Evaluation of the implementation of 
*Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities*

Final report
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Executive summary

Background

The Evaluation of the implementation of Foundations for Success, undertaken by Professor Bob Perry, Charles Sturt University, Albury-Wodonga, was commissioned by the Department of Education and Training. A governance group comprising officers from the Division of Indigenous Education and Training Futures, Strategic Research, Office for Early Childhood Education and Division of Teaching and Learning has provided overall strategic direction for the project.

Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Communities was developed in 2007–08 by the then Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts. Developed in collaboration with Indigenous education experts, academics and educators, it is unique in its applicability to early childhood educators working in pre-Prep settings in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.

Pre-Prep is a non-compulsory part-time early childhood education program targeting 3½ to 4½ year old children living in 29 Cape York and Torres Strait communities, as well as six other discrete Aboriginal communities. Pre-Prep programs are a key plank of the commitment to ensure children living in Indigenous communities have access to high quality and consistent early childhood education programs.

Evaluation study

The study was undertaken in three phases over 2009–10 in six of the 35 sites where the program is being implemented. The overall methodology adopted in this study was one of the non-Indigenous evaluator honouring the cultural and professional knowledge and traditions of the communities, educational settings, educators, families and children in each of the sites chosen for the evaluation. The study considered data derived from audio-recorded conversational interviews undertaken during four visits to each of the sites. As well, contextual information for each site was gathered through informal conversations and observations within the communities.

The analysis of these data was structured around the four main purposes for the evaluation.

1. **The process undertaken to develop Foundations for Success to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**

   The Foundations for Success guidelines are an excellent example of how to undertake the development of curricula for young children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There were extensive attempts by the Foundations for Success team to involve all stakeholders in the development of the program. The components of this involvement — community consultation and collaboration; access to professional support teachers; an engaged reference group; regular professional development meetings; and
ongoing engagement of educational leaders — show a sensitivity to the complexity of the endeavour and to the community processes integral to its success.

2. The extent to which the **Foundations for Success** guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

*Foundations for Success* supported educators in the six evaluation sites in their early learning programs. There is clear evidence that, through its underlying principles, planned learning approaches, pedagogical approaches and process of documenting and reflecting, *Foundations for Success* has facilitated much exciting, meaningful and innovative learning among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, pre-Prep educators, parents and other community members. The changing political and practice landscape in early childhood education in Queensland and Australia means that *Foundations for Success* pre-dates, and does not specifically reflect the structure of, two mandatory documents related to practice in pre-Prep, and will need to be revised in the future to do this. However, the key features of the program need to be retained.

3. The enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school

The enabling conditions and pedagogies identified as key to the successful implementation of the *Foundations for Success* guidelines are:

**Enabling conditions that link pre-Prep, families and community**

- Community determination of the scheduling of pre-Prep classes
- Flexibility in determining the location of pre-Prep classes
- Strong links between pre-Prep and community
- Centrality of Home Language and Standard Australian English in pre-Prep

**Enabling conditions concerning educational leadership**

- Leadership that is committed to the philosophy of pre-Prep and the *Foundations for Success* guidelines

**Enabling conditions concerning teacher preparation and professional development**

- Incorporation of knowledge and understanding of pre-Prep into initial teacher education
- Culturally and professionally appropriate teacher education for Indigenous teachers from the communities
- Ongoing professional development for all involved in pre-Prep

**Enabling conditions that are systemic**

- Opportunities for multi-age settings that involve pre-Prep and Prep children in meaningful and sustained interaction
Commitment to consistent and appropriate staffing of pre-Prep classes
Provision of appropriate buildings and other physical resources
Promotion of successful transition from pre-Prep to Prep
Strong and explicit connections between the Foundations for Success guidelines and other state and national curriculum guidelines or frameworks
Explicit valuing of Indigenous knowledges and the holders of those knowledges

4. The major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of Foundations for Success

The Foundations for Success guidelines have contributed to the enhancement of outcomes for children, particularly around literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development. The program has increased educators’ levels of understanding about the issues involved in pre-Prep education for Indigenous children. Levels of community engagement with the pre-Prep program varied across the evaluation sites. There were some misgivings about how the apparent advances related to a program informed by Foundations for Success might be sustained into primary school.

Key findings

- The overall Foundations for Success program is an excellent example of how to develop curricula for young children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Families, communities and educational staff need to be convinced of the importance of pre-Prep for the current and future education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children if it is to be effective.
- The development of the Foundations for Success guidelines is ongoing. In particular, it needs to be brought into alignment with the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline, while maintaining its current integrity and focus.
- Foundations for Success has facilitated exciting, meaningful and innovative learning in the communities in which the evaluation was undertaken.
- The extent to which Foundations for Success can support teachers in their work with pre-Prep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities depends on the levels of fidelity with which the program is adopted, as well as the knowledge, experience and skills of the teachers involved.
- Positive, respectful links among pre-Prep teachers, families and communities facilitate joint decisions around the implementation and valuing of pre-Prep education.
• The honouring and celebration of both Home Language and Standard Australian English is not only educationally sound, but is the single most important defining feature of a program informed by *Foundations for Success*.

• Educational leadership that is committed to the philosophy of pre-Prep in general, and the *Foundations for Success* guidelines in particular, is necessary, if not sufficient, for the success of the program.

• Teachers who are to implement the *Foundations for Success* guidelines need to be taught how to do this through initial teacher education and ongoing professional development.

• Given the importance of local cultural, community and language knowledge to the implementation of *Foundations for Success*, it is critical that local Indigenous staff’s expertise be recognised in terms of access and progress through teacher education, remuneration, and other aspects that will facilitate their continued employment in pre-Prep classrooms.

• The provision of new or refurbished pre-Prep buildings and adequate teaching resources facilitated the successful implementation of the program.

• There are some challenges around how a program informed by the *Foundations for Success* guidelines is perceived in terms of the transition to school of the pre-Prep children. These challenges require the collaboration of pre-Prep and Prep teachers, as well as the leadership in the settings.

• Successful implementation of *Foundations for Success* relies on the availability of people who can access Indigenous knowledges relevant to the local community. These knowledges and the holders of these knowledges must be valued explicitly.

• In the opinion of teachers in the evaluation sites, participation in a program informed by *Foundations for Success* has had positive benefits in terms of children’s literacy, numeracy and social development outcomes.

• Continuity of curriculum and pedagogy across the transition to school was of concern to many pre-Prep teachers.

**Overall summary of the evaluation**

The evaluation study in the six sites visited during 2009–10 has shown that pre-Prep programs informed by the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have the potential to be successful in Cape York and Torres Strait Islander communities. While the levels of successful implementation in the six evaluation sites varied, there was sufficient success in enough sites to show that the approach can work. Further, the evaluation has identified a number of enabling conditions that will facilitate the continued successful delivery of the program.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In May 2005, the Queensland Government released the Bound for Success: Cape York and Torres Strait Education Discussion Paper. It was designed to stimulate discussion about how to improve the educational achievement of Indigenous students in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands to ensure that:

- as many children as possible engage in early education and go into the Prep Year and Year 1
- all students receive grounding in the basics so that as many students as possible progress, first to secondary schooling and then on to senior study
- as many students as possible complete Year 12 or its equivalent, and then successfully go on to take up opportunities for further education and training or employment (Department of Education and Training, 2006, p. 3).

A consultation process followed, and separate Bound for Success strategies were released for Cape York and for the Torres Strait Islands.

1.2 Foundations for Success – guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities

Among many other initiatives, the Bound for Success Education Strategy for Cape York and Torres Strait Island communities articulated the government’s commitment to the provision of a high quality, consistent pre-Prep program in 29 Cape York and the Torres Strait, and six other Aboriginal communities in Queensland. This commitment included the development of ‘a new pre-Prep learning program developed by teachers and educational experts’ (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2006, p. 20).

Early education is not new in Indigenous communities in Queensland. Since the early 1980s, education for children two years prior to Year 1 of school has been provided in many Indigenous communities. However, the introduction of the Preparatory Year in schools in 2007 required a reconsideration of the pre-Prep year, and the need for the development of appropriate curriculum guidelines. As well, there was a clear need for enhanced buildings, resources and professional learning for staff to facilitate the delivery of this curriculum.

The pre-Prep program arising from the Bound for Success initiative targets 3½ to 4½ year old children across the 35 communities. The non-compulsory, sessional early learning program is delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher and at least one full-time teacher assistant. The delivery is occurring in a range of settings, including school-based settings,

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1 In reporting data throughout this report, I have chosen to use the term Indigenous rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. I have also chosen to designate all teachers, professional support teachers, principals or directors as teachers. The reason for these choices is to protect the anonymity of sites and people in those sites.
(either stand alone or as part of a composite class), within a licensed childcare centre, and through C&K community kindergartens.

The curriculum for the pre-Prep program has been designed to provide a quality early childhood program specifically focused on the needs of these communities. This program is documented in *Foundations for Success: Guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Communities* (Department of Education Training and the Arts (DETA), 2008). This is a significant curriculum framework for many reasons, as shall be borne out in this report. However, from a timing perspective, it has national significance since it pre-dates, and has clearly influenced, both the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWR), 2009a) and the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) sponsored *Draft Indigenous Early Childhood Framework*, which was subsumed by the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.

Some $47.5 million has been provided by the Queensland Government over the four years from 2006 to 2010 to enhance pre-Prep programs within these 35 communities. Much of this was allocated to new or refurbished buildings, facilities and equipment.

The sites in which the *Foundations for Success* initiative is being implemented are shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Foundations for Success sites](image-url)
1.3 Recognition

*Foundations for Success* has been awarded many accolades, but there are two public awards that should be mentioned here briefly in order to illustrate the recognised importance of the program.

1.3.1 Premier’s Award: Smart Category

*Foundations for Success* won this award in 2009 in recognition of its contribution to high quality early education. This award recognised the work of the team leading the project and that of the educators and community members in the 35 Indigenous communities in which it operates.

1.3.2 Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management International Innovation Awards

*Foundations for Success* was elected as one of 12 finalists from over 150 submissions for this award, which culminated with the award announcement ceremony in Malta in October, 2010. While *Foundations for Success* did not win the ultimate award, its recognition as a finalist in such a prestigious international forum is very commendable.
Chapter 2: Evaluation of the implementation of Foundations for Success

2.1 Overall purpose

The overall purpose of the evaluation study was to undertake research to evaluate and report on:

- the process undertaken to develop Foundations for Success to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- the extent to which the Foundations for Success guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- the enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school

- the major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of Foundations for Success.

The evaluation project needed to take into consideration the concurrent work being undertaken at the Commonwealth level leading to the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009a), the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (DEEWR, 2009b) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2011).

It was proposed that the evaluation project be conducted in three phases, each of which would inform the direction of the subsequent phases of the project.

The indicative timeframe for each phase of the research project was:

*Phase 1*: January 2009 – March 2009

*Phase 2*: April 2009 – December 2009

*Phase 3*: January 2010 – December 2010

2.2 Methodology

The overall methodology adopted in this study was one of the evaluator honouring the cultural and professional knowledge and traditions of the communities, educational settings, educators, families and children in each of the sites chosen by DETA for the evaluation. Before the evaluation could commence, six sites were negotiated and key liaison people identified by DETA. Given that the evaluator was a non-Indigenous person who had never been to any of these sites, some initial work needed to be done by DETA officers to
ensure that he would be able to make the first introductory visit under the auspices of an agreement for the site to be involved in the evaluation. (While it was clear in each site that the project was evaluating *Foundations for Success*, not the site or its programs, it is possible that there was some doubt that might have impacted on the openness of people in the sites.)

In each of the phases of the study, the focus was on specific aspects of the overall evaluation, culminating in a comprehensive view about the impact of *Foundations for Success*. In summary, the phases contributed to the study as follows.

**Phase 1** had as its major foci:

1. collection of baseline data in each of the six sites
2. documentation and analysis of enabling conditions and processes for the development of early childhood education and care curricula in the communities
3. entry into the participating communities in such a way that respectful medium-term relationships could be built to allow the continuation of the project for a period of two years.

The foci for **Phase 2** of the project were:

1. the identification of the extent to which the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
2. the identification of the enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school.

The foci of **Phase 3** were:

1. to determine the major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of *Foundations for Success*
2. to report findings to project participants and communities
3. to exit the sites appropriately.

Four visits by the evaluator to each of the six sites were proposed — two in each of 2009 and 2010. Each of these visits was considered to have different purposes.

**Visit 1:** Entry to the site; orientation of evaluator to the site; introductions to educators, families, community leaders and community members; invitation to return to each community.

**Visit 2:** Initial data generation around each of the research purposes; being seen in the community; invitation to return to each community.

**Visit 3:** Continued data generation around each of the research purposes; visibility within the community; invitation to return to the community.
Visit 4: Reporting on tentative evaluation findings to the communities where possible, families and educators; acknowledgment of assistance from all involved; exit from site.

Visit 1 occurred during Phase 1 of the project, Visit 2 during Phase 2 and Visits 3 and 4 during Phase 3.

During these site visits, data were generated through informal conversations with individuals or groups of educators, community members and family members. As well, time was spent playing and talking with children, attending the settings and observing in their classrooms. Wherever possible, the evaluator spent time in the community, both to be seen and to observe. Many casual conversations, that have not been used in terms of data for the evaluation, but which have been invaluable in helping the evaluator begin to understand the community, were held in shops, with local artists, and with people met while walking the streets of the communities. The methodological approach of being willing to talk with anyone who was willing to talk with the evaluator paid handsome dividends.

Data were also generated through the study of documents, including educators’ plans and programs, setting plans and reports, and local media.

All conversations were, with the permission of those involved, audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were then coded using the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), entered into NVivo, and analysed within this environment in order to address each of the research purposes.

2.3 Ethical considerations

Approval to conduct this evaluation study was obtained through the Charles Sturt University Human Ethics Committee and the Education Queensland Strategic Research Division. Information statements were given and explained to all participants and signed consent forms obtained as required.

Great care was taken to learn and adhere to the cultural and professional protocols in place in each community. The advice of local community members and local liaison people at each of the settings was critical in the ethical conduct of the study.

2.4 Evaluation sites

As has been agreed with the reference group, the evaluation sites participating in this project will not be named in this report. However, it may be that, given the small number of sites in the project, some sites are recognisable from their descriptions.

2.4.1 Site 1

The pre-Prep class at this site is housed in a preschool and childcare centre situated next to a Prep to Year 10 school. While the centre is officially part of the school, it is managed on a day-to-day basis by the non-teaching director.

At the time of Visit 1, pre-Prep children attended the centre on a full-day basis, five days per week. There were 24 children enrolled in the pre-Prep class. There have been variations to this pattern of offering during the evaluation years in order to try to link funding more closely to provision. For example, during Term 3, 2009, there was an attempt to institute a morning and an afternoon class catering for different children. While this seemed to work in at least one of the other sites (Site 3), it had the effect of a reduction in attendance at this
site. By the time of Visit 2, numbers had not recovered fully, even though the original five days per week basis for the program had been reinstated. The 2009 teacher was a non-Indigenous female early childhood graduate with experience teaching in NSW and southern Queensland schools before coming to the community. 2009 was her second year in the community. In 2008, she taught the Prep class in the school. This teacher left the site at the end of 2009 to take up a teaching position in south-eastern Queensland.

In 2010, a new, recently graduated, non-Indigenous female teacher worked with the pre-Prep children. Pre-Prep sessions were run for three hours each of five mornings. The teacher then moved to the school in the afternoons to work as a support teacher in the early years of school. Although 24 children were enrolled in the pre-Prep class, there were rarely more than 15 children in attendance.

At the time of Visit 1, there were two Indigenous teaching assistants in the pre-Prep class, one female and the other male. The number of teaching assistants had increased by the time of Visit 2, with the addition of another female assistant. At the time of Visit 3, there were four local Aboriginal teaching assistants employed and attending most pre-Prep sessions. However, by the time of Visit 4, this number had been substantially reduced and attendance was less regular. All the assistants were from the local community and spoke the traditional language of the community, an English creole and Standard Australian English (SAE).

Data were generated through structured conversations with the pre-Prep teachers, and informal discussions with the centre director, the teaching assistants and a small number of community members. Further data were drawn from observations in the pre-Prep class and in the community. Language challenges (for the evaluator) meant that few data were gathered directly from the children.

2.4.2 Site 2

The pre-Prep centre at this site is housed in a building situated in the centre of the community. It is governed under the auspices of the Prep to Year 7 school, even though it is physically separated from the school by about 1 kilometre. The pre-Prep teachers have roles in the school and broader system as well as in the pre-Prep centre.

During 2009, pre-Prep children on this site attended on a full-day basis for half of the week. Pre-Prep teacher A led one group of children from Monday to Wednesday morning, and pre-Prep teacher B led another group of children from Wednesday afternoon to Friday. There were approximately 20 children enrolled in each of the pre-Prep classes. Both teachers were non-Indigenous females. Teacher A was very experienced and has acted as a professional support teacher during the development and implementation of Foundations for Success. She was into her third year of teaching at this site. Teacher B was less experienced and was in her second year at Site 2. Teacher B left the site at the end of the 2009 school year to teach in Brisbane.

In 2010, Teacher A taught both groups of children using the same format as in 2009. At the end of Term 2, 2010, Teacher A left the site for a period of maternity leave. From the beginning of Term 3, a male non-Indigenous teacher was re-appointed to the pre-Prep class (he had taught at this same site during the initial trials of Foundations for Success).

One teaching assistant has worked across both groups of children and with the various teachers for the whole period of the evaluation study. She has lived in the community for
most of her life. The Home Language of most of the children is a creole, with very few people (the pre-Prep teaching assistant is one) capable of speaking the traditional language.

During the entire evaluation period, plans for the current pre-Prep centre to be replaced with a new, purpose-built centre were mooted. However, by Visit 4, negotiations were still continuing about where the new centre would be situated.

Data were generated through structured conversations with all of the pre-Prep teachers and the teaching assistant. Further data were drawn from conversations with the school principal, the Prep teachers, both structured and informal conversations with community leaders and other community members, and observations and discussions with the children in the pre-Prep classes.

2.4.3 Site 3

This site has a new, purpose-built pre-Prep building on the same site as the Prep to Year 7 school. The principal of the school is responsible for the pre-Prep centre, and the three staff at the centre are full members of the school staff. There was a change of principal between 2009 and 2010.

The pre-Prep caters for a maximum of 24 students in the morning and another 24 in the afternoon. Both groups attend the centre five days per week. In the morning, most of the children are brought to the centre and collected by family members or, sometimes, older siblings from the school. The afternoon group of children generally arrive at pre-Prep from the childcare centre that is situated across the road. The childcare educators bring the children to the centre and collect them at the end of the session.

Pre-Prep is staffed by three female Indigenous staff members, all of whom were born and have lived in the local town for most of their lives. All three know the community well and have worked in the kindy for many years prior to the establishment of the pre-Prep centre.

The Home Language of most of the children is called Aboriginal English, but is a specific creole used by people from the region. All of the pre-Prep staff have this creole as their own Home Language, and they use it both with the children and among themselves whenever appropriate. SAE is also used when appropriate.

Data were generated through structured conversations with the pre-Prep teacher and the two teaching assistants; the school principals and the Head of Early Childhood in the school. Informal conversations were held with community members, both at the pre-Prep and in other venues within the community. Informal conversations were held with children as they played at pre-Prep. Further data were drawn from observations in the pre-Prep class, the school and the community. Data from this site were gathered on only three occasions, as the three pre-Prep educators were all ill and therefore absent from the site when the researcher undertook Visit 3.

2.4.4 Site 4

At the time of Visit 1, the pre-Prep classes at this site were situated on the school site in adapted school classrooms. The building that had housed the previous kindy was about to be refurbished as the pre-Prep centre. The school is Prep to Year 10, and has about 350 students, including the pre-Preps. There was a straight pre-Prep class which was housed
temporarily in a home economics classroom, and a pre-Prep/Prep class in another standard classroom. There were 22 pre-Prep children enrolled at this site. The children could come to the pre-Prep classes for five full days per week.

By the time of Visit 2, refurbishments to the previous kindy building to create the pre-Prep centre were almost complete, but falls in attendance meant that there were only sufficient pre-Prep children for the straight class to continue. Attendance on the day of Visit 2 was 10. Based on a census of the town, it was anticipated that, in 2010, there would be approximately 60 children eligible for pre-Prep.

Since Visit 1, there had been substantial staffing changes in pre-Prep. At the beginning of Term 3, 2009, the pre-Prep/Prep teacher became a non-teaching member of the school executive, the Prep teacher was moved to a Grade 4 class, and all the pre-Prep children were placed in one class, which was assigned the early childhood-trained school art teacher. There was a pre-Prep teaching assistant, but she was not available on the day of Visit 2 due to a funeral in the community.

Visit 3 saw the refurbishment of the pre-Prep building completed and two early childhood trained teachers teaching separate pre-Prep classes, one for five mornings, and the other for five afternoons each week. One of these teachers was the pre-Prep teacher from Visit 2, and the other was a graduate teacher new to the school. During this visit, a local Indigenous teaching assistant was also present. The combined enrolment for the two pre-Prep classes was around 28, many less than the 60 that had been predicted.

By the time Visit 4 was undertaken, the newly graduated pre-Prep teacher had left the school, attendance in pre-Prep had dropped dramatically to the extent that there was now only one class. On the day of Visit 4, attendance in the pre-Prep group was less than 10.

Traditional language has been all but lost in this community. Aboriginal English is the most common Home Language of the pre-Prep children. All of the pre-Prep teachers could understand much of the children’s language, but could not speak with them in their language. They all used SAE when interacting with the children.

Data were generated through conversations with all the pre-Prep teachers, the former pre-Prep/Prep teacher and the former pre-Prep teacher. A meeting with three community members (pre-Prep parents), conversations with the school Community Liaison Officer who is an Elder in the community, and semi-structured interviews with the school principal, deputy principal and curriculum coordinator were included in the data collection on this site. Other than very brief ‘in-passing’ conversations, it was not possible to talk with the pre-Prep teaching assistants. Further data were drawn from informal conversations with other teachers in the school, and observations in the pre-Prep class and the community.

2.4.5 Site 5

This site is based in a community preschool setting and is not attached to a school. The preschool consists of three classes — one for children under 3.5 years, a pre-Prep class catering for children 3.5 to 4.5 years, and a pre-Prep/Prep class catering for children aged 4.5 to 5.5 years. At the time of Visit 1, there were 67 children enrolled over these three
classes. Across the 2009–10 period, enrolment at the preschool increased. More and more Indigenous people, including a number from the nearby town, brought their children to the preschool.

Each class was staffed by an early childhood trained teacher and a teaching assistant. All staff were female. In 2009, all but the teacher in the pre-Prep room were Indigenous. This non-Indigenous teacher left the site at the end of 2009, and was replaced by an Indigenous teacher. All of the Indigenous staff have lived for many years in the village in which the preschool is situated, or in a nearby town. Many of them are Torres Strait Islanders, while others are local Aboriginal people. Some of the staff grew up in the village. As a consequence, there is a great deal of ‘local’ knowledge among the staff of the setting. All classes are housed in purpose-built preschool rooms which were refurbished during 2009–10. There is also a Parents as Learners Centre housed within the complex.

In this community, the local traditional languages have been lost for the most part, and the most common Home Language is an Aboriginal English creole. Some of the staff know some traditional language, and efforts have been made in the centre, including the naming of classes, to use local traditional language.

Data were generated through structured conversations with all teachers (including the centre director) and teaching assistants. As well, a conversation was held with a previous director of the centre, who currently works for Queensland TAFE. During two visits, the researcher was also able to speak with the head of the junior school to which children from the project site transition, either as Prep or Grade 1 students. Further data were drawn from observations in the pre-Prep class, the pre-Prep/Prep class, and in the community (including attendance at the community NAIDOC celebrations).

2.4.6 Site 6

This pre-Prep site is in a small school on a Torres Strait island. There are three classes in the pre-Prep to Year 7 school. At the time of Visit 1, the pre-Prep children were housed in a double school classroom with Prep and Year 1 children. Altogether, 25 of the 42 children in the school were in this combined double classroom, with an Indigenous teacher and two Indigenous teaching assistants.

All of the staff in the pre-Prep/Prep/Year 1 classroom are local people. All are female. The teacher has 19 years of early childhood teaching experience, mainly in this school. One of the teaching assistants was trained as a community preschool teacher in 1973 and, after six months in a mainland Aboriginal community, returned to work in the preschool. She has been there, off and on, ever since. The other teaching assistant is a younger high school graduate who had only started in her position 2 weeks before Visit 1. All of the staff working in the pre-Prep context were seen as full members of the school staff.

The day before Visit 1 to this site, sod was turned for the construction of a dedicated pre-Prep building on the school grounds. This building was completed by the time Visit 2 was scheduled in late 2009. However, because of some family crises for the pre-Prep teacher, Visit 2 was not undertaken. Telephone conversations with the pre-Prep teacher at this time indicated that the move into the new building had been achieved successfully, and that the building was contributing positively to the pre-Prep program.

In 2010, 22 pre-Prep/Prep children (12 pre-Preps) were enrolled at the school and attended class five days a week in the new pre-Prep building. At the time of Visit 3, the same local
teacher and the younger teaching assistant from Visit 1 worked with the children five days a week. The pre-Prep children stayed in the class for three hours each day, while the Preps remained at school for the whole of each day. The teaching assistant only worked while the pre-Prep children were present. Late in 2010, another teaching assistant had been employed for the pre-Prep/Prep class, meaning that there were two assistants available while the pre-Prep children were present, and one while the Prep children only were in attendance.

The traditional language on this island has all but disappeared. The Home Language for most of the children and the school staff is Torres Strait creole. However, the pre-Prep/Prep teacher does make continuous efforts to ensure that the traditional language is used. Thus, in many aspects, this is a functioning trilingual classroom for both the pre-Prep and Prep children.

Data were generated through structured conversations with the pre-Prep teacher, all three teaching assistants and the school principal. As well, conversations with parents of pre-Prep children were held during Visits 3 and 4. Further data were drawn from attendance at a staff meeting, observations in the pre-Prep/Prep/Year 1 class (in 2009) and pre-Prep/Prep class (in 2010), and in the community.

2.5 Schedule of visits

Each of the sites was scheduled to be visited on four occasions. The dates of actual visits are contained in Table 1.

Table 1. Schedule of site visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site number</th>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 2</th>
<th>Visit 3</th>
<th>Visit 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31 March 2009</td>
<td>22–23 October 2009</td>
<td>15 March 2010</td>
<td>5–6 August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 April 2009</td>
<td>25–26 October 2009</td>
<td>22–23 March 2010</td>
<td>18–19 August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 May 2009</td>
<td>26 November 2009</td>
<td>25 March 2010</td>
<td>15 June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(No pre-Prep staff available)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 April 2009</td>
<td>23 November 2009</td>
<td>11 March 2010</td>
<td>17 June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7–8 April 2009</td>
<td>No visit</td>
<td>19 March 2010</td>
<td>17 August 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of different people consulted in this evaluation varied from site to site, largely on the basis of availability and transience. However, in total, the number of audio-recorded conversations enjoyed with educators, parents, and other family and community members in each site provides some idea of the scope of the data generation exercise undertaken in this study.

Table 2. Total number of audio-recorded conversations per site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site number</th>
<th>Educators</th>
<th>Parents, family, community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TRIM Nos: 11/267528  19
As well as these audio-recorded conversations at each site, many unrecorded conversations were held, particularly with community members who did not agree to have their conversation recorded, or where the circumstances of the conversation did not allow recording.

There was a number of informal unrecorded discussions with educators at the three professional development meetings held in Cairns during 2009 and 2010. As well, the professional support teachers and the project manager made themselves available at various stages of the evaluation for both recorded and unrecorded conversations.
Chapter 3: Data and analysis

3.1 Overall purpose

The overall purpose of the evaluation study was to report on:

- the process undertaken to develop *Foundations for Success* to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the extent to which the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school
- the major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of *Foundations for Success*.

Data generated in the study resulted in the production of transcripts of conversations. Using a researcher-developed coding frame, each of these transcripts was coded by at least two people, with the evaluator providing the casting opinion on any coding where there was disagreement, based on the experience of having been a part of the conversation. These coded transcripts were entered into an NVivo database, and analysed according to categories relevant to each of the research purposes.

Two progress reports were prepared during the project. These reports were completed after of Phases 1 and 2 of the project, and addressed the particular aspects of each of these phases. In this Final Report, relevant data from these two progress reports are included in order to provide an overall evaluation.

Data and analysis are presented in this report according to the four major research questions for the project.

3.2 The process undertaken to develop *Foundations for Success* to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The process involved in developing the *Foundations for Success* program required the establishment of a centrally based, but broadly advised writing team within the Curriculum Division of the then Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA). The writing team members had experience and expertise in early childhood education, Indigenous education and curriculum development, as well as in policy development and implementation in these areas. Team members undertook thorough research into these
areas through extensive reading of the extant literature and a comprehensive series of visits to the proposed program sites. During these visits, consultations were held with Elders, leading community members, parents of young children and educators about the proposed program, the educational needs for young children within the communities, and other matters pertaining to the program, such as equipment and building requirements.

The writing team continued to consult with community members and community-based educators during the development of the various drafts of the program, while other DETA officers ensured that the necessary changes to legislation, regulations, policies and procedures were in place for the initial implementation of the program from mid-2008. The reference group, of which the evaluator was a member, met on several occasions to consider drafts of the *Foundations for Success* document, and to offer comment concerning its content and approach, as well as the process of development being undertaken. From the evaluator’s perspective, reinforced through discussions with several other members of the reference group, the processes adopted in relation to the group were very satisfactory, with open communication being the norm and with the advice given being considered and acted on in a most appropriate fashion.

In the sites that were a part of the evaluation, there was evidence of genuine appreciation from educators and community members for the developmental approaches and processes used in the program. In some cases, the very act of visiting the community and seeking advice from all stakeholders was seen as highly important, not only in terms of genuine consultation with the community, but also in terms of the raising of the esteem within the community of the pre-Prep year and the educators involved with it.

There were some significant impacts as a result of the particular processes used in the development of *Foundations for Success*. At one site, a non-Indigenous teacher outlined how important the development of *Foundations for Success* was for the professional development and the community esteem of the Indigenous pre-Prep teacher and her Indigenous teaching assistants.

> It was great for her personally to be able to acknowledge the good work she’s done because she doesn’t big note herself out there, she’s very quiet. And people know that she’s a quiet achiever, but it’s still nice I reckon to put it out there. And the fact that the consultation around the whole pre-Prep rollout was so good. They listened a lot to her and so forth when they came up for the building design. The opportunity she had to feed into the document, trial things, feedback. [The professional support teacher] facilitated a lot of that, but that was very valued by [our pre-Prep educators] and I think by our community. The fact that people were listening to what she had to say, she was able to put that in and then things might actually change in the book. It wasn’t ‘Here, this is it, we know it all’ type thing. It was a work in progress and could still well be, in the morphing of it. So I think as far as the community went that was a really good thing. And you know, the people that came up went and saw Council and said ‘We’re going to do this and we just want to let you know’ and there was a lot of really good protocol went on around the document. Before they really got to the document, but then that just set it up for the document to be much more valued. And people could see that it wasn’t just a new building for the same old program, that there was an expectation that this is a very important part of these little children’s learning. And we’ve got a way to go in the community I guess, to get everyone probably up to that same head space … So for us it’s good because we can really go forth and argue about the importance of early years, whether it be facilities like that or with health and screenings and things. So I think that that whole profile was lifted and it’s lifted [our pre-Prep educators] and it’s like ‘Wow’, we really can have input …
To go away to Cairns and be asked to present stuff and to be seen as some best practice or leaders in their field was just a real mind shift for them ... 

It was sort of a really scaffolded springboard for her to reflect on what she does, can she do it differently, can she have higher expectations, is it OK to have higher expectations, how would she go about these things? And that’s where [the professional support teacher] has been fantastic. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The role of the professional support teachers in the development of the program must not be underestimated. While some were members of the reference group and had input to the Foundations for Success curriculum document, their greatest value was seen in their interactions with the pre-Prep educators and community members. In many ways, the professional support teachers were seen as the local representatives in the Foundations for Success team, and were integral to the program’s acceptance at each of the sites involved. From a practical point of view, the professional support teachers assisted the educators in the implementation of all aspects of the program, particularly the curriculum framework, design and establishment of new buildings, equipment purchase and management, and community engagement. They were also important in ensuring that a large proportion of the early childhood educators from each site attended the professional development meetings held by the program team. These meetings helped establish the extended Foundations for Success team, and built important relationships within and across site teams. As well, they were efficient and effective in establishing a beginning knowledge base around the program, which could then be extended by the professional support teachers through site visits and various technological mechanisms such as the Blackboard.

The Foundations for Success team made genuine efforts to involve the educational leaders of each of the sites in the development and implementation of the program. Consultations were held, the leaders were invited to professional development meetings, and they met with the professional support teachers during site visits. The importance of leadership on educational outcomes in schools is well recognised (Levin, 2006; Penlington & Kington, 2007), although there is less consensus around the role and importance of leadership in early childhood settings (Hard, 2006). In some evaluation sites where committed leadership has driven the development and implementation of Foundations for Success, the importance of this leadership is evident. In sites where other priorities have meant that the school education leaders have, to a large extent, left pre-Prep mostly to its own devices, the success of the program has rested on the personal and professional strengths of the early childhood educators involved. The evidence from these sites suggests that the project team’s efforts to involve the educational leaders from the planning phases were well-founded, although some of the implementation results are quite ‘uneven’.

In summary, there were extensive attempts by the Foundations for Success team to involve all stakeholders in the development of the program. The components of this involvement — particularly community consultation and collaboration, access to professional support teachers, an engaged reference group, regular professional development meetings and ongoing engagement of educational leaders — show sensitivity to the complexity of the endeavour and to the community processes integral to its success. Coupled with the expertise of the Foundations for Success team, it seems that there was little more that could be done to ensure successful development and implementation. It is not a coincidence that
there are echoes of the approach taken in this project — and, indeed, in the final documentation — in the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009a).

While the components of the process involved in the development of *Foundations for Success* are judged to be most appropriate, this is not to say that they have been universally successful in all of the evaluation sites. Rather, their impact has been mediated by many circumstances, including the nature of the communities involved, the strength, direction and particular qualities of the educational leadership in each of the communities, and the particular qualities of the pre-Prep educators who are implementing the programs. These impacts will be explored further in relation to subsequent research purposes.

### 3.3 The extent to which the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

All participants in this evaluation have indicated that the *Foundations for Success* curriculum guidelines have been of great benefit to them in planning, implementing and reflecting on their early learning programs for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their settings. This has been a consistent message that has strengthened as the evaluation has progressed.

The extent of practice fidelity (O’Donnell, 2008; Tyack & Cuban, 1997) in the implementation of *Foundations for Success* varies from site to site. Some of the reasons for this are explored further in the following section concerning enabling conditions. However, in this section, the emphasis is generally on the successful implementation of the program.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have supported pre-Prep teachers to undertake all of the tasks specified. Even in the site that claims not to be engaged exclusively with *Foundations for Success*, there is evidence that the key messages are being heard and enacted.

Evidence in this section has been organised under the five learning areas and four pedagogical approaches in the guidelines.

The *Foundations for Success* early learning framework is designed to guide the learning and teaching that takes place in pre-Prep.

> Central to the framework is the child, their family and community and the knowledges, languages, ideas and ways of learning that each brings as participants in an early learning program. It is dynamic and aligns:

- the planned learning (what is valued as important for children to learn)
- the pedagogical approaches applied to engage the participation of children, families and community in the planned learning
- the process of documenting and reflecting on the learning that evolves as a result of their participation, to inform new planned learning (DETA, 2008, p. 11).

Consistent evidence across the four visits to the evaluation sites is that all three of these components have been, or at least can be, beneficial for all stakeholders in pre-Prep education.
3.3.1 Planned learning

The key focus in this component of the framework is that of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children acquiring the understandings, capabilities and attitudes they need for success in future learning’ (DETA, 2008, p. 12). Five learning areas are described in Foundations for Success and reported here.

Being proud and strong

Foundations for Success lists the following components of this learning area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are:

- developing pride in personal and cultural identities
- sharing a sense of belonging, connectedness and wellbeing
- developing confidence in themselves as knowers and learners
- becoming socially, emotionally and spiritually resilient (DETA, 2008, p. 12).

The importance of celebrating and developing pride in children’s personal and cultural identities is a critical component of this learning area. The need for a sense of belonging for all was emphasised by many participants. The place of language in these identities is well recognised and was clearly supported at all of the sites visited. Often this would be in the form of language markers displayed in the room.

Interestingly, even at sites where traditional language was spoken by very few of the community, the traditional words were displayed, rather than words from the contemporary creole. However, the creole was used with and by children, Indigenous staff and community members. With one or two exceptions, creoles or traditional languages were only used sparingly by non-Indigenous staff in conversations with children, Indigenous staff or community members. The sense that Home Languages were encouraged in the pre-Prep settings was of particular relevance to Indigenous educators, who often had experienced quite the opposite in their own education.

Those parents who did come up to the door and they can hear the young kids say our traditional language greeting and it makes the parents feel really good about us. We didn’t have that in our time ... But now little people are saying that in school, it’s great.

In my days when we went to school our language was totally banned. You cannot speak your traditional language or even talk in creole. You had to try to speak in English. [Indigenous teacher]

Language was seen as a key anchor for cultural identity, and Foundations for Success was praised for its emphasis on valuing Home Languages as well as SAE.

There were numerous approaches taken to encourage children’s feelings of belonging, connectedness and wellbeing. In one site, photos of each child with their family were displayed at the table used for registering the attendance of the children each day. This meant that the child and family could recognise themselves as an integral part of the pre-Prep setting every time they entered the building.
Another way in which children and their families could be part of the pre-Prep environment was through the extensive use of children’s portfolios. While these were more developed at some sites than others, they did provide a chance for interactions between the site and the families through recording the child’s interests and learning.

All educators in the evaluation sites were intent on developing the individual strengths of their children, even though the children sometimes faced many challenges in the environments in which they live. All of the Indigenous educators who spoke with me praised their communities and the progress that was being made in them. While it was clear that they understood the challenges faced by their communities, they saw the way forward was to build positive identities in their children and to assist them to grow ‘proud and strong’. For the most part, the same was true of the non-Indigenous educators, although there was more of a tendency to see the challenges facing the children and their communities as sometimes insurmountable or, at best, long term. One non-Indigenous teacher summed up her feelings about children being proud and strong in the following way.

So in terms of being proud and strong, there are two different areas. One is drawing on their past, on [site name], on who they are. And the other one is looking forward, to how are we going to use that and how am I going to help to educate them in the matters outside [site name] so that they can then deal with that and succeed. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

One aspect which did not emerge until later evaluation visits — perhaps because of the need for firmer relationships to have been built before this sensitive issue could be broached — is pertinent to this section. There appears to be a noticeable difference between the ways many non-Indigenous educators and many Indigenous educators perceive ‘being proud and strong’. Some examples will illustrate the point.

How do we let it flavour in a really positive way? Where can we make the opportunities in all of our learning and talk it up and let the children really celebrate it and promote it and be proud. Like, I’ve seen those little fellas, when we opened the kindy they got out and did their corroboree and you could just see that they were just really glowing in it. So, I think that’s big for us because the impact of that goes all the way. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Bringing on the knowledges that come before and linking that to pre-Prep ... Trying to go to that deeper level and so, for examples, the totems that we are doing at the moment, those posters. I’ve never done anything like that before and that’s been such a special learning experience for myself but for the children and the families as well. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The impression I got from my first assistant was that she agreed that we needed to strengthen the culture and that her family were the only ones that sort of knew the language. She couldn’t teach the children the language because she didn’t quite know it and she didn’t feel confident to suggest anything. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Next term I’m hoping to do more with the being proud and strong by inviting people in to sing songs and do dancing and traditional things like that. I just haven’t been able to do it this term ... Of course, letting them talk to me in [traditional language] and listening to them, trying to respond and just encouraging them to use their language [is about being proud and strong]. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

It’s about a way of being. Rather than something added on. Yeah, and it’s just there, you know. [Two Indigenous teachers]
I know who I am and for these kids I think they know that too ... When you go somewhere, even if you go to Cairns or Townsville and you come across Indigenous people and they look at you and just looking at you they say ‘Oh, are you from this place?’, ‘Are you from XXX or are you from YYY?’ Just looking at you they can identify a resemblance ... And I suppose, like I said, if I know who I am I’m happy with that and I’m proud and strong. I know in my culture even if I don’t have things in my home. [Indigenous teacher]

When you tell a white teacher ‘OK, how are you going to get the kids to develop pride in personal cultural identities?’, bang, bring out the tokenistic black stuff: the island dresses, the dhari, the Aboriginal songs and music and all that. Culture doesn’t have to be that. What about the culture of fishing or the culture of just sitting down and yarning with people? [Indigenous teacher]

In summary, many non-Indigenous educators tend to see ‘being proud and strong’ as connected to language, visual stimulus and cultural content, while many Indigenous educators tend to see ‘being proud and strong’ as active — as a way of being — and not necessarily as something that needs to be displayed. Perhaps a middle road can be seen in the following quote from an Indigenous parent:

When I come in, I ask her ‘What do you do today?’ and she’s really proud to show me what she has done. [Indigenous parent]

**Being a communicator**

*Foundations for Success* lists the following components of this learning area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are:

- developing their first language/s in parallel with their developing awareness of SAE as a second or additional language
- engaging with multiple forms of literacy that build bridges between family and community contexts and the literacies of school
- engaging with numeracy experiences that build bridges between family and community contexts and the numeracy of school (DETA, 2008, p. 13).

One of the key freedoms that *Foundations for Success* has bestowed on pre-Prep educators is the encouragement/requirement that Home Language be used and honoured within the pre-Prep program, both as language in its own right and as a bridge to SAE. The importance of bilingual learning was recognised by most of the educators. As well, links between language and cultural identity were reinforced.

Of course, we’d do it anyway, especially in early childhood, when the kids don’t have much English at all, but it’s a great thing that *Foundations for Success* has acknowledged this ... It’s written down now, that it’s so important to value that Home Language. I’m no expert so I’m not sure, but I think this is one of the first official papers that have come out, that have actually valued that so highly. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Well, like here, there’s no traditional language that is spoken fluently. Even my parents when I was growing up did not speak the traditional language. Creole is the main language. I see that it’s very important to have that, but also together with the Standard Australian English because most of the kids are coming in, they’re speaking creole at home and there’s not a lot of Standard Australian
English spoken. Only those that are like at the school, the office where there’s people that are speaking Standard Australian English ... What I’ve been doing is just speaking to them in Standard Australian English first, then just by looking at their face and knowing that they don’t understand me, that’s when I quickly switch to creole. And I see that as very important, that they don’t lose [their Home Language], but they also make a distinction between [creole and SAE]. That they can identify that my language is just as important as Standard Australian English, but there are times where I could use it and times that I can’t use it. [Indigenous teacher]

Many of the Indigenous educators could remember their own schooling, when they were not allowed to use their Home Language, and saw the approach taken in Foundations for Success as being of great benefit to the children and their families. It also built the confidence and esteem of the Indigenous educators in that they had something valuable to offer that could not be matched by the non-Indigenous educators. There was much evidence concerning ways in which Home Language and SAE were being taught together in pre-Prep.

The Indigenous teachers in this classroom are so amazing because yes, they do speak [traditional language] most of the time, but they are definitely teaching English at the same time, as well as me teaching bits of English ... I think they are teaching both definitely. I’m probably teaching a little bit more ‘proper’ English for want of a better word. Only because it’s my first and only language, but no, I think they definitely ... They are teaching a lot ... They are speaking a lot of [traditional language] but they definitely teach some English. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Well, to make them understand you speak their Home Language ... Then later, when you talk Standard English together, they understand. But if you want to get something across to them, you just cut it down to Home Language. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Approaches to the development of both Home Language and SAE varied considerably across sites, often according to the human resources available.

In two of the sites that were led by experienced Indigenous teachers from the local communities, bilingual, and sometimes trilingual, teaching was the norm. To observe a teacher who is willing to work in the language most appropriate for individual children, while at the same time developing the child’s skills in all of the languages being considered, was a real joy. Code-switching and translation became the key processes that were modelled and practised.

In another site where the non-Indigenous teacher had worked with the Indigenous teaching assistant for three years and they had built up respect and rapport, a different system of bilingual teaching occurred. The teaching assistant was fluent in both the traditional language and in the creole that most children and parents spoke. The teacher had minimal competence in either of these languages. The two educators developed their roles and their understanding of these roles to the extent that they complemented each other’s input. The real strength in this relationship was the contribution of the teaching assistant because of her superior and more comprehensive local language skills. Through the encouragement of the trained teacher, the assistant played an ‘equal but different’ role in the class, including preparation and delivery of locally constructed language texts, traditional songs and games, and links with parents and the community. This was particularly notable early in 2010, when the non-Indigenous teacher reflected on some differences within the new group of children.
That’s a difference with this particular group this year. I’ve got a lot of grandparents that look after some of their children and their level of English, well they don’t use any English. I find it very difficult to communicate effectively with them, and I always use [teaching assistant] with them. Of course I’ll still talk with them, but if there’s something important that I want the message to get across, like our parent day that we’re organising for the end of the term and different things, the tee shirt designs, I’ll get [teaching assistant] to go and explain it to them ... I think that’s made them safe and feel that they can stay as well. That they’ve got … Not got this stupid white lady going blah, blah, blah and them thinking ‘I have no idea what she’s talking about’. But that’s really relevant with this particular group.

[Non-Indigenous teacher]

While the language skills of the teaching assistant can have clear benefits, there are other cultural turns that can be equally important in communicating with young children.

Well the way that [teaching assistant] asks questions from the kids. I know that they know her from the community, but I think also that because she understands how they think and how they organise their thoughts better than I do, she can ask questions so that the kids understand what’s being asked of them and they have more freedom to give a deeper, more complex answer. Where I get the impression sometimes, not only because of the language, but because of the way I ask things, they’re not quite sure as to what I’m actually going for. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Both as a literacy experience and as a way of acknowledging culture, many songs were sung in traditional languages, as well as in SAE. The children involved in this singing seemed uniformly to enjoy the experience, and often wanted more than time or the educator would allow.

The role of the school leader in the honouring and development of both Home Language and SAE is critical. Some of the pre-Prep educators in some of the evaluation sites felt that it could be almost a waste of time to be maintaining Home Language in pre-Prep, because it was not going to be accepted in later school years.

You look at how the children are yarning and laughing. They have a little bit of fight, like anyone else does. But the language skills, how they’re sharing, how they comfort one another, in the social side of things. When we go into the room, they’re recognising their name, they’re having rich conversations. I’m telling them a book and they’re telling me all in their own language and all that kind of stuff and I’ve got it up on the wall. So we’ve got all that stuff, but then when they go to Grade 1, I don’t know what they expect from the kids. [Indigenous teacher]

On the other hand, some school leaders took up the challenge emanating from pre-Prep and changed their school programs as a result, reaping the benefits with improved student engagement.

I was leader of the early years team last year, I know I really thought ‘Why are we doing this, why are we sort of pretending that creole isn’t there, that’s ridiculous’. And we want these kids to understand these concepts, of course they can hear them in their first language. So we can thank Foundations for Success for that. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

While matters of communication predominantly revolved around language and literacy, there were some mentions of numeracy and the ways in which Foundations for Success had resulted in increased awareness of numeracy challenges for children.

Numeracy it’s again, definitely concrete. Sure, we do the little singing rhymes, 5 cheeky monkeys jumping on the bed, that sort of thing, and they are really good because the kids love it, they’re engaged and they really are counting down. And you know that touch counting is so important and
then giving them something concrete to hold. Like we might be looking at shapes and we’ll roll the dice and that person will get a go and they might look at a shape on our poster, but then try and find a shape in the room that’s similar. Just lots of hands on concrete items instead of worksheets. We use shells for counters, gum nuts for counters. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Of particular interest were the language aspects of numeracy. Two examples, one from pre-Prep and one from Prep, emphasised the importance of encouraging the use of Home Language in mathematics and the impact of *Foundations for Success* on thinking about this throughout the school.

Sometimes it is frustrating when you’re trying to do numeracy and the terminology that the kids don’t understand. Of course I’ll turn to Home Language and say ‘How much is this?’ and if they say ‘Plenty’ or ‘That’s more than one’ and that’s how we ... if it’s working in the room we have no problem with that. [Home Language] does help with numeracy and we use it every day. [Indigenous teacher]

[The Prep teacher, explaining some probability concepts] was saying ‘certain it will happen’ and ‘possible it might happen’ and ‘impossible it can’t happen’. In the creole, that ‘will’, ‘might’, ‘maybe’, all that is very blurry, very blurry in English, but if you told them what the equivalent in creole they’ll go ‘Oh that’s what that means’ ... So that’s the way the college is going and like I said, we thank pre-Prep for that because that’s probably what got us going. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

**Being an active participant**

*Foundations for Success* lists the following components of this learning area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are:

- developing and understanding their own and others’ roles, rights and responsibilities
- listening, collaborating and negotiating with others
- becoming increasingly independent and interdependent
- sharing respectful relationships with others (DETA, 2008, p. 13).

In each of the pre-Prep sites visited, children worked and played together without disruption or argument. There seemed to be very respectful relations among the children, who generally appeared to be happy and confident in the environments.

In most sites, the educators worked together as a team with the children, using each others’ strengths wherever appropriate. When the teacher did not speak the children’s Home Language, the Indigenous teaching assistant would help by speaking directly to the children or translating for the teacher. In some cases, the relationship between the teacher and assistant was such that there was an almost seamless understanding that governed their work. Each knew implicitly when it was their time to intervene or take a lead.

*This is my third year here and [the teaching assistant] and I have worked together before, so it’s a little bit easier in that I know her so well and I developed those relationships through her. [Non-Indigenous teacher]*

‘Being an active participant’ was often summarised as the need for children to develop as respectful, independent beings who are on their way to becoming players in a wider world than they have experienced up to this point in their lives.
I want them to try. I want them to be confident. I want them to speak up, whether things are right or wrong. I want them to be respectful and I want them to speak their mind as well. I want them to be able to learn basic things like how to count to 10 and how to write their name ... Have some manners about them, say ‘Thank you’ and ‘please’. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

First of all I hope they come to school all the time. They have good teachers, good teacher aides. Obedient, the first thing. And when we know that they do things, we try and put them in the right place. [Indigenous community member]

I think all those other big things will happen, but if the children can leave pre-Prep and come to school confident, feeling good about being a part of the group, all of the rest of that academic learning, that school learning, will fall into place ... The only real thing that we sort of push, and I think that it comes from the family, when you talk to families, is that name. That they recognise their name and that for me as a teacher, it’s just that they’re willing to have a go at writing something. Whatever it is, just put pen to paper and have a go. And once again, that confidence to risk take. And that’s why we’ve got those big name tags there, and they’re there if they want to use them and if they don’t, they don’t. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The main purpose I guess, is to start them at an earlier age in education. Getting them settled in the school environment and also starting them in the foundation of their learning. Getting a firm foundation that when they come into Year 1 or Prep, they’re ready, there are no difficulties in their learning at that early age. [Indigenous teacher]

Much of this learning area pertains to all young children, and would be generally seen as part of any high quality early childhood setting and curriculum. However, one important impact of Foundations for Success is that being an active participant has been made explicit. This explicitness has then been echoed in the more general national and state curriculum guidelines (DEEWR, 2009a; Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), 2010).

One aspect in which active participation was perhaps an issue was around planning for learning, both of children and their teachers. For example, in one site, the emphasis on planning and documentation through learning stories led to daily meetings of all pre-Prep teachers. The teachers spent at least an hour each day writing learning stories about particular children, and planned future learning experiences for these children as part of these stories. While this was successful in developing plans for the children, it also provided strong professional development input for all concerned. As well, it helped develop a strong collaborative team.

I need to make sure that all the teachers are valuing the children for who they are, but also for the learning that they’re doing and engaging in that learning ... I mean respecting these kids as learners and realising that they are helping by just engaging with them, and that has definitely come about through those learning stories. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

This team was broken up when the non-Indigenous teacher left the site at the end of the year. For numerous complex reasons, the following year the group at this site did not continue with this practice. There were some difficulties in developing rapport within the group of teachers and the ‘team’ disintegrated.

I think [my biggest challenge] mainly it would be the teacher aides, English is their second language as well, so there’s that barrier between us ... I don’t know how to explain it. It’s just hard for anyone new
coming in ... It’s hard for me because I don’t know the language and I don’t have much support from the teacher aides, so I can’t build on that. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

There was other evidence about active participation by children, families and teachers in planning for pre-Prep experiences.

**Teachers**

Yeah. And I guess having to do that, actually getting the ladies [the teaching assistants] to sit with me planning, the half an hour every day, and going through the Foundations for Success and telling them, going through the different areas and getting them to be part of that, like recording and stuff like that. It’s really opened up their mind as well. And it makes them feel more important too, that they are playing a major part in these kids [learning]. And they now, I find myself that they’re the ones that are taking the book out and sitting down and saying ‘Oh miss, I’ve got to do this, can I do this’, and then they do that and it’s just been great. [Indigenous teacher]

**Teachers and parents**

Well at the moment there’s a large interest in doctors and health and things like that from play, and that’s somewhere we’re going to include the MAP, the health centre here, to come in and talk to the kids and try to extend them through not just checkups, but other things that could happen on the island like sports injuries or snake bites, and extend their play that way. And language. Also we’ve got a big push for reading at the moment, and we’re having a meeting tomorrow about incorporating writing at home too. I’m trying to up skill the parents and keep them informed week to week through a newsletter that I write. And it actually tells the parents what we do in literacy, numeracy and writing each week. And then it gives them the opportunities to talk about it with their kids and share that learning and then come in, and if they would like, eventually add things to the board that we’ve got under those areas. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

**Children and teachers**

Oh no, I guess it all started when we came back to Cairns and also with [the professional support teacher] visiting us and talking about the plan, do and reflect, and what she has been doing in class. And I guess we didn’t actually start that until we got to Cairns and were listening to other teachers as well, talking about it and what they’re doing in class. So we thought of talking with [the teaching assistant] and coming back and trying to I guess put it into practice here, and see what outcome we will get from it. And it’s just been great. It’s just been non-stop excitement. Like demonstrating it first, the actual collaborative planning and then talking about, introducing the word ‘reflect’, why do we have to reflect and what does reflect mean and doing it with kids. I think we did that for ... We did a Jack and the Beanstalk a couple of times, and then we did other planning for different areas in the classroom. Like going into the home corner and talking about if you’re going to be a dad, what are the roles that dads usually do at home? So getting them thinking that way and they’re planning that they’re going to go hunting and stuff like that. And said ‘Well if you’re going turtle hunting, where’s the turtle?’ ‘Oh I can make a turtle’. And they sat down and did a plan of how they would make a turtle. And it’s just been great, it’s just been exciting in working with the kids because you see actually they’re thinking about ... Because we talked about letters and words, letters put together and now actually talking about their thoughts. Because when we did the collaborative planning, we talked about how we put our thoughts onto paper and it’s a written word that we’re putting down and sentences, that we’re telling people that this is what we’ve done. And yeah, it’s just from there. I didn’t have to tell them much. It’s just the ... I guess one thing that amazes me is that they’ve been very observant. They’ve watched and they’ve listened. And to me sometimes when I’ve been doing the planning, it’s like ‘Oh they’ll never understand what I’m doing’ ... But when I actually went away,
physically, out of the classroom and go away — I went into XXX I think — and they just, just out of the blue, wanted to do planning and they did it and never stopped doing that. [Indigenous teacher]

Figure 2: Active participation in planning

**Being healthy and safe**

*Foundations for Success* lists the following components of this learning area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are:

- making choices about their own and others’ health and safety
- becoming increasingly self-sufficient in personal health and hygiene
- developing increased fine and gross motor control (DETA, 2008, p. 14).

On a number of occasions, the evaluator accompanied Indigenous community members and teachers on the bus runs through the communities, either to bring children to pre-Prep or school or take them home after pre-Prep. It was clear that the children took a great deal of pride in their appearance and cleanliness, and that they were responding not only to the expectations of their families, but also to those of the school or pre-Prep class. In all the pre-Prep sites visited, care was taken by teachers and assistants to ensure that children maintained an appropriate level of hygiene, through activities such as regular nose blowing and hand washing. Clearly, the aim was to educate the children and to have the children
take responsibility for their own health and hygiene. This was seen as an integral part of the message coming from *Foundations for Success*.

*There are certain times in the day when they learn that they have to do certain things. They’re fed at a certain time, they brush their teeth at certain times, all those sort of patterns that we start to help children to develop. The toileting is starting to be part of their every day routine ... as well.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*We do a lot of advocating on their behalf with the health teams, to get the health teams working in programs that suit our children and suit the families, not vice versa. The programs need to change, not the families.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

There were ample opportunities observed during the evaluation visits for the children to develop independence and increasing self-sufficiency in personal health and hygiene. All teachers took all available opportunities to reinforce key health messages such as healthy eating and hygiene. In some sites, children were able to make their own choices about when they would eat and how much they would eat. In these sites, the children were asked to record that they had eaten so that the teachers could be assured of the children’s nutritional intake. In other sites, food was dealt with through more standardised rituals pertaining to time, behaviour and amounts to be eaten. In some cases, children brought their own food while, in others, food was supplied by the setting. In some sites, it was reported that there were occasionally special meals to celebrate particular events in the community, and that these sometimes involved parents and other community members joining with the children and teachers or supplying the food. In all sites, the children seemed to enjoy adequate, nutritious food and seemed to be developing attitudes to eating that would prepare them for later moves to school.

As with learning around nutrition, hygiene and safety, children’s fine and gross motor skills were well catered for in all of the evaluation sites. With very few exceptions, the particular activities that were available to the children reflected ‘sound’ early childhood practice, without being particularly culturally or contextually relevant. ‘Developmentally appropriate’ activities such as cutting, pasting, play dough and modelling predominated and provided opportunities for the modelling of SAE, as well as for the use and development of Home Languages. Many of the teachers felt that these opportunities were critical to the children’s learning, particularly in the area of their development of a sense of belonging to groups, and their own identities as pre-Prep learners.

In one site, community ‘excursions’ were the norm. These were seen by parents and teachers as a very positive feature of the pre-Prep program.

*The school is seen to go out into the community too, and they see people and things happening, and the community is aware more of the school being part of the broader community, not just the fenced in area that they come to. But also there’s a lot of learning that takes place within those environments. And the great thing about it is, with all that space, the children can become as creative as they want and push us into directions of their interests. And things can as quickly start and finish in a day or it can run for a week. But there are lots of things, like the numeracy and the literacy, and things that come out of that. And then we try to incorporate the writing when we come back, with photos and talk about what’s happening and put them on our walls.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*I just think they’re doing a really good job here. I also like how they have a lot of outings, excursions, which is really good. And they go around in the community and the kids love it.* [Indigenous parent]
Being a learner

*Foundations for Success* lists the following components of this learning area.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are:

- thinking, enquiring and problem solving
- creating, representing and responding in imaginative ways

In some of the pre-Prep settings, there was evidence of creative thinking on the children’s part through their artwork and pattern making. Children’s artwork was displayed so that the children and their families could see it. In two of the pre-Prep settings, parents who were artists had been invited to provide the children with some of their own creative insights about how they go about making art.

An example of exploration and investigation was observed when the evaluator interacted with three girls who were burying their feet in the sand in the sandpit. They were all sitting opposite each other around three sides of a square and the task of ‘feet burying’ meant that none of them could move their feet: if any of them did then that would spoil the play for everyone else. They continued this for 10–15 minutes while talking to each other about all sorts of things: family; whose sister was who; and other aspects of family and community. They were fully engaged in their play and investigation. This was continued even when the feet started to ‘sneak out’ from underneath the sand.

There was at least one computer available in each of the pre-Prep classes. Generally, these were used for ‘drill and practice’ type games in the areas of literacy and numeracy, or for demonstration by the teachers. On the other hand, digital cameras were used by children in some of the sites in order to record the daily events and, in particular, to ensure that there were lots of photos of the children in the setting.

The notion that ‘all children are capable thinkers, enquirers and problem solvers’ (DETA, 2008, p. 14) is fundamental to this learning area and to all of the programs visited during the *Foundations for Success* evaluation. However, success in reaching this fundamental outcome varies across the sites.

Some sites were still in the situation of trying to develop what were seen as fundamental precursors to the high level learning highlighted in this area. For example, some teachers suggested that the notion of investigation and deep learning were just not possible in the contexts of irregular attendance, and home contexts that did not seem to value pre-Prep education. For example:

*I’m trying to be not so organised, that’s my hardest thing, with play-based learning. I’m an organised person and it’s hard for me to let go, to just let play happen. I guess I should probably focus more on when we take things out we put it away, that kind of stuff, because that is what sometimes if I’m on my morning tea break, and inside play and some of the other teachers are looking after them, I’ll come back and the whole room will be absolutely destroyed and I don’t know how it can happen in 15 minutes, but then it takes a good half an hour to put everything back in place. So I should probably be focusing more on only taking things out that need to be played and that they want to play with and...*
putting it away after. But it’s a bit like ... Yeah, it’s hard. So I want to try ... Yeah, and let go. But then in that way when they’re playing freely it becomes very ... There’s a lot of fights and yelling and screaming and that kind of stuff, so it’s not productive anyway, if I’m not there. And even if I am there it’s very hard with so many children to still be controlling. I don’t know if that’s the right word. Like, looking at other kids but focusing on one group. So that’s what I find hard and I kind of have put the free play to a minimum. So it’s ... I don’t know, I think at home they must be able to have free play all the time, but it’s not being productive. So here I want it to be productive rather than just running amok ... I know that some parents like the children to be in bed and looked after and had dinner, and they come to school every day and you can tell which ones they are. But then in the community, it might not even be the parents’ fault, but there’s always loud music and there’s kids running the street ... So no wonder they come to school tired or don’t come to school at all. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Some teachers struggled with the idea that the approaches advocated in *Foundations for Success* might not be valued or continued as the children moved into school.

*Foundations for Success*. Being proud and strong ... Being a learner: imagining and responding, investigating environments. OK, so we know all these kids that were sitting there [in Pre-Prep] can do these things. Why are they failing in Grade 1? Why aren’t they listening in Grade 1? Why does XXX always get into trouble being an active participant or being a learner? ... He just showed us he can be a learner, imagining and responding and investigating environments. Why can’t he do maths? [Indigenous teacher]

An example linked to ‘creating, representing and responding in imaginative ways’ has been introduced earlier, with the sustained planning and investigation undertaken in the ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ project. As well as the planning and construction of ‘Jack’ referred to in Figure 2 above, the children were involved in the planning, investigation and construction of ‘the giant’. Their words describe the achievement:

*For our giant we used large boxes. By stacking them on top of each other we created the giant’s head, neck, body and legs. We posted a poster on the giant using paintbrushes and glue. On the poster it has the giant’s speech ‘Fee-fi-fo-fum. I smell the blood of an Englishman. If he’s alive or if he’s dead, I’ll grind his bones to make my bread.’ And that’s how we created our very own ‘Jack and the beanstalk’ story through our collaborative planning and arts.* [Indigenous pre-Prep children and their teacher]
3.3.2 Purposeful pedagogies in pre-Prep

*Foundations for Success* highlights four major pedagogical approaches ‘that build upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s sense of wonder and curiosity to engage them as active participants in the program’s planned learning’ (DETA, 2008, p. 14). These four approaches are:

- play
- extended projects and investigations
- focused, intentional teaching
- shared rituals.

Each of these approaches was very important to the teachers in the evaluation sites as they provided a rationale for, and confirmation of, their practice. Data provided strong evidence of the use of purposeful pedagogies, but also highlighted some disparities among teachers’ interpretations of the approaches:

- some confusion around the nature and purposes of play, but a strong adherence to play being the dominant pedagogical approach in pre-Prep
- some sparkling examples of extended projects and investigations at some sites, and almost no such evidence at others
- some confusion between educators’ understandings of focused, intentional teaching and didactic instruction, with the result that, at some of the evaluation sites, there was little focused, intentional teaching as suggested in *Foundations for Success*
- a great deal of evidence of shared rituals around activities such as meals, sleeping and toileting, as well sharing books and stories, singing, and working and playing collaboratively
- unevenness in interpretations and adoption of the purposeful pedagogies and the expectations of young Indigenous children, as illustrated in the following two quotes.

*I think there was more emphasis on looking at where the kids are, but the problem with here is that the kids come with ... not much really ... We’ll probably do just what we’re used to doing really, what’s worked for us and worked for the kids, as long as the school is happy and the parents are happy. We can justify what we’re doing, we can use the right words.* [Non-Indigenous educator]

*You know, we changed, now move towards that Foundations for Success ... I think they’re playing more and just give them that space that they need instead of them being more directed. We just leave them to play and that ... We have to change too because our expectation was more towards schooling and teaching ... Yeah, and I think that [change] was something we needed for this area.* [Indigenous educators]

*Play*
Play is almost a universal ‘given’ in early childhood education but, perhaps because of the universality, it is often misunderstood or interpreted in idiosyncratic ways. Only rarely is a definition of play given, as it is assumed that everyone knows what it is. Perhaps unfortunately, it can mean many different things. *Foundations for Success* does not specifically provide a definition of play, but does emphasise its importance in children’s learning.

All of the teachers in the six evaluation sites agreed that play is the critical pedagogy for young children’s learning. In conversations with the evaluator, not much was said about play because it was seen as just ‘part of the early childhood’ fabric. Each pre-Prep class had free and structured play incorporated into their planning, although the proportions of each varied markedly across the sites. The following interpretations of play illustrate this point.

*My role in their play is to, I think, to build on their play. So if they want to play in the sandpit they go right ahead. But they might think ‘Look teacher, I’m trying to dig this hole but they keep coming in here, what can I do?’ Then I can offer suggestions. But I don’t interrupt their play. Their play is how they want to do it. How they want to fill their time, how they want to enjoy themselves and express themselves. I’m there as a resource to their play. So if they want buckets, if they want shovels, if they want some sticks or if they want to think what I would do ...* [Indigenous teacher]

*For me, play in my program is where the children are engaging in role-play activities; where they’re practising those roles that they see in the community, that sort of thing ... So obviously they’re taking from what they have in their home, in their community, into their play and they’ll be doing that. Another group will be with the tea set and they’ll be in the sand and that’s their house. And there’s always an event going on like a birthday, or they’re making kai kai for people who are coming back. And then we’ve got the dinghy and lots of things happen with the dinghy. It’s either for transport or it’s for fighting, play fighting. But again, I see the children all interacting and then coming ... Like, within their little cell groups and then coming together and that’s what happens with my program. And then there are times when we talk about that. Sometimes I get in and I play with them, like they involve me. But often I wait until I’m invited, because I feel that if I go in too much then I will change what happens within their play, and is that what I want to have happen? Their play seems to travel along, it doesn’t deteriorate and often it continues across the days that they’re there.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Yeah, I think it did for me. Especially in the being proud and strong, that identity and belonging, because when we were school-based, we had to do Indigenous studies, teach them a bit of Indigenous studies. Whereas *this Foundations for Success* gives us that whole play thing and you know what I mean. [Indigenous teachers]

**Investigations and extended projects**

Data suggest that the ‘purposeful pedagogy’ focused on investigations and extended projects was not fully understood by the teachers in many of the evaluation sites. It is much more usual in early childhood settings generally, and in those visited in particular, to see relatively brief periods of investigation, followed by a change of topic and another brief period of investigation. The importance of sustained shared thinking as a pedagogical foundation for young children has been highlighted in the definitive work of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education project (*Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004*) and the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years project (*Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002*). Such an approach has been advocated in
Foundations for Success, but the evidence was that there is still quite some work to be done in this area. However, two counter examples show what might be possible.

One example of an extensive, longer term investigation relevant to the children occurred when a child brought in some crabs for his ‘news’. They were placed in an aquarium so that all the children could see them, but they did not survive for long. However, one parent suggested that perhaps a more feasible study might be of tadpoles. She could supply the tadpoles from a community nursery. So the children went to the nursery, gathered the tadpoles, brought them back to their classroom, placed them in the aquarium, and, at the time of an evaluation visit, were waiting for them to metamorphose into frogs. While this was taking longer than anyone had expected, there was a lot of discussion among some of the children about how the tadpoles seemed to have changed, how long it had taken, what might happen next, and so on. Drawings and photographs were being used to document the investigation.

In another setting, the building of the new pre-Prep classroom had just begun. There was a lot of discussion about how long the building might take, what it would be like — can you really tell from the plans, the logistics of moving and what materials and equipment might need to be left behind in the old classroom. Plans were being developed about whether the group could fit into the new building, and how they could tell before the building was finished.

There was also evidence that educators were thinking about the educational benefits of extending children’s investigations:

> I think staff need to learn how to scaffold activities so that kids don’t feel the need to drop out because it’s suddenly got too hard or it’s suddenly got too long. You need to read it and re-energise that little one to keep going. I think the better skilled people are, right to Year 7, the more success. The better teachers here know how to scaffold for success. And like if kids feel that they’ve got the right amount of support, woven together with the right amount of challenge, they’re the ones that will persevere and keep going. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

**Focused, intentional teaching**

There were many examples observed of adults and children engaged in focused, intentional teaching. In some cases, particularly in those pre-Prep classes integrated into schools, this intentional teaching strayed into traditional teaching approaches such as rote recitation and worksheets. However, in most, teachers were aware of the opportunities that children’s play or child-initiated investigations provided for them to act as ‘provocateurs’ (Rinaldi, 2006) who could complicate children’s learning and challenge their thinking.

> So what we do is we play outside in the morning for a couple of hours. We intentionally set up lots of different areas of play so that we’re hoping kids will learn through these different things, but we do let them freely play on it. So they can get whatever they’re interested in at that moment, that’s what they can get out of it. However, at the same time we will often, only with the child’s consent, we will enter into play with them. And the reason that we like to do that is because we can then help to sort of probe and ask questions and extend on that play with those kids. So hopefully extend ideas that they’re working on or even, especially in this context, help them imaginatively. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

However, other points of view about focused, intentional teaching were expressed:

> So to me intentional teaching is when I’m standing up in the room and telling them what to do. If we’re doing THRASS, now that’s intentional teaching, because I want them to know something. If
I’m going there and if we say ‘OK let’s do the number chart’, that for me is intentional teaching …

Intentional teaching for me is when I’m telling you something. [Indigenous teacher]

It could well be that the educators’ beliefs about focused, intentional teaching, as outlined in Foundations for Success, have not yet been fully developed or enacted in their teaching. This is one area where further professional development could be beneficial.

On the other hand, there were examples that suggested that active listening on the part of educators was an integral part of focused, intentional teaching. One of the most telling examples comes from a community Elder.

See little children, they have ideas that we don’t understand. Take for instance, there were some little children who were drawing and some drew pictures and this other little child just all black, and the teacher asked this little one ‘What is that? I can’t see anything in there.’ He said ‘My dad’s car in the garage’. ‘Where?’ He said ‘You can’t see it, it’s night time’. So we’ve got to ask children because they’ve got their own little minds, and we want to try expand these little ones. We sort of try to build something up so that their foundation can be stabilised when they grow up.

We build on what they already know and what we can teach more for these little ones.

They know a lot and sometimes we might say ‘Oh we know better than they do’. But some children are very clever.

Sometimes we learn from little children. Some odd things. [Indigenous community member]

**Shared rituals**

The importance of shared rituals was observed on a number of occasions during the evaluation. Family, food, traditional singing and dancing, and special events such as community picnics are relevant examples. Other examples occurred at the pre-Prep setting:

Each child attending pre-Prep has their own folder. It stays in their locker. It’s a folder that has on the front family photos, so connecting the child and the family to the centre. First page inside this ring binder is an attendance chart, where children and families or children and carers, grandparents, mothers, fathers, whatever put a sticker each day that they’ve attended pre-Prep. The kids do this together, it’s not a matter of marking the roll, it’s the kids doing this with their parent, grandparent, whatever when they arrive, and the form staying in the folder. In the ones that I looked at there were no days missing. Kids have been there 100% of the time that they were eligible to be there, and so you’ve got this really high attendance rate. Kids and parents and carers feeling involved and evidence of that in lots of ways. The folders or the portfolios also contained a combination of teacher-written stories of learning [Evaluator’s field notes]

And when I started reading to the kids, it’s a long book and we had about half an hour before lunchtime, so I took them to the library and I picked a book. I said ‘We’ll do something different, I’ll read this book for you guys’. And so I showed them the picture and explained. I read the XXX story. XXX is the traditional stories from XXX and they pass XXX if they’re driving out to XXX, and I asked them if you’re driving out to XXX you pass this little Aboriginal community, XXX . And XXX has big caves out where the mountains are and there’s some Aboriginal art there, showing them the XXX and so I read the story. And I did read in Home Language, and every one of them, even XXX who is not from here,
she must understand because she’s been here that long. And now that’s one book that they all want me to read, they ask me every morning. I said ‘Ok, I won’t read this story until every one of you ... If you behave next week maybe on Friday I’ll read these books’. And I do read, so they’re all sitting there. And I said to them like a long, long time ago, this story is based here, where we stay and yeah ... They really like that. [Indigenous teacher]

These examples demonstrate how quite subtle everyday strategies can provide rich experiences for Indigenous children that connect their learning environment to their culture and community in meaningful ways.

The importance of education for young Indigenous children so that they develop sound foundations for positive future experiences was articulated by a community leader at one of the evaluation sites.

Yeah, it is important for us as a whole, to teach the children at school or at home, because if we don’t teach them the right things, there are people outside our community, they will teach them their ways, then they could end up in jail with no jobs. And there are so many people today without jobs and we need these children, for their education. We went to school and we want these children to go to school, to learn as much as they can. [Indigenous community member]

The ‘right’ things seem to be those that will assist the children to gain a place in their two worlds — the world of their families and communities, and the mainstream economic world of Australia. Clearly, these two worlds have many shared rituals that can be used to develop the ‘right’ things.

3.3.3 Documentation and reflection

The importance of documentation of young children’s learning, and the use of such documentation in teacher’s reflecting on this learning and their own pedagogical approaches, and in communicating the learning to parents and families, has been the subject of much research and practice (Carr, 2001; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2006). The levels and quality of documentation at the six evaluation sites varied considerably, particularly in terms of the take-up of the individual portfolios for children. At some sites, portfolios were little more than a minimally organised collection of children’s outputs such as paintings and few photographs. At other sites, the portfolios were comprehensive and coherent records of children’s learning in pre-Prep, which were strongly personalised to the child and designed to be interactive with, and available to, parents and other family members. Included in these portfolios were artefacts and photographs with explanations, commentary and planning directions; learning stories with comments from the educators and the children; children’s voices; provision for responses and comments from parents and other family members; and interactive inclusions such as sign-in sheets that ensured that the portfolios were seen regularly by parents and other family members. While it is known from personal links with other sites using Foundations for Success that some teachers had developed quite extensive electronic portfolios for, and with, their children, none of the evaluation sites had done so, often on the grounds that in their contexts, electronic portfolios would not be readily accessible to many of the families.
In the sites where *Foundations for Success* seemed to be working well, quality documentation was evident. While such documentation is regarded as necessary, but not sufficient, for successful implementation of the program, it does provide a clear indication of commitment to the principles espoused by the program. The following comment indicates the importance of documentation.

*Whereas before it [portfolio documentation] was just like, you collect whatever samples that you need to report to parents, but now there are areas that the kids are specifically put into, to say like ‘social’ and ‘Being proud and strong’ and making them aware what is it and what they are doing in play.*

[Indigenous teacher]

Documentation is not valuable if it is not read. In one setting, the educators had devised a particular method to ensure that the portfolios were read regularly.

*Because they’re [the portfolios] in their lockers, and just that little trick with the attendance. I mean, it just gets them touching, feeling, opening it every single day. They are taking that on as wanting to do it. Like, we’ve encouraged it, which we did last year. We had a few parents last year that did it, but this year you can see them all come in the morning.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Across the six evaluation sites, there has been a mixed response to the ways in which *Foundations for Success* assists in the educators’ reflection on their practice and on the children’s progress. In some sites, it has been a very important facilitator for reflection and planning. For example, at Site 1, the practice of all educators writing individual learning stories at the end of each day meant that the entire team of educators was involved in reflecting on, and planning for, children’s experiences and learning in pre-Prep. At Site 6, joint planning with children and educators involved has been a highlight of the program (see Figures 2 and 3). At other sites, planning and reflection that uses *Foundations for Success* is tempered by other challenges, such as having to report against other guidelines, such as *Building Waterfalls* (C & K Pre-schooling Professionals, 2006) at Site 5, or conform to templates or approaches to planning that have been specified by the school to which the pre-Prep is attached (Sites 1 and 4). The following quotes from educators are instructive in seeing the various levels of documentation and reflection across the sites.

*The main thing I do is taking photos of them in their learning, and writing learning stories. Then, of course, just photos of them playing. I can’t write a million learning stories, they take forever ... Each week, I sit down with the children, we glue all their things into their folios, and they can have a look at their photos and I read them the story.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*I went with what I knew and I knew what the school was asking as far as data collection, so I tried to just amalgamate the two: keep the observation process going, keep the data collection going for the Foundations checklist, and the things for which I was keeping records. As far as presenting it on a document, I kept my Word document going with my weekly thing and [the principal] had formatted an Excel spreadsheet which had all the terms and everything in it. So I had a look at that and [the other pre-Prep teacher] and I are still in the process of trying to mould that into a pre-Prep document.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*I use the pedagogical reflections [from *Foundations for Success*] when I try and come up with new ways to engage with our families, and when we think we might do something really well, particularly with our family focus, I’ll look back at those statements with [the teaching assistant] and try and come up with some more creative ways of doing things. I probably found that I’m planning differently. The documenting I’m doing with children is different this year. Last year I probably did more similar to Prep*
documenting, which was great for me. It was great when I had teachers come to visit me, because they could see that I was including children in my planning. But it didn’t mean anything to the children. I was just sitting there writing up all this stuff, so indoor play, we did this and this. Now, it’s really just all oral. I don’t write it down. I don’t feel I need to write it down because it’s obvious: what we’re doing is in their portfolios through the reflecting. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

3.4 The enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school

The identification of enabling conditions and pedagogies that impact on Indigenous children’s learning and development has been a major component of the evaluation of Foundations for Success. Numerous features of the program and the contexts in which it exists were identified as both indicators of success and stimuli for sustained success. These features are listed here under four major organisational headings, but are not presented in priority order or in terms of any measure of ‘weight’ of evidence. The four major headings are:

- enabling conditions that link pre-Prep, families and community
- enabling conditions concerning educational leadership
- enabling conditions concerning teacher preparation and professional development
- enabling conditions that are systemic.

3.4.1 Enabling conditions that link pre-Prep, families and community

Community determination of the scheduling of pre-Prep classes

A variety of scheduling mechanisms for pre-Prep has been trialled in the six evaluation sites. While reality of funding and staffing will probably determine the final scheduling approaches in most sites, it appears that some alternatives offer enhanced potential over others.

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (DEEWR, 2009b) establishes the right of every preschool child in Australia to access at least 15 hours of quality preschool education in the year before the child starts school (that is, the Year 1 minus two years). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the 35 Foundations for Success communities, this right will be met through pre-Prep.

When pre-Prep began in some of the evaluation sites, attempts were made to run a full-day, five days per week program. At the end of 2010, this was the case at only Sites 1 and 5, although at Site 1, the designated pre-Prep teacher was only present for three hours each morning before moving to the school for other duties. All other sites had adopted one of two models which reflected the national minimum recommendation:

- three hours per day for five days
- two six-hour days and one three-hour session on a third day.
Some sites catered for two groups of children during the week — either a morning and an afternoon group, or 2.5 days in the first half of the week and 2.5 days in the second half. In a slight variation on this latter arrangement, one site alternated on a fortnightly basis, with Group 1 attending for three days and Group 2 for two days in Week 1, and then Group 1 attending for two days and Group 2 for three days in Week 2.

Which of these models is preferred by the local community seems to depend on the community and on the teachers in the pre-Prep setting. When changes were made — sometimes in an attempt to improve attendance — there was often confusion among families and attendance rates dropped. It would seem that the best way of determining the appropriate scheduling of pre-Prep classes would be for the teachers to consult with the parents and other family members on what might suit best in that community. Once the decision is made, it seems important for it to remain in place unless there is some drastic need to change it.

For example, at one site, there were two sessions of pre-Prep — one morning, one afternoon — run by two different teachers in the same space. Numbers dropped to such an extent that it was not viable to run both groups, so a five mornings per week group was established. Very few of the former ‘afternoon’ children attended, making the remaining group only marginally viable. One way in which this determination might have worked better would have been for the school to have consulted with the parents and other community members before the change was made.

In another site, the afternoon group is run in conjunction with the local childcare centre. This seems to work from the children’s educational point of view, but it means that the pre-Prep teachers do not meet any of the ‘afternoon’ parents or family members, thus restricting their opportunities to interact with these people about their children. Nonetheless, this is a solution that works for the community and the particular group of working parents. Through their community participation, the pre-Prep educators have developed other ways to interact with these parents.

Inevitably, resource issues will dictate a 15 hours per week model for pre-Prep. Which particular model is to be adopted seems to provide an opportunity for meaningful community consultation.
Flexibility in determining the location of pre-Prep classes

At the six sites involved in the evaluation of the *Foundations for Success* program, the pre-Prep classes were administratively part of schools (three on the school grounds and one physically separate), in a childcare setting linked to a school, and in a standalone kindergarten. There seem to be advantages and disadvantages in all of these situations, as the following quotes and Table 3 below illustrate.

*For us to be seen as a part of the community and for the community to see that pre-Prep is not school. It’s school but it’s not a formal ... I think moving it to the school as well risks that.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*I think there’s a huge strength in being in the same building as day care ... The reason is that we can concentrate much more on early childhood, because this whole building is early childhood and people understand that and they value that.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*The only asset to being at the school here is that we have the bus. I run the program, we eat at different times, we have our own bathroom facilities, we have our own playground, it’s kind of like a little thing in itself. And it ran quite well like that.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

*In some ways it is better in a school, but as you know, not all of them are attached to the school, they’re just off to the side. So they sort of float between worlds. They have the advantage of they can participate in the school, but they also can sort of say to them ‘Listen, our kids are too young, they don’t need to be involved in athletics day, all day, in the sun’. Disadvantages in schools, yeah, there are some. A lot of community people are afraid of schools and have bad memories and feelings about school. So it doesn’t actively encourage parent participation ... But usually children vote with their feet. So if it’s somewhere fun to go, they’ll make their own way there.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site number</th>
<th>Location description</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1           | Childcare setting    | Early childhood focus  
Early childhood trained staff available to assist pre-Prep staff  
Community engagement | Lack of interaction with Prep  
Teacher split across pre-Prep and school  
Transition issues for children | |
| 2           | School: physically separate  
Visibilty within community  
Community engagement  
Supportive school leadership | None reported or observed | |
| 3           | School grounds  
Visibilty within school and community (at school gate)  
Excellent new building  
Supportive school leadership  
Links with childcare centre (across the road) | None reported or observed | |
| 4           | School grounds  
Refurbished building  
Interaction with Prep | None reported or observed | |
| 5           | Standalone  
Purpose-built structure | None reported or observed | |

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of locations for pre-Prep classes
It is clear that all of the location arrangements can have advantages or disadvantages for the educational program in pre-Prep. A common comment from many of the pre-Prep teachers in schools was that they often felt like an isolated island within the ocean of the school, while others craved for more meaningful interaction between the pre-Prep and schools.

While there may be personal preferences, it is unlikely that individual educators or communities will have a great deal of influence in the location of the settings. All can work, and there needs to be careful consideration of what will work best for the community, the children and the staff. Location of the pre-Prep may be important within particular communities, but high quality programs can exist in a variety of settings and in a variety of locations.

**Strong links between pre-Prep and community**

One of the major benefits of having the pre-Prep class situated in a building within the community rather than on school grounds (Site 2) was that it gave the community members, especially the parents, a way of being involved without their having to confront unhelpful memories of school. The community site also allowed the pre-Prep to be a presence in the community through easily organised excursions and visits.

One of the guiding principles of *Foundations for Success* involves the pre-Prep building strong family and community partnerships:

*Family and community engagement is central to creating a holistic and participative early learning program. Educators who have trusting relationships and respectful dialogue with children, families and communities can share information that contributes to deep involvement, collaboration and negotiation* (DETA, 2008, p. 2).

If pre-Prep is to be successful, it needs to be valued by the community. A first step to such valuing is to ensure that pre-Prep is well known in the community, and this involves much more than where the pre-Prep is sited. Among the evaluation sites, there are examples of school-based pre-Prep classes that attract a lot of community interest and engagement, and examples where there is almost no such interest and engagement. The difference between these seems to be in the willingness of the pre-Prep staff to become part of the community as much as possible, AND to ensure that the parents and other community members know that they are welcome in the pre-Prep class, both to be with their children and also to offer their expertise in the educational program.

*I’m really trying to encourage the families to come in and to talk to their kids about what we’re doing in school, but also writing that down and adding it to their portfolios. We’ve got walls within the preschool, and one of them is a culture and a community wall, and anything we do that’s strongly focused on culture within the community, like going out to the library or going to beaches or having
people come in to visit from the community, that also goes there. And we encourage the Home Language of the kids to be put onto those walls. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The school is seen to go out into the community too, and they see people and things happening and the community is aware more of the school being part of the broader community, not just the fenced in area that they come to. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

[I am] using the pedagogical reflections when I try and come up with new ways to engage with our families, and when we think we might be doing something really well, particularly with our family focus, I'll look back at those statements with [the teaching assistant] and try and come up with some more creative ways of doing things. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

**Centrality of Home Language and Standard Australian English in pre-Prep**

One of the key features of *Foundations for Success* is the centrality of Indigenous children’s Home Language in the development of their knowledge, identity and relationships:

The program is language-based, rich in shared and sustained conversation and resources to support the development of children’s first language/s in parallel with their developing awareness about Standard Australian English (SAE) as a second or additional language (DETA, 2008, p. 3). This principle has enabled pre-Prep educators to build educational programs specifically designed to meet the needs of young children by recognising their strengths, building on these, and developing relevant language knowledge in both Home Languages and SAE. Teachers have empowered themselves to work in this historically new paradigm, and teaching assistants have become very important people in pre-Prep classrooms. There are consequences of this change of power which are discussed later.

One aspect that is only beginning to be addressed at some of the evaluation sites is the importance of parents, families and communities recognising that their children, in pre-Prep, but perhaps more importantly in schools, who enter school from a Home Language other than English, will benefit through their recognition as second or additional language learners. Benefits could include extra funding to the school as a whole, and pedagogical and resource targeting for the individual children.

Five hundred students [from Prep to Year 9 and] you have only 30 identified as speaking another language at home! We were wondering whether this was because they [parents] just didn’t know, no one has ever told them, whether it was shame or it’s an expectation that they do speak standard Australian English ... [We talked about] the differences between the languages and that the differences create areas of difficulty. And if we can explicitly teach those areas, he’s going to be able to speak and write standard Australian English and know that it’s a different language. But honestly, parents just haven’t been informed how languages came about. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

While the teacher is not specifically blaming the parents for not knowing the benefits of identifying their child as someone learning English as an additional language, the ramifications in terms of funding for a school with many such children can be quite dire. Such a scenario then restricts the capacity of the school to offer appropriate learning opportunities for such children.
3.4.2 Enabling conditions concerning educational leadership

*Leadership that is committed to the philosophy of pre-Prep and Foundations for Success*

It is well known that reform in education tends to be much more successful if the leadership in the educational site is committed to the reform (Fullan, 2005). This characteristic was illustrated very clearly in the six *Foundations for Success* evaluation sites. In all of the sites, the leadership expressed commitment to the program, but there was evidence that, in some cases, this commitment was superficial or overtaken by lessened commitment from ‘superiors’ in the site hierarchy, or in schools to which children moved from the pre-Prep site. At some sites, expressed commitment from the leadership was not triangulated by other informants in the site, particularly the pre-Prep staff. There was some carefully guarded criticism of the support that had been made available by leadership, particularly in terms of resource allocation. In one site, the pedagogical approaches taken in the school bore little resemblance to those used in the pre-Prep class, resulting in important pedagogical discontinuities from pre-Prep to Prep. This was a decision that had been taken by the school leadership. A suggested solution was to change the way the pre-Prep children were taught, so that it was more in line with the pedagogy adopted in the school. In another site, where children moved from a prior-to-school site using *Foundations for Success* to a school in the neighbouring town, similar discontinuities were observed, with suggestions from the pre-Prep teacher that she had to change what she was doing in her class to accommodate what the children would meet in the school.

The impact of strong leadership committed to *Foundations for Success* was observed in only a couple of the sites. Both the pre-Prep teachers and the school principals discussed the results of such commitment. For example:

>[As a principal, I need to] sit next to them and have the supports wrapped around them until they can fly and then they’ll be fine. And it’s worth the investment. The time invested to start with is worth it. It seems huge as it does with teacher assistants who are just starting into the job and you think ‘Gee, I’ve got to do a lot of support around this’, but it’s worth it I think later, because then they’ll fly and fly really strongly. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

>*I’m so passionate about Foundations for Success and what success we’ve had with it here with [the principal] being the same. She’s just embraced it as a [principal] and is trying to get the school to adopt strategies that we use here to engage families. So I was just so positive because she was so positive, that it was just going to be this wonderful thing and move it up, and it would be different to the past, because I’ve got this [principal] who is really passionate about it too. [Non-Indigenous teacher]*

The importance of appropriate school administrative support beyond the commitment of the principal has also been highlighted. Providing the pre-Prep teachers with the same authority and skill in navigating administrative procedures that they have not had to deal with in the past can be very helpful.

*I think if we didn’t have the total support of admin the way that we have, the whole project would not be anywhere near ... it would have taken three times longer to get to this point. I really feel like ... even when we started ordering stuff, and even though the money was all there, the process, it felt like the girls were really reluctant to go and ask for stuff or to use the ordering process ... they hadn’t been part of that budgeting process.*
So now they’ve got the confidence to go up and do that. But they’ve been welcomed you know, and each little move that they’ve made in that direction has been encouraged. And if it wasn’t, even if it was slightly discouraged, then they wouldn’t have developed the skills that they need. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

It is clear that the relationship of the site leadership to the pre-Prep teachers and the commitment of the leadership to this area of the site are critical to the success of the program. Such strong commitment seems to be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the overall success of Foundations for Success.

3.4.3 Enabling conditions concerning teacher preparation and professional development

Incorporation of knowledge and understanding of pre-Prep into initial teacher education

Many of the non-Indigenous pre-Prep teachers who participated in this evaluation were not aware of the existence of pre-Prep until they were appointed as teachers within the community, and some did not realise that they had been allocated to pre-Prep until after they had arrived in the community to take up their appointment. There was certainly no mention of Foundations for Success in their teacher education courses, and little preparation for the contextual situations in which they found themselves. Clearly, if the program is to continue into the future, this needs to change. The evidence from the evaluation sites in which new teachers entered in 2010 is that there was little done by the exiting teachers to provide transition into the pre-Prep classroom for the entering teacher. While these transition processes need to be improved, presumably under the leadership of the experienced site leaders, it would be of assistance if the graduating teachers knew of the program. The evaluator believes that Foundations for Success is such an important program that it should be studied by all early childhood and primary teacher education students preparing to teach in Queensland. This probably means that teacher educators who do not know about the program would need to be introduced to it by Education Queensland officers before the teacher educators could introduce it to their student teachers. Key aspects that need to be included in the teacher education programs beyond the details of Foundations for Success itself include approaches to teaching young children who are learning English as an additional language, approaches to the education of Indigenous children, and approaches to working in teams of adults, particularly where members of the team are different from the teacher in a number of characteristics, including culture, age and first language.
Culturally and professionally appropriate teacher education for Indigenous teachers from the communities

In some of the evaluation sites, Indigenous teaching assistants were involved in further study, which could lead eventually to a teacher education degree. However, most of these teaching assistants did not aspire to the full degree, and often expressed the feeling that a Level 3 diploma was sufficient for them. At one of the sites, further study, at least to the diploma level, was seen as a condition of employment, and paid time was made available one afternoon per week for intensive study, mentored by the director of the centre. A lot of success had been achieved using this particular approach, but unfortunately, the employment patterns of the Indigenous pre-Prep staff during 2010 meant that they did not complete their planned studies during that year.

At some of the evaluation sites, the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) was, or had been, available. While this program has produced many Indigenous teachers, including some in leadership positions in the evaluation sites, it does not have an early childhood specialisation, thereby making it inappropriate for people aspiring to work as teachers in the pre-Prep year. Given the need for further Indigenous teaching staff in pre-Prep, it would seem fruitful to investigate the possibilities for early childhood teacher education in a mode similar to RATEP, or some other mode that encouraged Indigenous pre-Prep staff to study for a teaching degree while remaining, at least for the most part, in their home communities.

Another possible source of assistance in the quest to produce more fully qualified Indigenous early childhood teachers is the Early Childhood Education Workforce Capacity Project, which is currently being finalised. This project is sponsored by DEEWR and led by Charles Sturt University (CSU).

CSU will build workforce capacity in ECE, particularly in inland and Indigenous Australia, through dual sector partnerships and collaborations with local communities. Project outcomes include new certificate/degree pathways and professional learning modules for qualified early childhood educators (including teachers) and child and family workers (DEEWR, 2008).

Ongoing professional development for all involved in pre-Prep

All of the pre-Prep educators in the evaluation sites were very grateful for any professional development they could obtain from the Foundations for Success program. Of particular note was the work of the professional support teachers. The professional support teachers provided face-to-face support wherever possible, backed with availability via phone, email and chat rooms. For many of the teachers in the more remote sites, their professional support teacher provided a lifeline to resources, organisational information and other colleagues.

Other professional development of particular note included the Foundations for Success conferences held in Cairns from 2007 until 2010. These conferences allowed teams of educators from the 35 sites to join together with their colleagues to explore the basic philosophies and practices encompassed by Foundations for Success. The conferences were important in 2007 and 2008 to introduce the program to the pre-Prep practitioners, and to establish collegial links among the 35 teams. In 2009 and 2010, the conferences played
particular roles in consolidating the program among those educators who had been involved from at least 2008, introducing *Foundations for Success* to educators who had commenced in pre-Prep after the initial influx of materials and information, and linking all the educators in an attempt to improve its sustainability over later years.

Professional development for the *Foundations for Success* program cannot be left to the leadership in each site. Even when this leadership is committed to the program, there is likely to be a struggle for sufficient knowledge about the philosophical and research base, as well as the overall structure of the program, to be available to educators new to the program. Initial teacher education, as suggested above, might help, but by itself, will almost certainly be insufficient. The availability of ongoing professional development in the *Foundations for Success* program is one of the key enabling conditions for its longevity in the 35 communities, particularly given the relatively rapid turnover of non-Indigenous teachers in these communities.

### 3.4.4 Enabling conditions that are systemic

**Opportunities for multi-age settings that involve pre-Prep and Prep children in meaningful and sustained interaction**

In many of the 35 pre-Prep sites using *Foundations for Success*, the educational structures and numbers of students available for pre-Prep have resulted in multi-age classes of at least pre-Prep and Prep children being formed. This occurred substantively at only one of the evaluation sites (Site 6), with the following comments indicative of its success.

*Pre-Prep and Prep together has worked really well, really well. At first I was a bit worried about like thinking ‘How will I cater for the pre-Prep and how will I cater for the Prep? Should I separate them and have like in the morning they go outside, pre-Prep outside and the Prep inside?’ But then it didn’t work. But having them together really helped, yeah.* [Indigenous teacher]

*The advantage is good because you have the bigger ones when you’re in group times, you have the bigger ones that are confident, that are talking and showing good example for the little ones. And then the disadvantage is because I guess, not so much, is when they come in at that early stage and they’re not settled. But after a while they do, but the disadvantage is because they ... I guess it’s the shorter time for them and then they get to go in three hours.* [Indigenous teacher]

*It does work, it does work ... I’ve only been here for a little while, but I think it’s a good thing having the pre-Prep with the Prep, because the Prep is already here, they know what it’s like, they kind of like feed all of that stuff they know onto the kids. So that’s a good thing.* [Indigenous parent]

*I guess, my advantage of having them all together is that I see the changes. And it’s an easy transition I guess, from pre-Prep to Prep, and then from Prep to Year 1.* [Indigenous teacher]

The advantages referred to by these teachers and the parent do point to the need for sites to at least investigate the possibility of placing children from both groups together, and building a two-year curriculum based on the sound pedagogical strengths advocated by *Foundations for Success*. There could be great benefits for children’s transitions to Prep (for example, the presence of older children to show them how school works) and to the more formal structures of Year 1. Such a juxtaposition of pre-Prep and Prep would also place emphasis on the need for Prep to be based on the key pedagogical components of *Foundations for Success*, particularly play and the principle linking Home Language and SAE.
Decisions around the appropriateness of multi-age classes combining pre-Prep and Prep will be made by considering a number of issues. What does seem to be clear from this evaluation is that, with all else being equal, there do not seem to be major disadvantages arising from the development of such multi-age classes. Indeed, there may well be advantages to this arrangement.

**Commitment to consistent and appropriate staffing of pre-Prep classes**

All of the pre-Prep classes in the six evaluation sites were staffed by an early childhood trained teacher and at least one (and up to four) teaching assistant(s). All of the teaching assistants lived in the community in which they were working, and most had grown up in those communities. Three of the teachers (Sites 3, 5 and 6) were Indigenous and came from the communities in which they were working. Sites 1, 2 and 4 had a total of nine non-Indigenous early childhood teachers working in pre-Prep over 2009–10. All of the pre-Prep staff were committed to the education of the children, and all were familiar with the *Foundations for Success* framework.

In some sites, very strong teams of educators had been built. Sometimes, these were teams consisting of the Indigenous teacher and the Indigenous teaching assistants, and in other cases, the non-Indigenous teacher and the Indigenous assistant(s). In every case where such teams existed, substantial time (generally more than one year) had been taken to develop them.

Staff transience, particularly for non-Indigenous teachers, is an issue at all levels of education in remote communities. It seems to be the norm for teachers who are from outside the community to stay in communities for a maximum of two years. While this has ramifications across the board, at the pre-Prep level, there are particular concerns.

1. Sound early childhood practice, and this is reflected in *Foundations for Success*, requires that teachers build rapport with the parents of the children attending pre-Prep, so that parental involvement can be used to extend the children’s learning, both within the pre-Prep program and within the community. Teachers new to the community can find this very difficult to do, even when they know its importance.

2. It takes time for non-Indigenous teachers to build rapport, trust and respect with the community teaching assistants who hold the key to so much knowledge that will make the program work well. New teachers often expressed that this was one of the most difficult parts of the job, and told of the time it takes, time that they sometimes resented having to spend because it took them away from the children.

3. In one of the evaluation sites, the non-Indigenous teacher was beginning to establish a strong team with the three pre-Prep teaching assistants. At the end of 2009, the teacher left the site and went ‘down south’. The teaching assistants were quite concerned about how they would ‘educate’ the new teacher to the community and the way things were done in pre-Prep. One summed up these concerns: ‘I hope she [the new teacher] doesn’t change everything that we’ve been through for the past 18 months. And I hope it still runs the same. And hopefully she’ll understand that.’
By halfway through 2010, the attempts to re-build the team had failed, and all three teaching assistants had left the site.

The quality and experience of the pre-Prep staff is a major determinant of how well any curriculum will be implemented in pre-Prep. Teachers from outside the community need time to adjust to the contexts of both setting and community, and they need substantial orientation to the community, preferably through working with the Indigenous teaching assistants. They also need a range of skills to assist them in building and maintaining strong relationships with their teaching colleagues and the local community.

The development of equitable and professional relationships among all members of the pre-Prep team is critical for the success of the *Foundations for Success* program. All members of the team need to be valued for their expert knowledge, both within the educational setting and within the community. Some of the characteristics that were identified as barriers to effective teams were:

- inexperienced teachers – this was especially marked where new teachers saw themselves as the educational ‘expert’, yet had little local, contextualised knowledge of the community
- lack of teacher preparation for settings that include children who are English as a further language learners, and who come from culturally diverse backgrounds
- Indigenous teaching assistants paid at a much lower rate than the teacher, and at a lower rate than might be obtainable in other positions within the community
- inconsistency in Indigenous staff attendance due to community business and the transient nature of families.

On the other hand, there were some spectacular examples of teams of educators which did work in an equitable manner, with their members using their expertise appropriately.

*Especially for me, because it's not where I'm from and it's so different to where I'm from, she [the teaching assistant] helps me understand how to help the children, that it would be different to how I would expect it to be done, but the children here are much more responsive from it because that's what's normal to them. So I learn a lot from her as to how to deal with kids in situations that come up, and how they learn as well and what they listen for.* [Non-Indigenous teacher]

**Provision of appropriate buildings and other physical resources**

A large part of the $47.5 million dollars for the *Foundations for Success* program was allocated to new and refurbished buildings in most of the 35 communities. Of the six evaluation sites, only two had new buildings and, at another, the original kindy building had been refurbished. Another site was awaiting the settlement of negotiations around land, and the two in already established prior-to-school settings remained in their existing buildings. While it is difficult to ascertain whether these new facilities led directly to an improvement in children’s outcomes after pre-Prep, there is no doubt that they were important in terms of the status afforded to pre-Prep, both within schools and within the communities.
[The new building has made a] big difference for the kids here at the school ... Just to see the progression of that building from scratch. Not only that, but also for the parents, the parents of this year’s pre-Prep and Prep ... [There was] a big impact on the parents wanting to be part of the school because of the new building. And also for the students here at the school and staff. We were really looking forward for this new building and also [the pre-Prep teacher] was really looking forward to moving from that other classroom into that new building. And the difference that that building made, I guess is that it’s been built and it’s really suited for that year level. [Indigenous teacher]

[The building] has made a big difference. The teacher seems more relaxed. There’s more space for the children and it’s their own. Their own, nobody can kick them out of here and she sort of shows it by the way she’s got it presented. [Indigenous parent]

[The building has made] a big difference because there’s a lot of time when we were in the old building there’s no fence around it, they had to share with the bigger kids and you know, bigger kids can be rough. We didn’t have a place to store our outdoor equipment, and if we were to set an obstacle course outside, for sure you’ll have bigger kids on the obstacle course as well ... I think this building has been great, because of the fencing and also it’s not like being in the upper class where the environment has to be structured. Here it’s set up especially for them. It’s been great. [Indigenous teacher]

The new curriculum was the beginning of it, but then to get a new building, it seemed to energise the whole program, in conjunction with the new curriculum and the professional support teacher. The combination of these three things has really lifted the profile of pre-Prep and lifted the confidence of the ladies that do it ...I think the whole rollout of pre-Prep and the valuing of people and the really lifting of the profile of it, and, then, to get a brand new building smack in the front of our school has just been huge — for the ladies personally, but also for pre-Prep in our community. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

As well as the building and refurbishment program, the project also provided funds for substantial purchases of teaching materials and equipment. In all of the six sites, there was evidence of much appropriate early childhood equipment being available. Some of this had been built up over many years of preschool education on the site, some was natural material available from the local environment, and some had been made available through the Foundations for Success project. At most of the sites, there was strong support for the pre-Prep program, and this was translated into access to equipment.

I think we’ve got pretty good resources here at the moment. If not, then I’ve got access to them through [the school principal] anyway, so all I have to do is think of what I need and I can just go and let him know. So I think we’re doing ... I don’t think we’re missing out on anything so far. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The building and resourcing component in the Foundations for Success project has been of particular importance in raising the status of pre-Prep in communities, and especially in schools. It has provided a visible symbol of the government’s commitment to pre-Prep.

**Successful transition from pre-Prep to Prep**

In the Foreword for Foundations for Success, the then Minister wrote:

*Foundations for Success enhances Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s continuity of learning, laying the foundations for their success in learning as they make the transition into Prep and Year 1 (DETA, 2008, p. i).*
Clearly, one of the reasons for instituting pre-Prep in the present form was to assist Indigenous children as they made their transition into school.

There has been a great deal of research and practice undertaken in Australia over the last 15 years with the aim of enhancing children’s transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2006, 2007; Petriwskyj, 2005). One of the findings of this research is that transition to school is a multifaceted process that involves many stakeholders over an extended period of time. No one part of the transition endeavour can ensure that children’s transitions to school are going to be successful. While ‘continuity of learning’ may be an important aspect of transition to school, it would appear that there are many social and emotional aspects of the transition that are critical. In particular, for Indigenous children moving from a preschool situation such as a pre-Prep class using Foundations for Success into mainstream schools with state-wide (soon to be national) curricula, there are many daunting prospects (Dockett et al., 2007).

Data from the present evaluation of Foundations for Success have not provided a great deal of information concerning transition to school beyond some hopes from the pre-Prep educators and parents.

_We had a meeting last week about transition for our little ones with the Prep teachers for next year ... It seems to be part of our bigger conversations at the moment: just how the families and communities are engaging in the Foundations for Success pre-Prep here. I think that’s going to be a big change with the transition, having a lot more family involvement._ [Non-Indigenous teacher]

_They [children who had moved from pre-Prep in 2009 to Prep in 2010] were confident, they were independent, they were talking about how they desperately wanted to go to the big school ... they were ready. And we had lots of transition to Prep last year and they were just so ready to go there._ [Non-Indigenous teacher]

_The principal decided that she wanted instead, of the folios going home at the end of the year, she wanted the teachers to see the folios, because that’s really the only bit of evidence that we’ve got. We’ve got the early learning profile, but that’s words on a page only. The folio is so rich. So we decided this year for the first time that the folios would go up to the school, and that in the second week of school the parents would have an interview with the Prep teacher and their child ... So in the lead up to that, the new Prep teacher said to me ‘Why have I got these folios, I can’t report on pre-Prep, I don’t know anything about it’. And I said ‘Well, you were never supposed to’. I did give her a curriculum document when I first met her. But I said ‘No, it’s not ...’, I said ‘I’ve reported, this was for you to see what was in the folio and it would be a conversation starter with the child, showing you their folio’. And I said ‘Have you had a chance to look at them?’ and she said ‘No’. Wasn’t interested. So I mean, I don’t know, you can do these things and have the best of intentions but I thought ... If I was a Prep teacher, that would have just been such a rich moment._ [Non-Indigenous teacher]

_It does make a big difference for the Year 1s. In that regard where whatever [the pre-Prep/Prep teacher] is doing down there, setting the foundation, and by the time they come up to Year 1, I can see it in their ability, what they’ve learnt in pre-Prep and Prep, and now it’s showing in Year 1s and the Year 2s. So it does make a big difference ... Yeah, I think it shows in their academic success, especially at that early age, their recognition of letters and numbers. And as you go into Year 1 and Year 2, they’re starting to learn the value of numbers and they can identify that clearly and it shows._ [Indigenous teacher]
There’s opportunity for the little girl to be exposed to the education system. It prepares her to go into Grade 1. And I can see how she’s really advanced in the way she speaks, and at that young age she’s able to sound letters, she’s able to identify letters and sound them out. It shows me that she’s grown, she’s thinking like how the school children are thinking, and it’s really preparing her for that next big jump. [Indigenous parent]

While most participants at the evaluation sites agree that Foundations for Success has been of great benefit to all involved, there were some notes of warning raised. In particular, in one site where the children moved from the local community into school in a neighbouring town — usually for Grade 1, but sometimes for Prep — there were some misgivings which may be based on some misunderstandings of the overall program.

If we don’t tell them what mainstream is all about or the language that they can use there, but only concentrate on Home Language, we’re setting them up for failure. So we can’t just keep them in our little cultural cocoon. Yeah, so keeping them in their little cultural cocoon is not preparing them for nothing. It’s really not, it’s not doing nothing for them and we’re only setting them up to fail, because they’re going to think when they go to Grade 1, it’s just going to be exactly like this: all the teachers are going to understand them; all their needs are going to be met. [Indigenous teacher]

In this site, there was even some suggestion that children might be ‘harmed’ by programs such as Foundations for Success if the philosophy is not carried through into formal schooling. However, the notion that one might adapt the program in order to fit better with the formalism of school (versus adapting the school programs to fit with the children arriving from their Foundations for Success experiences) did not gain much traction among the teachers participating in the evaluation. This situation echoes the well-known transition to school issue of children being ready for school versus schools being ready for children (Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2010). Perhaps the chance to have one excellent year under Foundations for Success more than outweighs the potential for some less than excellent years.

Honestly, to give them one good year of something that they can remember and hold on to is better than 10 years of misery. When you think back as a child, of the best years in your life. I remember when I was in Grade 1, I still remember my Grade 1 teacher. I don’t remember any other teacher that I had, but I remember my Grade 1 teacher: her kindness, her compassion, her understanding. They were the good years. Or that was a good year. So I’m hoping that these children will have those memories, and when they’re adults, maybe rekindle them. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

If Foundations for Success can influence children’s transition to school positively, then it will have achieved one of its major aims. The data presented here indicate that while this may be the case, it will need to be monitored in the future. While it is not suggested that Foundations for Success be continued into Prep, it does need to be considered, given successful transition to school is so important for future school success (Alexander & Entwisle, 1998; Peters, 2010), just how Indigenous children moving from a program based on the curriculum framework, and their families, can be accommodated in what are generally much more formal school programs.
Strong and explicit connections between Foundations for Success and other state and national curriculum guidelines or frameworks

*Foundations for Success* was released in 2008, thus preceding the release of both the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* (DEEWR. 2009a) and the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline (QKLG)* (QSA, 2010). The EYLF provides the definitive framework for education in the year two years before Year 1 of school, and there is COAG agreement that all jurisdictions will adhere to this framework. Hence, the pre-Prep classes in the 35 communities implementing *Foundations for Success* will be required to meet this stipulation. The QKLG:

> supports kindergarten teachers’ professional practice in a range of contexts across Queensland. The guideline is based on the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) and embraces the inclusive vision that ‘all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life’.

> While the EYLF focuses on children from birth to five years, the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline aims to specifically enrich children’s learning in the kindergarten year. In Queensland, the kindergarten year is the year before the Preparatory Year of schooling. Throughout the kindergarten year, children’s right to experience the joy of childhood is fundamental and learning is promoted through play, and emergent and planned learning experiences and interactions (QSA, 2010, p. 2).

Thus, the QKLG has a very similar overall purpose to that of *Foundations for Success*, but is to be generally applied across Queensland rather than only in the specific 35 communities that form the ambit of *Foundations for Success*.

The EYLF is based on five principles and eight practices. The QKLG integrates these principles and practices to develop eight principles. *Foundations for Success* is also based on a set of eight principles, many of which echo those in the national and state documents, but all of which are more specifically targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. An indication of the explicit links that can be made between these principles and those in the EYLF and QKLG is provided below.

**Table 4. Explicit links between principles and practices in Foundations for Success, EYLF and QKLG**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Foundations for Success principles</strong></th>
<th><strong>EYLF principles and practices</strong></th>
<th><strong>QKLG principles</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Knowing who you are’ and having a</td>
<td>• Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships</td>
<td>• Respect for and response to diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive sense of cultural identity is</td>
<td>• Respect for diversity</td>
<td>• Holistic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>central to Aboriginal and Torres</td>
<td>• Holistic approaches</td>
<td>• Respectful relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strait Islander children’s social,</td>
<td>• Responsiveness to children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional, intellectual, physical and</td>
<td>• Cultural competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiritual wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong family and community</td>
<td>• Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships</td>
<td>• Holistic learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partnerships enable improved health,</td>
<td>• Partnerships</td>
<td>• Respectful relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning and wellbeing for</td>
<td>• Holistic approaches</td>
<td>• Shared decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>• High expectations and equity</td>
<td>• High expectations and equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children are competent and capable</td>
<td>• Respect for diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and have been learning since birth</td>
<td>• Ongoing learning and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice</td>
<td>Responsive to Diversity</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Responsiveness to children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning through play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural competence</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Home Language/s** define every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child – their knowledge, identity and relationships

| High expectations and equity |
| • Respect for diversity |
| • Cultural competence |

| Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships |
| • High expectations and equity |
| • Respect for diversity |
| • Holistic approaches |
| • Responsiveness to children |
| • Cultural competence |

| Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships |
| • High expectations and equity |
| • Holistic learning |
| • Respectful relationships |

| Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships |
| • High expectations and equity |
| • Holistic learning |
| • Continuity in learning |

| Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships |
| • High expectations and equity |
| • Holistic approaches |
| • Intentional teaching |
| • Cultural competence |

**Monitoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning** is an integral part of the learning–teaching process

| Partnerships |
| • Ongoing learning and reflective practice |
| • Holistic approaches |
| • Responsiveness to children |
| • Cultural competence |
| • Assessment for learning |

The three curriculum frameworks use these principles and practices to develop learning areas or learning outcomes which are quite similar across all three frameworks (see Table 5).
Table 5. Explicit links between learning areas/learning outcomes in Foundations for Success, EYLF and QKLG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Foundations for Success learning areas</strong></th>
<th><strong>EYLF learning outcomes</strong></th>
<th><strong>QKLG learning and development areas</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Being proud and strong                    | • Children have a strong sense of identity  
• Children are connected with and contribute to their world  
• Children have a strong sense of wellbeing | • Identity  
• Connectedness  
• Wellbeing |
| Being a communicator                      | • Children are connected with and contribute to their world  
• Children are effective communicators | • Connectedness  
• Communicating |
| Being an active participant               | • Children are connected with and contribute to their world  
• Children are confident and involved learners | • Connectedness  
• Active learning |
| Being healthy and safe                    | • Children have a strong sense of wellbeing | • Wellbeing |
| Being a learner                           | • Children are confident and involved learners  
• Children are effective communicators | • Active learning  
• Communicating |

The EYLF and QKLG are the federal and state mandated frameworks for education in the Year 1 minus two classes across Queensland. Even though Foundations for Success pre-dates both the EYLF and the QKLG, Tables 4 and 5 show that there is a great deal of similarity between the three documents in terms of the underlying philosophy and principles, and the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be addressed by each. Foundations for Success provides an alternative way of addressing the requirements of the EYLF and QKLG while, at the same time, addressing the particular strengths and needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in the 35 communities in which Foundations for Success has been implemented.

**Explicit valuing of Indigenous knowledges and the holders of those knowledges**

Foundations for Success is based on eight key principles which recognise that ‘[Q]uality programs assert the legitimacy of diverse cultures and languages to maximise the learning potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the wellbeing of their families’ (DETA, 2008, p. 2). Ready access to Indigenous knowledges relevant to the local contexts is critical to the realisation of this assertion.

In some of the evaluation sites, Indigenous knowledges are accessible through the Indigenous pre-Prep teacher. There can be no doubt that being able to staff all pre-Prep classes with highly capable, early childhood education graduates who are also fluent
speakers of the local language(s), are experienced teachers, preferably outside their own communities as well as within them, and can bring their own Indigenous knowledges to bear, would be highly desirable. Unfortunately, this is also highly unlikely to happen in the near- or even medium-term future. However, at the evaluation sites where such a pre-Prep teacher is in place, *Foundations for Success* was flourishing, and the children were learning in exciting, relevant and empowering ways.

Many of the evaluation sites did not have such a teacher in their pre-Prep class(es) and at some, this lack was noticeable. However, at others, different approaches have resulted in quality delivery of pre-Prep. The defining feature of these sites was the explicit valuing of the Indigenous knowledges of the teaching assistants, and the genuine partnerships that had been built among these people and the designated teacher. In one site, the relationship between the teacher and the teaching assistant was so symbiotic and so developed that it was almost seamless, resulting in the school principal and parents, as well as the pre-Prep educators, referring to the ‘team’ rather than the ‘teacher’, and considering the members of the team — the teacher and the teaching assistant — as having equal and complementary roles in the education of the young children in the community. Such a productive relationship takes time and respect in its building, and support from those in leadership positions.

> In reality it all depends on the confidence of the teacher assistant and the relationship the teacher assistant and teacher have ... Because for the teacher aide to stand up and deliver the learning, the teacher might be upset, but if they say ‘Look I really need you to get up and explain this for me’. But if the teacher aide isn’t feeling confident or if those two don’t have a good relationship ... You can see what a good relationship does by looking down there [pre-Prep] at how [teacher] and [teaching assistant] work together. In reality it’s something that we’re still struggling with. In some classrooms, it’s going along really well, and then in other classrooms it’s not. But we’re certainly going in the right direction and I think it’s pre-Prep putting it out there. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

> I think it can be very, very successful, but it just depends on the personality of the teachers that come in, the recognition of the teacher assistant and their knowledge. I think the principal’s attitudes have a lot to do with it as well. What they think of early childhood and how they can support both their staff. Not just the teacher but the teacher assistant. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

It is clear from the data gathered in this evaluation that the role of the Indigenous knowledge holders working with pre-Prep classes is critical to the fulfilment of the aims of *Foundations for Success*. There were examples within the evaluation sites where the Indigenous knowledges were held by the designated teacher, and other examples where the knowledges were held by teaching assistants, and some where both scenarios held. One of the results of the valuing of the Indigenous knowledges held by the teaching team was that community engagement in the pre-Prep program was enhanced because of the trust and respect in which ‘team’ members were held by the families and community.

Where *Foundations for Success* has been successful, Indigenous knowledges have been shared with the children in meaningful and relevant ways, and have formed the basis for the development of effective teams of educators in pre-Prep and enhanced community engagement. Where the program has not been as successful, this sharing has not occurred to the same extent. The success of the program depends on the valuing of these Indigenous knowledges in each of the communities. However, it is often the case that the employment conditions, including salary, as well as the requirements for professional development, do
not seem to value the knowledges that are so important to the success of *Foundations for Success*.

We don’t value the community’s culture, so we don’t pay them to come in and teach the children culture. Even though there’s an argument saying ‘Well these are their children and they should be teaching them that’. But if we truly valued it, if we really did think that this is something we want the children to have and feel proud of, why aren’t we employing cultural teachers to help the children? If there are several different cultures, maybe we have to employ several different community members. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Perhaps slightly more bluntly, the situation could be described in the following way:

*That’s what needs to change. That these girls [Indigenous teaching assistants], they need to say ‘Well, if I’m running this show; if I have to teach [the non-Indigenous teacher] all this ****, you pay me properly to do it!’* [Indigenous teacher]

Another important way in which Indigenous knowledges, that are so critical to the successful implementation of *Foundations for Success*, could be valued would be to recognise them in the same ways that other ‘prior knowledge and experience’ is recognised in formal awards at certificate, diploma and degree level. In this way, Indigenous knowledges could be recognised as valuable in the professional development of Indigenous staff, and as one way in which some flexibility might be provided to people seeking a more timely route through the systemic requirements for further learning and accreditation.

Concrete ways for valuing the Indigenous knowledges of the educators implementing *Foundations for Success* need to be found. While goodwill and charming camaraderie are important, they are not sufficient for the ongoing success of the program.
Chapter 4: The major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of *Foundations for Success*

4.1 Introduction

Data for this section of the report have been gathered through the same conversations that were used in generating the results presented previously. No assessment of children, for example, to ascertain levels of literacy and numeracy or other developmental indicators was undertaken, as this was deemed to be inappropriate to the cultural contexts of the evaluation sites, and of doubtful measurement validity. Instead, comments from educators and community members have been used to provide overall perceptions of the outcomes resulting from the implementation of *Foundations for Success*. Most of these comments point to positive outcomes for children’s learning, and for enhanced relationships between educators and families and communities. There are also some signs of enhanced community engagement in systemic education. The extent of any ‘enhancements’ varied from evaluation site to site and, in some cases, reflected the nature of the implementation of the program.

In settings where *Foundations for Success* had been implemented with a reasonable level of fidelity, there was clear evidence the program had a major positive impact on student outcomes, with educators reporting that students who had completed the program and were in Prep were achieving higher outcomes in areas such as literacy and numeracy than children in Grade 1 who had not been through the program. While there is no measure of direct causation for such improvement, the attribution was largely to children’s improved overall competence and confidence as a result of their participation in *Foundations for Success*.

There was evidence that the implementation of *Foundations for Success* could help enhance family and community engagement in the education of their children. In turn, the evidence suggests that such enhanced engagement could lead to improved student learning outcomes.

However, there was significant concern about the lack of continuity between the pre-Prep curricular environment and the school environment, with many suggesting that the difference between the two environments could have a negative impact, in spite of the good work done in *Foundations for Success*. If compatible educational philosophies are not found in the school environment, some educators were worried about confusing, or instilling false expectations in, children about what different education settings would expect of them.

In some sites, the perceived tension between the valuing of Home Language in pre-Prep and the need to have a sound grasp of SAE in order to have a successful transition to school was raised. While this might be taken to indicate that Home Language is not being valued in school, such a perception was not shared across all of the six evaluation sites.

The impact of national testing in Grade 3 and beyond was mentioned by some of the pre-Prep educators as a disincentive to remaining faithful to the *Foundations for Success*
approaches. Even at this early level, a small number of educators were concerned that they were being expected to begin the enormous task of getting children ready for these culturally and linguistically inappropriate tests.

4.2 Outcomes for children

Much of the evidence for the impact of Foundations for Success on outcomes for children has been canvassed earlier in this report. However, some further quotes are enlightening.

_The Grade 1/2 teacher said ‘I can’t believe how far advanced these Grade 1s are. This is fantastic. I just did not expect that they were going to be at this level.’ [Non-Indigenous teacher]_

_I think the confidence is the big thing ... I think all those other big things will happen, but if the children can leave pre-Prep and come to school confident, feeling good about being a part of the group, all of the rest of that academic learning, that school learning, will fall into place._ [Non-Indigenous teacher]

_I think their confidence as little learners has come on a lot, and I think just when you see them writing and having a go at writing, some of the work samples hung up, then they are like what you used to see in Year 1, and they’re two years younger now. And it’s not been forced on them and they don’t all do it. Some of them just still aren’t at that phase or stage, but to see the work samples that they’re very happy to do and excited about, and they can tell you about it, yeah, it’s pretty exciting and it’s showing in Prep._ [Non-Indigenous teacher]

Not surprisingly, most commentary around the benefits of Foundations for Success for children emphasised preparation for school. However, there were some that saw the program enhancing children’s lives in the present as well as the future. That is, they saw that pre-Prep can also be a place for children to live in the here and now. While it would seem that many of the pre-Prep educators would hold personal philosophies that honour the children’s ‘being’ as well as their ‘becoming’, pressures for later achievement have resulted in Foundations for Success being interpreted as a curriculum framework designed to ‘bridge the gap’ in the achievement of academic goals, with a particular focus on preparation for school.

4.3 Outcomes for teachers

As has been discussed previously, many educators have valued their experience with Foundations for Success, particularly in terms of the legitimisation it has provided for many practices around the valuing of Home Language and culture. For many non-Indigenous teachers with little experience teaching in the community contexts visited in this evaluation, Foundations for Success has provided a comprehensive framework for their practice with pre-Prep children. For many of the Indigenous educators who participated in this evaluation, Foundations for Success has strengthened their own self and cultural identity, and provided them with a route for further professional development. For example, at one site, the emphasis on planning and documentation through learning stories led to daily meetings of all pre-Prep educators in the site. This not only led to enhanced planning for individual children, but also had professional development outcomes for both the non-Indigenous and Indigenous educators.

_I need to make sure that all the teachers are valuing the children for who they are, but also for the learning that they’re doing and engaging in that learning ... I mean respecting these kids as learners_
and realising that they are helping by just engaging with them, and that has definitely come about through those learning stories. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

There have been a number of examples about how the implementation of Foundations for Success has enabled the pre-Prep educators to influence what might happen in the later years of children’s schooling. These show another facet of the outcomes for educators.

So he [the Year 2, 3 teacher] is taking all the ideas to go and share and practise it in his class, because what the kids are doing here has really amazed him. They can do more than the Year 1, honestly speaking. [Indigenous teacher]

The [initial] pressure about planning and stuff like that has changed you know. Like there was initially, particularly when the kids became enrolled [in the school], [pressure around] you’re part of this [school] so I want to see your term planning etc. We’ve been able to negotiate with the admin and say well look, this is really what real planning looks like down here, and this is why. Because we do this and then this is added on and then that’s added on, and it grows like this and that’s the way that pre-Prep is. [Non-Indigenous teacher]

The Foundations for Success program has provided many opportunities for professional development of staff, both through meetings in Cairns open to all educators in the 35 community sites, and through regular access to professional support teachers. While neither of these opportunities is expected to continue into the future, they have provided a substantial boost to many of the educators in the evaluation sites. Consideration of continuing professional development is needed.

4.4 Outcomes for families and communities

Much evidence about the value of Foundations for Success to families and communities has been canvassed earlier. Outcomes for families and communities stimulated by Foundations for Success consisted, in a number of the evaluation sites, of greater opportunities for interaction with the teachers and greater knowledge of what the children were doing in pre-Prep. However, in many sites, there was little evidence of increased family and community engagement. In these sites, there seemed to be a continuing perception among some teachers that there was little interest or little capability in the community for such engagement. As a result, little was being done to foster such engagement.

In other sites, family and community engagement were flourishing.

*Foundations for Success was getting the parents more involved in their kid's education at school.*

[Indigenous teacher]

Sometimes, the success of Foundations for Success was discerned as putting some extra community pressure on educators in subsequent grades.

*After the meeting last night, the parents were coming up to me and saying 'Why is it, what’s the difference between what you’re doing and what Year 1 and 2, the lower grades, are doing there? In behaviour wise, in planning wise, in everything'. They were quite amazed and they wanted to know why couldn’t this be happening there. So I had to talk about the transition, and I said like the bridge going across, I said I can go halfway ... the lower class teachers have to come halfway and meet me. He needs to be familiar with what I’m doing and I need to know what he’s doing to be able to help each other. And they go ‘Oh, so is that going to happen?’*

[Indigenous teacher]
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The evaluation of Foundations for Success was undertaken over the 2009–10 period in six of the 35 sites in which the program is being implemented. It considered data derived from conversational interviews, informal observations and conversations undertaken during four visits to each of the sites, as well as access to contextual information and documentation for the relevant sites. The analysis of these data was structured around the four main purposes for evaluation. Findings relating to each of these purposes are summarised in this chapter of the report.

The overall purpose of the evaluation study was to report on:

- the process undertaken to develop Foundations for Success to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the extent to which the Foundations for Success guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school
- the major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of Foundations for Success.

5.1 The process undertaken to develop Foundations for Success to determine approaches to curriculum development that lead to quality early learning programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The Foundations for Success program is an excellent example of how to go about the development of curricula for young children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The initial and continuing consultation processes with communities were sensitive, extensive and comprehensive, and met the accepted protocols for working in these communities (see, for example, Queensland Government Department of Communities and the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, 2005). Data drawn from the evaluation indicate strongly that, at least in some of the communities, the consultation processes laid the foundations for pre-Prep to be seen as a prestigious addition to the communities, and for local Indigenous educators to feel that their expertise and cultural experience in the communities, and in early childhood education, were valued. The fact that the Foundations for Success program also brought with it the promise of new or substantially refurbished buildings and many educational materials also helped enhance the status of pre-Prep.
The early appointment of professional support teachers is also an approach that helped both the curriculum development — through their involvement with the central writing team — and its acceptance into the communities. While their small number meant that all of the professional support teachers were stretched very thinly across their communities, they provided stability in the light of extensive change for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators implementing the program. They also were able to provide a great deal of support in matters such as planning and resource management.

The quality of the work of the *Foundations for Success* writing team, backed by the project reference group, must not be discounted in this summary of important contributions. What was achieved by this team in such a short period of time stands as testament to what can be achieved by skilled and experienced people under strong and knowledgeable leadership. The quality of the work has been recognised nationally and internationally, and has provided a template for future such endeavours. It is of little surprise that many of the elements of *Foundations for Success* are to be found embedded in the more recent early childhood curriculum documents including the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009a) and the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline* (QSA, 2010).

In summary, there were extensive attempts by the *Foundations for Success* team to involve all stakeholders in the development of the program. The components of this involvement — community consultation and collaboration; access to professional support teachers; an engaged reference group; regular professional development meetings; and ongoing engagement of educational leaders — show sensitivity to the complexity of the endeavour and to the community processes integral to its success.

### 5.1.1 Key findings

- The overall *Foundations for Success* program is an excellent example of how to develop curricula for young children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- Families, communities and educational staff need to be convinced of the importance of pre-Prep for the current and future education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children if it is to be effective.

- The development of the *Foundations for Success* guidelines is ongoing. In particular, it needs to be brought into alignment with the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* and the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline*, while maintaining its current integrity and focus.
5.2 The extent to which the *Foundations for Success* guidelines have supported educators to plan, implement and reflect on an early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

There is no doubt that *Foundations for Success* has supported educators in their early learning programs in the six evaluation sites. The extent of this support in practice depends on many contextual issues. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that *Foundations for Success*, through its underlying principles, planned learning approaches, pedagogical approaches and processes of documenting and reflecting has facilitated much exciting, meaningful and innovative learning among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, pre-Prep teachers, parents and other community members.

There are many issues and challenges related to the implementation of *Foundations for Success* that have had to be addressed. Many of these have been canvassed extensively in this report, but there are some that specifically relate to the guidelines themselves that do need to be considered. For example, the changing political and practice landscape in early childhood education in Queensland and Australia means that *Foundations for Success* does not specifically reflect the structure of either the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009a) or the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline* (QSA, 2010), the two mandatory documents related to practice in pre-Prep. Although *Foundations for Success* pre-dates these mandatory documents, it has a great deal in common with them. *Foundations for Success* will need to be revised in order to make it directly compatible with these two documents. It is hoped that the underlying philosophy and approach in *Foundations for Success* can be retained and strengthened during this process of revision, and that the revised document can connect the more recent documents quite specifically to the Indigenous contexts in the 35 *Foundations for Success* communities.

On the basis of the evaluation undertaken and reported here, it is clear that *Foundations for Success* has the potential to support teachers in their work with pre-Prep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. The extent to which this has occurred varies across sites, according to the levels of fidelity with which the program has been adopted, the knowledge, experience and skills of the teacher teams involved in its implementation, and many other enabling conditions. The evaluation has shown what is possible when the conditions align to encourage quality early childhood and culturally appropriate practice in pre-Prep, and has also highlighted what conditions are needed to provide the best possible chance of such alignment.

5.2.1 Key findings

- *Foundations for Success* has facilitated exciting, meaningful and innovative learning in the communities in which the evaluation was undertaken.

- The extent to which *Foundations for Success* can support teachers in their work with pre-Prep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities depends on the levels of fidelity with which the program is adopted, as well as the knowledge, experience and skills of the teachers involved.
5.3 The enabling conditions and pedagogies that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development as they transition between home, an early learning program and the early years of school

There are many enabling conditions and pedagogies that need to be in place for programs such as Foundations for Success to work to their full potential. All of these contribute, in conjunction with the planned learning, explicit pedagogies, documentation and reflection outlined in Foundations for Success, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders children’s learning and development. The explicit enabling conditions that have been generated from the data analysed in the evaluation are listed below. Some of these enabling conditions have a local scope, while others are system-wide. All presume the appropriate consultation with Indigenous Elders and communities so that the establishment of joint approaches to each can be achieved.

5.3.1 Enabling conditions that link pre-Prep, families and community

- Community determination of the scheduling of pre-Prep classes
- Flexibility in determining the location of pre-Prep classes
- Strong links between pre-Prep and community
- Centrality of Home Language and Standard Australian English in pre-Prep

5.3.2 Enabling conditions concerning educational leadership

- Leadership that is committed to the philosophy of pre-Prep and Foundations for Success

5.3.3 Enabling conditions concerning teacher preparation and professional development

- Incorporation of knowledge and understanding of pre-Prep into initial teacher education
- Culturally and professionally appropriate teacher education for Indigenous teachers from the communities
- Ongoing professional development for all involved in pre-Prep

5.3.4 Enabling conditions that are systemic

- Opportunities for multi-age settings that involve pre-Prep and Prep children in meaningful and sustained interaction
- Commitment to consistent and appropriate staffing of pre-Prep classes
- Provision of appropriate buildings and other physical resources
• Promotion of successful transition from pre-Prep to Prep

• Strong and explicit connections between Foundations for Success and other state and national curriculum guidelines or frameworks

• Explicit valuing of Indigenous knowledges and the holders of those knowledges

While there is no suggestion that this is an exclusive list of required enabling conditions, these have emerged from the data analysis. It is likely that reaching agreement among community members, educators and systems about this list will go a long way to achieving the aims of the program. In fact, probably the most important enabling condition for the successful implementation of programs such as Foundations for Success is the willingness of all concerned to interact in trusting, respectful and open ways, with a clear focus on the wellbeing of the children involved. Such interactions are features of the teams who have implemented Foundations for Success successfully.

5.3.5 Key findings

• Positive, respectful links among pre-Prep teachers, families and communities facilitate joint decisions around the implementation and valuing of pre-Prep education.

• The honouring and celebration of both Home Language and Standard Australian English is not only educationally sound, but is the single most important defining feature of the Foundations for Success program.

• Educational leadership that is committed to the philosophy of pre-Prep in general, and Foundations for Success in particular, is necessary, if not sufficient, for the success of the program.

• Teachers who are to implement the Foundations for Success guidelines need to be taught how to do this through initial teacher education and ongoing professional development.

• Given the importance of local cultural, community and language knowledge to the implementation of Foundations for Success, it is critical that local Indigenous staff’s expertise be recognised in terms of access and progress through teacher education, remuneration and other aspects that will facilitate their continued employment in pre-Prep classrooms.

• The provision of new or refurbished pre-Prep buildings and adequate teaching resources facilitated the successful implementation of the program.

• There are some challenges around how a program informed by Foundations for Success is perceived in terms of the transition to school of the pre-Prep children.
These challenges require the collaboration of pre-Prep and Prep teachers, as well as the leadership in the settings.

- Successful implementation of Foundations for Success relies on the availability of people who can access Indigenous knowledges relevant to the local community. These knowledges and the holders of these knowledges must be valued explicitly.

5.4 The major outcomes for children, educators, families and communities stemming from the progressive implementation of Foundations for Success

Many of the teachers who participated in the evaluation, including three experienced principals, reported that they felt Foundations for Success had contributed to the enhancement of outcomes for children, particularly around literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional development. They were also adamant that the program had increased the educators’ levels of understanding about the issues involved in pre-Prep education for Indigenous children.

In some communities, the prestige that had been afforded pre-Prep during the initial development of the program, and the refurbishment or building of new facilities, was noted. While levels of community engagement with pre-Prep seemed to be increasing in some communities, there still seemed to be a long way to go to achieve what might be seen as satisfactory levels of engagement.

There were some misgivings about how the apparent advances related to the Foundations for Success program might be sustained into primary school. For example, there were some stark reminders that the same valuing of Home Language and culture would not necessarily be seen as the children moved into primary school, even in situations where the pre-Prep was housed within a school. Rather, there did seem to be some likelihood, in some of the sites, that more formal approaches to the education of young children that had been introduced into the school might be introduced to the pre-Prep as well.

5.4.1 Key findings

- In the opinion of teachers in the evaluation sites, participation in Foundations for Success has had positive benefits in terms of children’s literacy, numeracy and social development outcomes.

- Continuity of curriculum and pedagogy across the transition to school was of concern to many pre-Prep teachers.

More work needs to be done on the matter of enhancement of outcomes for all participants in Foundations for Success. There are many circumstances that impact on such outcomes, and a set of curriculum guidelines, even when reinforced through facilities and materials, is but one of the pieces in the puzzle. Nonetheless, at least in the short period of the evaluation, Foundations for Success does seem to have enhanced outcomes in many different ways. In the spirit of the overall report, two quotes provide a fitting finale.
I like the Foundations for Success. It is a great program if applied properly, and when you apply it properly, that means just not getting in there and getting all your kids to come to school every day or all your kids to know this, that and whatever. Being strong in their culture and being proud and can communicate great and all that kind of stuff, because when they go to the next level, those kids have to use exactly what they did here and apply it to that situation. Are they going to be confident in doing that? Are they really going to be confident in doing that when sometimes it’s just such a big step? [Indigenous teacher]

I think the Foundations for Success has been a huge success. I’m just really impressed with this curriculum. It’s the first one that we’ve had that has really acknowledged the clientele that we’re dealing with. Because of the whole acknowledgment that the first language is not English, we don’t just pretend that it’s not and just carry on anyway. We actually acknowledge that and work it into the curriculum. The amount of parent and community involvement that the curriculum encourages the teachers to build and develop [is amazing] ... I can’t believe the amount of parent involvement we had last year compared to years before. Just huge. And our task now is, or our challenge I guess, is for us to make this continue, now that the kids are up at the big school, as they call it up here. [Non-Indigenous teacher]
Personal reflection and acknowledgments

This project has been an opportunity of a lifetime for the evaluator. I have been able to visit many wonderful places and meet many early childhood educators, children, parents and community members whom I otherwise would never have met. I have made many friends and have gained a renewed appreciation of the skills, dedication and expertise of early childhood educators. I have also learned a great deal about the Indigenous people of Australia. I have gained knowledge that perhaps all Australians should have, but very few get the opportunity to acquire.

I have seen some wonderful examples of early childhood practice during my visits to the six evaluation sites, and have been continually entranced by the ‘wonder’ that young children bring to their learning, play and lives. I have been inspired by early childhood educators who are able to move seamlessly between languages, so that the children not only understand what they are being asked, but are also having their languages extended. I have been amazed at the quality and productivity of some of the teams of educators I have seen. In short, I have seen enough to know that *Foundations for Success* can work in all of its dimensions. Of course, there have been sites in which the program has worked much better than in others. That is not the fault of the program.

There are many people whom I must thank for the opportunity that this evaluation of *Foundations for Success* has afforded me. Other than Emma Kearney, who has been the rock on which the analysis of hundreds of pages of transcript has rested and whom I thank most sincerely, I am not going to name any of them specifically, both for reasons of confidentiality and because I do not know all of their names. Rather, let me simply say a deep and heartfelt thank you to all of the following groups of people:

- the children in the six evaluation sites: thank you for encouraging me to join your play
- the pre-Prep educators: without your professional expertise, your openness and candour I would have had little to write about in this report
- the school principals and centre directors: thank you for putting up with my requests for visits and my prying
- the parents: I did not meet as many of you as I would have liked, but those whom I did meet provided another dimension to my understanding of pre-Prep
- community members: I really appreciated being made feel welcome in your communities, being shown around, having my questions answered and my concerns allayed
- the professional support teachers: what an amazing group of people dedicated to the enhancement of pre-Prep experiences for everyone
• members of the Brisbane-based *Foundations for Success* team and the reference group for this evaluation: thanks for encouraging me to undertake the evaluation, having the faith that I could do it, for your advice and for your patience

• the team at the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University who undertook the logistical exercises involved in getting me to and from the evaluation sites

• the very competent group consisting of research assistants and transcription expert who have worked tirelessly with the data to ensure that evidence was readily available

• my partner, who provided both professional and personal solace throughout the evaluation and accompanied me on one round of the visits

• my son, who told me that it would be OK to be away for three weeks at a time because he thought it might help others.

I hope that this evaluation will lead to even better practice in pre-Prep and kindy classes throughout Queensland. It has been a privilege to undertake this evaluation. Let’s hope it makes a difference.
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