators, Collaborators and Creators; while the educators' role was to observe, question and support the children's learning. This digital literacies project illustrates a strong transdisciplinary approach that encompassed Indigenous knowledges, Science, Technologies, Engineering and the Arts.

Dr Denise Chapman elaborated on the relevance of poetic encounters with literacies in early years from an anti-racist and anti-colonial perspective. Ms. Annette Fuller took the pluralities of literacies further into her experiences with remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, and the role of storytelling in building relationships with place. Finally, Associate Professor Janet Scull shared the findings of a place-based literacies project in an urban setting, challenging ideas that separate nature and culture into a more nuanced terrain.

The Panel presentations provided a balance between the current research into place-based and diverse literacies; and the practical approaches being utilised by community service providers, as well as educators and teachers in Early Years and School settings in lutruwita Tasmania. The Moderator for the day proposed: "It might be a matter of thinking – AND. And... is there a place, is there a new conversation we can have? Is there something that can happen in this complicated space in-between that generates something interesting and possibly new? Those are the conversations that we should be encouraging" (Iris, Day 2 Moderator).

Our Roundtable Two participants enjoyed hearing about the examples of stories and *storying* with children shared by our panel contributors. The Q&A explored the significance of relationships, place-based contexts and slowing down. It was suggested that we should move beyond "prescribed human literacies", and instead take a 'BOTH/AND' approach to bring together what we know, and work WITH our children, families and communities to better support literacy learning and outcomes.

Afternoon Roundtable Discussions

During our afternoon Roundtable Discussions, we were able to continue our dialogue with our panel contributors and participants. Sessions summarised and expanded on the morning's themes. We orchestrated these discussions among group tables with one panel contributor at each table to facilitate these group discussions. These sessions were further prompted by the guiding question:

What are the main priorities, strengths or barriers for strong Early Years literacy outcomes in your experience and within your community?



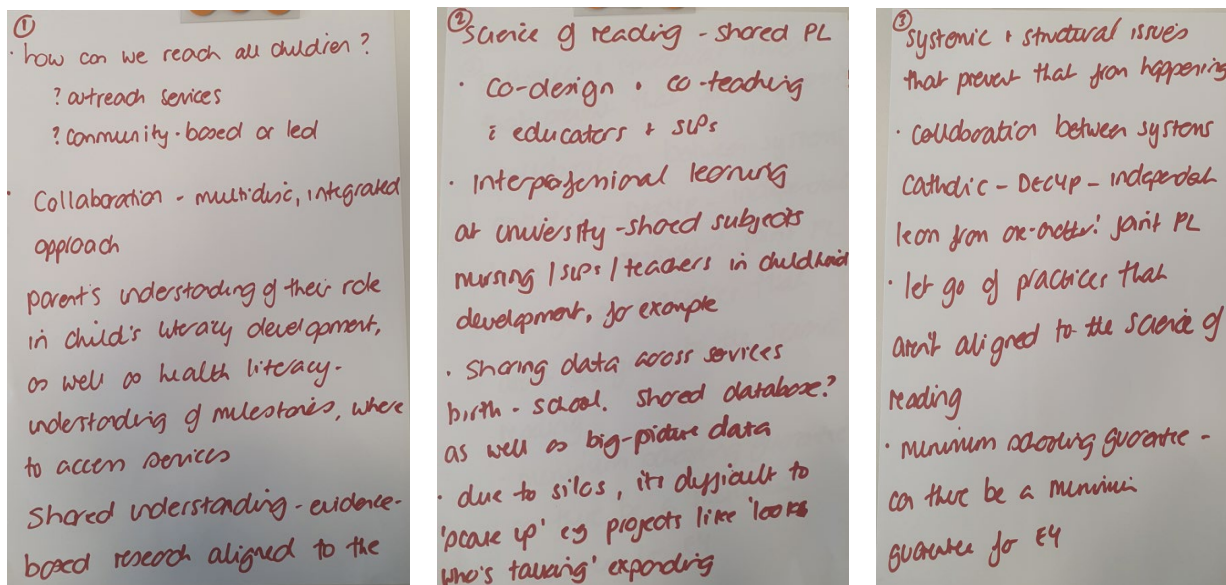
Participant Roundtable Groups were invited to record and share a few key points with our broader group, where some robust discussions ensured. The following sections present some of the key points raised during our Afternoon Roundtables across Days One and Two.

Participant Responses during Afternoon Roundtable Discussions – Day One

Thirty-five (35) key stakeholders participated in the afternoon Roundtable Discussions on Day One. They were invited to contribute to one of the six (6) Roundtable Groups. The allocation of participants in each roundtable was carefully done by the co-curators to ensure a diversity of voices in each of the roundtables. The data and discussion outlined below represent key responses and themes that emerged from some of these Participant Roundtable Groups.

Participant Roundtable Group 1

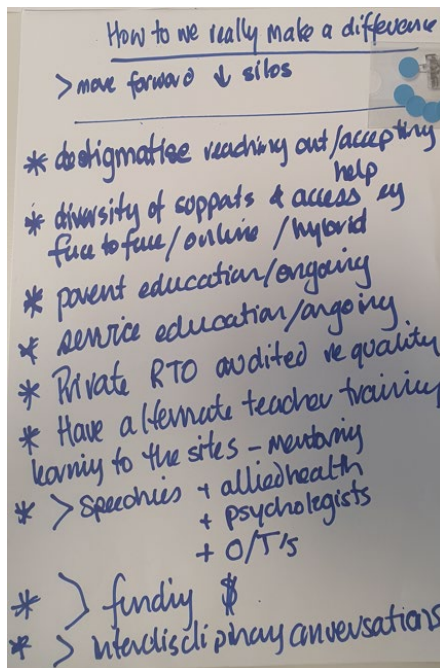
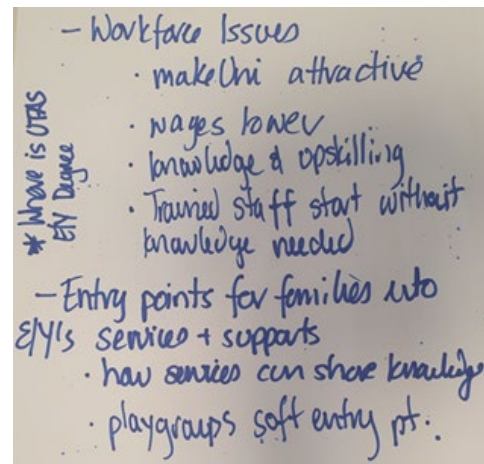
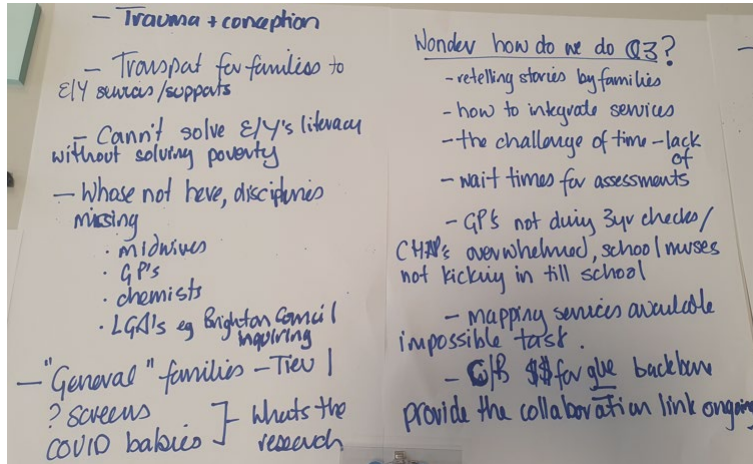
Our first group who contributed to the afternoon Roundtable Discussions on Day One highlighted some more structured and explicit approaches to early years literacy from health and speech pathology perspectives.



This group acknowledged the need for integrated, community-wide approaches that provide parental/familial education regarding the role they play in their children's literacy development, the importance of understanding key developmental milestones, and how to access support services. It was suggested that a "Science of Reading" approach and "minimum guarantee" for our Birth to Age 4 ECEC services could be co-designed and implemented through professional learning, cross-sectoral higher education and community service collaboration.

Participant Roundtable Group 2

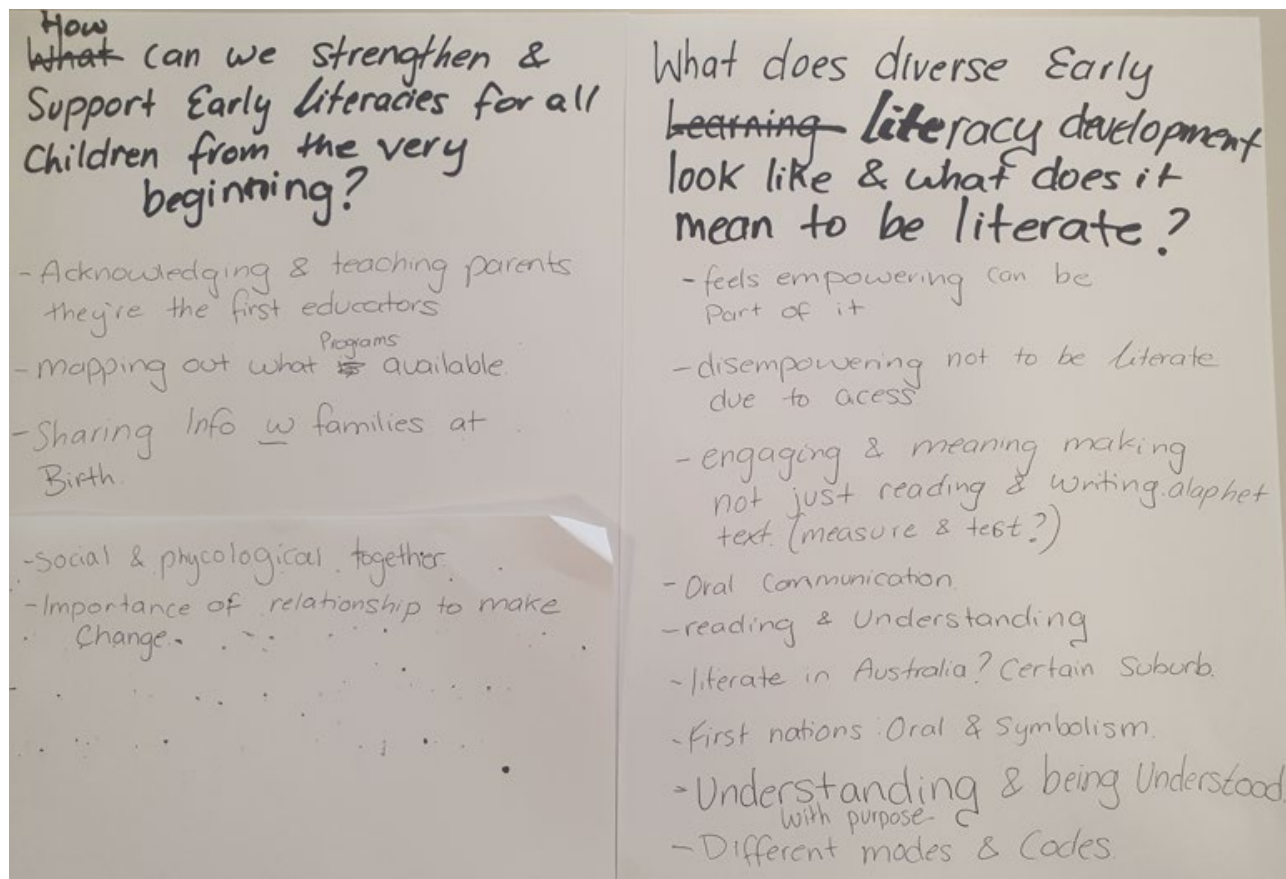
Our second group offered a different lens in terms of the barriers impacting early years literacy learning and development in Tasmania. The data here emphasises the issues faced among families and communities that are influencing literacy outcomes in the early years. Specifically, this group explored issues of poverty, trauma, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the workforce issues facing schools and ECEC services.



This group discussed systemic and local challenges and came up with potential ways to address these issues. Some examples of these propositions were: creating more instances for interdisciplinary conversations, making universities more attractive with degrees that respond to local needs, and creating professional learning opportunities on literacies for staff in early years services.

Participant Roundtable Group 3

Our third group contemplated how they collectively defined diverse early years literacies and what it means to be 'literate with a key focus on relationships, from families to broader health services. A crucial aspect identified by this group was the relationship between literacy and social empowerment.



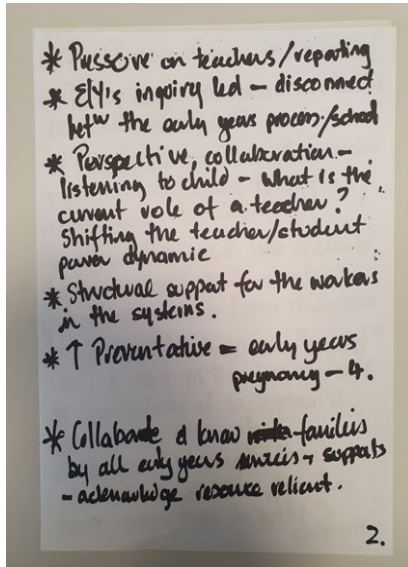
This group also considered potential ways that we can strengthen early years literacies for stronger beginnings. Some of these ways included: mapping out available programs to support children's literacy in different local areas, developing tool kits for (and with) families at birth (and before), expanding the notion of literacy beyond "reading and writing" to encompass oral communication, and other modes.

Participant Responses during Afternoon Roundtable Discussions – Day Two

Twenty-five (25) key stakeholders joined the roundtable discussions on Day Two. Like the previous day, participants were carefully allocated to each of the six (6) Roundtable Groups to ensure diversity of voices in each discussion. The data illustrated throughout the forthcoming sections represent central themes from three of these participant groups.

Participant Roundtable Group 1

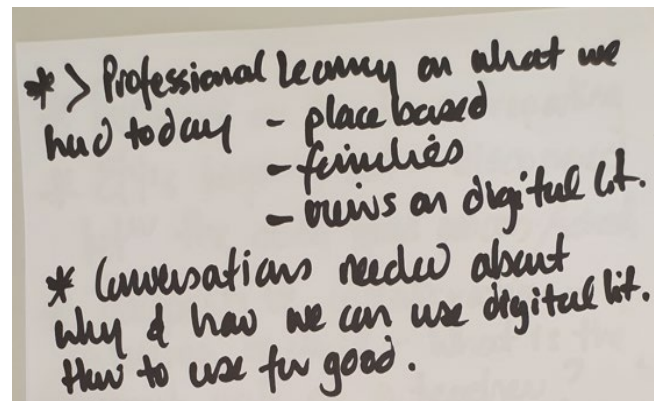
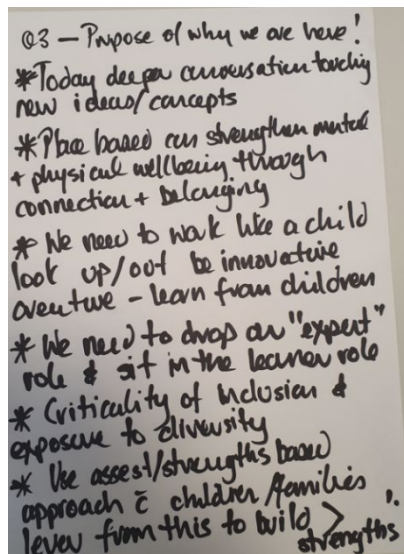
Our first group acknowledged a range of significant points regarding the challenges and needs for supporting literacy outcomes for young children.



These points were defined as:

- Pressure on teachers, and the disconnect between different approaches used in the Early Years and School sectors.
- Reimagining the role of the teacher, with greater collaboration WITH children in their learning as a way to shift the power dynamics.
- Structural support needed across systems, and preventative measures to support children and families from Conception to Age 4.
- Greater collaboration and resource-sharing between services and organisations so that we can all know our families and support them effectively.

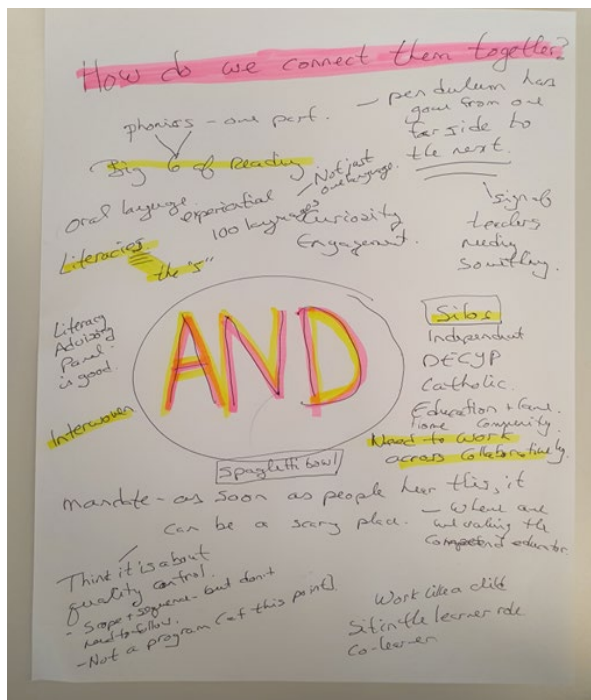
This group recognised that greater opportunities for professional learning were needed in the areas of place-based literacies, families and views on digital technologies – including “why and how we can use digital technologies for good”.



There was also agreement that “deeper conversation” is needed for the teaching of new ideas/concepts; and that place-based approaches to literacy learning can also strengthen wellbeing and inclusivity. This group suggested that we should critically reflect on the roles and approaches we take, and build on the strengths of children and families to develop more innovative ways to foster early years literacy outcomes.

Participant Roundtable Group 2

Our second group questions how we could bring diverse understandings of literacies together – with an emphasis on the notion of ‘AND’ – as well as greater inclusion of the One Hundred Languages.



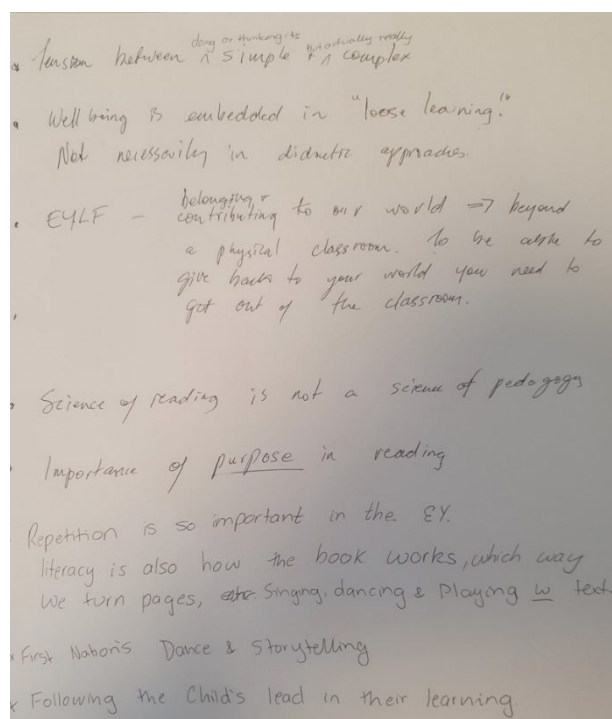
This group acknowledged the work of the Literacy Advisory Panel (LAP, 2023) as a positive step, agreeing with a need to focus on The Big Six (while not only emphasising Phonics). They also recognised the need for educators, teachers, schools and services to work together collaboratively to address “quality control” and to ensure that our educators and teachers are treated as being “competent”.

Participant Roundtable Group 3

Our third group raised some issues regarding tensions, strengths and needs for early years’ literacy learning.

These points included:

- Tensions between “simple” versus “complex” perspectives/understandings of the metacognitive and practical application processes.
- Difference in understanding the “Science of Reading” as a scientific/evidence-based pedagogical approach.
- Issues regarding “loose learning” and non-didactic connections to wellbeing.
- The importance of understanding the “purpose” in approaches to reading.
- The essentiality of “repetition” or rote learning and understanding the structure of texts in the early years.
- Opportunities needed to embed child-led engagement with text through song, dance, play and First Nations’ Dance and Storytelling.



Key Messages from the Roundtables

This event provided a generous opportunity to engage with key stakeholders and literacy advocates from early childhood education and care [ECEC], education, family, health, Indigenous, community and Government services from across lutruwita Tasmania. The invaluable contributions of our Roundtable panelists and participants made visible the diverse perspectives and experiences of strengths and barriers currently impacting early years literacy outcomes for Tasmanians.

Some of the key messages emphasized during this event relate to the importance of:

1. Engaging in 'deep listening', with children, families and communities.
2. Understanding that language is about experiences – everyone experiences life events from their own perspective, there needs to be awareness of nuanced languages to express experiences.
3. Embedding meaningful connections with place and Country – literacy learning for young children is about being here, with people, animals, plants, and everything that makes their place.
4. Building authentic relationships with children, families and communities – relationships are the foundation for literacy learning.
5. Encompassing children's strengths, interests and lived experiences – being open to diverse literacies.
6. Considering BOTH/AND approaches: expert support, including speech pathology and explicit teaching to *literacy learning* AND innovative, place-based pedagogical approaches to *learning literacies*.

Significant Impacts of the Roundtables

The Early Years Literacy Roundtables event has resulted in some significant impacts on the diverse ways in which early years literacy can be defined and strengthened across our Tasmanian communities. These impacts have been made possible through the generous philanthropic interest, support and contributions of *The Cuthill Family Foundation*. The sections that follow provide an overview of these key impacts and how they can inform future directions for early years literacy in Tasmania.

Reflecting on the Roundtable Objectives

When considering the impacts of the Roundtables event, it is essential to reflect upon our initial Roundtable Objectives. To revisit, these Objectives aimed to:

1. Contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue for improving literacy levels in Tasmania with a specific focus on early years literacies;
2. Bring together early years literacy researchers, educators, key Tasmanian stakeholders, national organisations, policymakers, allied health professionals and community-based literacy initiatives to discuss and unpack early years literacy for strong beginnings;
3. Offer important contributions and new insights into literacy learning and outcomes for young children and their families in Tasmania.

The findings summarised in this Report illustrate a clear alignment between these Objectives and the Roundtable Objectives. This also indicates that these Objectives were successfully achieved.

Immediate and longer-term impacts

The impacts from the Roundtables event encompass both immediate and longer-term impacts that specifically relate to themes of *interdisciplinary collaboration* and the *dissemination of contributions* made by Roundtable participants during the event. As portrayed in **Table 1** below, these themes also reflect the Roundtable Objectives.

Table 1: Immediate and longer-term impacts

Impact Theme	Immediate Impact	Longer-term Impact
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	The blended (in-person and online) facilitation of an interdisciplinary and intergenerational approach to unite key members of Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC], school-based education, family, community and health sectors to share their knowledges, experiences and perspectives of early years literacies.	Continuing to build strong and professional relationships; opportunities for collaboration, information and resource sharing; co-designed research and innovation; and shared language and understandings; in a collective endeavour to develop a community-wide approach for improving early years literacy outcomes across Tasmania and further afield.
Dissemination of Contributions	The presentation and dissemination of preliminary findings and new insights from Roundtable contributions at a national early childhood conference: Armstrong, L., Duhn, I. & Galvez Donoso, S. (2023). (Re)imagining transformative, place-based early years literacies for supporting and strengthening lifelong outcomes. <i>2023 Early Childhood Australia National Conference, Kumarninthe – Becoming one: Old ways, new wisdom</i> . 4–7 October 2023, Adelaide.	Continued data analysis of Roundtable contributions and new insights for the presentation and dissemination of a high-quality academic journal: Armstrong, L. & Duhn, I. (In Preparation). Breaking down silos through deep listening: Walking together to empower collective and innovative outcomes for diverse, place-based literacies.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

The invaluable contributions of our Roundtable participants and the emerging themes and impacts of this event require thoughtful consideration regarding ‘where to from here’. There are a number of ‘next steps’ that are being prioritised as we move forward.

Continuing the Momentum

It is vital to keep the traction and momentum going from the collective inspiration that was experienced by so many participants during the Roundtables event. The Table below offers some key recommendations based on the emerging Roundtable themes.

Table 2: Emerging themes and recommendations

Emerging Themes	Recommendations
Professional Learning Needs	Co-design, implement and evaluate opportunities for interdisciplinary professional learning on diverse early years literacies, including place-based and digital literacies that embed family perspectives, values and contexts to promote continuity of literacy learning across Tasmanian communities.
Interdisciplinary Dialogue	Work together to continue discussions between sectors and disciplines to map diverse perspectives and understandings of literacies, and to develop a community-wide approach that embraces the notion of ‘BOTH/AND’.
Collaboration and resource-sharing	Work together to develop ways for greater collaboration and resource-sharing between services and organisations to better understand the contextual literacy needs of Tasmanian children, families and communities and to strengthen literacy outcomes.

The themes and recommendations identified here can be perceived as stepping stones towards a clear way forward for improving the way we define, support and improve literacy learning and development in the early years. As we continue to identify needs (and strengths) across our sectors, disciplines and communities, we will be able to synergise our literacy goals; and also map the strengths, resources and practices that we can share to meet these goals more effectively.

Considerations for Future Initiatives

This Roundtables event has fostered a meaningful opportunity to consider future initiatives for developing and improving literacy outcomes – in the early years and beyond. There are growing understandings that literacy is contextualised within families and communities, suggesting that approaches should be reflective of this. We also need to acknowledge the ripple effects that low literacy levels, negative educational experiences, as well as other factors such as intergenerational trauma, and food and housing insecurities can have on receptiveness to literacy development, and learning more broadly. Though on the flip-side, more authentic and place-based literacy approaches may enhance the receptiveness of children and families across our Tasmanian communities. This leaves us with a few pressing considerations:

- How can the meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue facilitated by the Roundtables be leveraged?
- Are there opportunities for further engagement, relationships or funding?
- How can we engage our Government and policymakers to join us in this important endeavour?

It is clear from the overwhelming response from participants and interested members of the community that early years literacy is a key priority across Tasmania. There are certainly many opportunities for us all to engage in new and collaborative initiatives to support and strengthen literacy learning and outcomes. It is anticipated that by continuing the dialogue and maintaining the relationships that began during the Roundtables event, these future initiatives will indeed be possible. More explicit planning to continue this important work is now underway, including ways to attract greater attention, interest, priority and funding.

Conclusion

We anticipate that this is only the beginning and will endeavour to keep the momentum going and continue to engage in deep listening, meaningful dialogue and interdisciplinary collaboration for community-wide, multimodal and co-designed approaches to effective place-based and diverse literacies for supporting and strengthening current and future academic, economic and lifelong outcomes in lutruwita Tasmania.

Acknowledgements

Our Roundtable Curators from the School of Education, University of Tasmania wish to acknowledge our philanthropic partners, the Cuthill Family Foundation. Their passion for literacy in Tasmania and generous support have been paramount for the development and success of this Early Years Literacy Roundtables event.

We wish to thank all our Roundtable Experts for dedicating their time to share their profound knowledge and experiences of Early Years literacies for strong beginnings. Their panel presentations, stories and contributions to our expert roundtables will foster and strengthen our collaborative community partnerships to improve literacy outcomes for all Tasmanians.

Thank you to all members of the community for participating in this event. It is wonderful to facilitate an interdisciplinary approach to Early Years literacy, and a meaningful opportunity for experts from across the national and state landscapes to come together and learn from one another. This approach can help us to strengthen our understandings of the strengths and barriers for enhancing literacy outcomes, and how we can engage in diverse, place-based literacies to best support the children, families and communities within Tasmania and more broadly.

The Roundtable Curators would also like to take this opportunity to thank the amazing teams across the University of Tasmania and the community services who made this event possible.

Special thanks go to our following teams and those working behind the scenes:

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