

MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

language anthologies or single-author collections continue to appear each year, and the online periodical *Hontanar* publishes both Australian and international writing in Spanish. AustLit now has detailed records for this Australian material, with links to full-text where available.

AustLit provides nearly complete coverage of separately published Australian literary works, regardless of language of publication. Its records for works in languages other than English that have appeared in periodicals or newspapers are somewhat less comprehensive, but building data in this area remains a goal. For example, the Greek language periodicals *Antipodes* and *O Logos* both feature literary work by established and emerging Greek-Australian writers. AustLit records for these periodicals had previously been patchy, but thanks to work carried out in 2008 by researcher and author Pipina Elles, the most recent issues have been indexed, illustrating some of the diversity of literary activity that takes place in Australia in languages apart from English. Similar work remains to be undertaken for literary periodicals in other languages, including Arabic and Vietnamese. To illustrate, the quarterly literary journal *Kalimat*, published between 2000 and 2006, appeared in alternating English and Arabic issues, aiming to further cross-cultural communication and understanding; AustLit has just begun to index its contents.

Anthologies have been an important means for multicultural writers to reach a wide Australian readership, beginning in the 1970s and continuing today, and another part of my AustLit research is to stay abreast of such publications. One recent collection, *Culture Is...: Australian Stories Across Cultures, An Anthology*, includes works by writers from over thirty cultural backgrounds. With each contribution indexed and details provided for subjects and settings as well as the authors' biographies and links to other publications, readers can follow intriguing or unusual textual trails. For example, a story of a woman whose family fled Iran and came to Australia mentions the significance of her Baha'i faith and the AustLit record, therefore, provides links to other works that relate to Baha'i. Interestingly, three such texts appear in another anthology, *Shoalhaven Voices From Faraway Places*, and AustLit records that these three authors are also Iranian-born and that they became refugees due to religious persecution.

As Australian stories come from around the globe, so too do these stories travel to unexpected places, and tracking overseas published responses to Australian literature is another aspect of my research. To give a brief and closing example, AustLit lists two critical responses to Salvado's memoir: one in *The West Australian* in 2008; the other in a Mexican-based, Spanish language online journal, *Razon y Palabras*, in 2007. One of the co-authors of this latter publication is a University of Queensland academic, born in Mexico, who coincidentally – the AustLit database shows – has also published in *Hontanar*. Providing researchers with these intersections of texts, language, and culture is what AustLit does so well, making it easier than ever to explore the cultural diversity of Australian literature.

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Curtin library supports multiculturalism with an Australian first

Curtin University of Technology has more Indigenous students enrolled than any other Australian university and also has Australia's third largest international student population, so it is imperative that the library supports diversity on campus.

In 2008 Curtin was the first Australian university to launch a Reconciliation Action Plan as part of its commitment to turning good intentions into measurable actions. The Plan was launched by the Hon Fred Chaney, Director of Reconciliation Australia. The library quickly followed by developing its own Reconciliation Action Support Plan (RASP) to help the university achieve its vision.

RASP consists of three programs: Student and Academic Support, Public Programs, and Collaborative Collection Programs. The library is keen that each area has defined actions and targets for measuring outcomes. Actions already undertaken, or planned, include a joint digitisation project to digitise an out-of-print Indigenous language dictionary, a photographic display of Indigenous works, and production of subject guides and a booklet to assist students to make effective use of the library.

The Plan is a living document that will continue to evolve during the library's planning cycles and has already become a template for other areas within the university. It will be registered with Reconciliation Australia for ratification and will be the first such plan for an Australian university library.

Also in 2008 Curtin Library adopted a strategic initiative to further strengthen its Asian Languages Collection which was based on generous donations primarily from the Chinese Embassy, the Japan Foundation, the Korea Research Foundation, and the National Library of Australia.

The collection is focused on three main client groups: students learning the languages, researchers, and international students looking for material in their own language, and – judging by the loans statistics for Chinese novels in particular – awareness of what we have is certainly increasing!

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Storytime

Providing library services across language barriers: Nhulunbuy Community Library and Yirrkala Storytime

Yirrkala Storytime developed from the need to provide library services to the Indigenous population around Nhulunbuy. The town of Nhulunbuy was built in 1971 on Aboriginal land to service the bauxite mine on the remote east coast of Arnhem Land.

Nhulunbuy Community Library is a joint-use high school and community library, managed by the Northern Territory Library. However, although the town is in a region where the majority of the population is Indigenous, almost none of the local Yolngu

people used the library. Traditional languages are very strong in the region and many children under school age have little or no English.



To find ways of making the library relevant to Yolngu people, I consulted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network [ATSILIRN] Protocols¹. They provide advice on accessibility and use

and make the point that library staff first need to go out into the community and become known and trusted there. As early literacy is a high priority in public library services, story time seemed a logical place to start.

The largest Aboriginal community close to Nhulunbuy is Yirrkala, about 12 km away. In August 2006 I arranged with Djapirri, the Manager of the Yirrkala Women's Resource Centre, to hold a story time session for under-5s and went out there with bags of books and some colouring-in. A Yolngu woman, Djanambi, came with me in the car and we drove around the community to find some young children.

We set up on a mat under a shady tree at the front of the Women's Centre and I started to read. A couple of pages into the story one of the women said "Yapa, these kids don't know what you're saying". The penny dropped for me that the children did not understand English, so I asked Djanambi to translate. So from then on, as I read each page in English, Djanambi would translate. The children loved the stories and the colouring and I promised to be back next week.

I wish I could say that we progressed from strength to strength, but that was not the case. Language and cultural considerations require adult Yolngu participation, but Djanambi has commitments to other programs so is not always there. However, with a lot of perseverance and continued support from the Women's Centre, there is usually someone available.

Yirrkala Storytime slowly became established as a regular weekly event, every Thursday morning. We set up under the tree at the front of the Women's Centre or on their veranda in the wet season. After some quiet reading we have a story, reading first in English then translating into Yolngu Matha.

After the story the children do an activity based on the story and learn skills that will help prepare them for school. Everyone makes something to take home and we finish up with some puzzles and a fruit snack. Storytime has also featured Santa, the Fire Truck, and ALIA National Simultaneous Storytime.

One challenge is finding stories to read aloud that also lend themselves to on-the-spot translation, yet retain the fun and interest in another language. Stories that rely on rhythm and rhyme in English often fall flat in translation.

Books with subject matter that reflects the lifestyle these children have, such as *Big rain coming*², help them make the connection between spoken and written word and the real world around them. Important also are illustrations that include Indigenous faces and characters to help establish a rapport with the story.

For quiet reading I take a mix of board books, picture books, and junior non-fiction, particularly of animals and activities

familiar to the children. This is an important part of story time as it provides an opportunity for the children to simply enjoy the books. It gives them regular access to printed material where they can engage in pre-literacy activities and learn reading behaviours such as turning pages and how to hold a book.³

Community and cultural events do sometimes override the weekly story time, however this will always be the case and it needs to remain flexible and accommodating of such disruptions. Library staff have attended cross-cultural education specifically based on Yolngu culture, plus some formal study of Yolngu language and culture. This helps with understanding the conversation at Storytime!

Yirrkala Storytime has developed into a partnership between the East Arnhem Shire, which has responsibility for the Yirrkala Women's Centre, and the Northern Territory Library, through provision of library staffing, books, and other resources. From records kept of books and activities that have been successful, a set of Storytime Kits is being developed with guidelines and templates for each session. These kits will make it easier for story time to be run by a new staff member or introduced into another community.

However, even though there is a basic plan, every week is different! It has been and is still a challenge but with ongoing cooperation and support from all parties it can continue to be a source of wonderful fun and learning for the children, while helping them learn early literacy practices that are so important for when they start school.

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References

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2. Germein, Katrina, 1999. *Big rain coming*, Puffin, Camberwell, Vic.
3. *Evaluation of the Northern Territory library's libraries & knowledge centres model*, Northern Territory Library, 2006, p.94.

A fun way to connect with the community

When the first Turkish storytelling session was held at Meadow Fair North Preschool, a Turkish speaking boy ran up to the teacher saying very excitedly, "they're using my words, they're using my words!" The young boy was thrilled to hear someone else talking the way only his mum and dad had. Suddenly, the language he spoke only at home took another dimension, a new direction pointing to his parents' precious homeland, and, not only that, he also discovered that those Bilingual Storytimes sessions at his preschool were a lot of fun too!

Since May 2005, Bilingual Storytimes sessions have been offered at Hume Libraries and community settings, including childcare centres, preschools, playgroups, and schools. The sessions are performed in a variety of community languages, including Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Assyrian, and Sinhalese. Trained storytellers engage children aged 0–8 in a dynamic session of storytelling, songs, rhymes, and craft activities.

Bilingual Storytimes allow children to learn about their culture in a fun and friendly environment. Community Literacy and Engagement Officer Anna Boland said the story times give people a sense that their language and culture is valued by the community and helps children develop their English speaking