

Evaluation of the KindiLink Pilot Initiative in Western Australia

Volume 3: Case Studies (2016-2018)

School of Education
Early Childhood Research Group
Edith Cowan University

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1. Introduction

The case studies presented in this volume provide descriptive accounts of the implementation and outcomes of the KindiLink initiative across four sites in 2017. They aim to complement the survey data and describe the lived experiences of the participants in the daily implementation of the KindiLink initiative. In this way, this research was undertaken with the stakeholders at KindiLink sites. A sample of four schools was identified after extensive discussion with the Early Childhood Branch, Statewide Services. These sites were chosen to ensure variation in the context, and considerations included: geographical location such as regional, remote or metropolitan settings, the presence or not of a Child and Parent Centre, the make-up of the families invited to register for KindiLink and the number of Aboriginal¹ children attending Kindergarten. The four case study sites are geographically diverse with one remote, one regional and two metropolitan schools. Although all 37 KindiLink sites are unique, it was thought that these variables might offer some insights into differences in the implementation and outcomes of KindiLink. Table 1.1 documents these variables in each KindiLink case study site.

Participants in the case studies included: the principal, the KindiLink teacher, the Aboriginal Indigenous Education Officer (AIEO), attending ²families, community representatives and the kindergarten teacher. Each participant signed an informed consent form after reading an information letter explaining the research project. For some participants, there was provision of a translator and/or a verbal account of the research project and verbal agreement was sought. Additionally, participants were asked to give signed informed consent to photographs being taken. All case studies including photos were returned to schools for verification and confirmation.

The data that informed each case study was collected over a period of 2-3 days in Term 3 by two researchers in each site. Methods used to collect data included interviews, informal conversations, and observations of families, children, staff and the environment as well as analysis of school documents (such as planning and attendance register documents). In order to create a sense of trust and to ensure that cultural and linguistic protocols were observed, researchers often adopted an informal conversational approach to seeking information. Where appropriate, each researcher yarned with family members either individually or in small groups while having morning tea or playing alongside families. More formal interviews with school staff took approximately an hour and staff received the semi-structured interview questions beforehand. Observations of the interactions between the educators, families and children and engagement in activities were undertaken across the 2 days. Photographs of the KindiLink environment and families engaged in activities were taken to add visual evidence to the data and were analysed using the Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education and Training, 2009) and the Western Australian Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) (School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA), 2016).

¹ In this study, the term Aboriginal is used to mean Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous. This is based on the decision made by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Social Justice and Race Discrimination Commissioner (in consultation with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups) to use the term Aboriginal rather than Indigenous.

² The term 'family' is used to encompass many different carer roles, including parents, grandparents, aunts, custodial parents, and the wider community.

Table 1.1: KindiLink case study sites

Name	Location	CPC on-site 2016-17	Families		KindiLink Registrations				KL ¹ teacher same in 2016 & 2017	Teacher same for KL and Kindy		Aboriginal 4 year olds in Kindergarten			
			2016-17		2016		2017			2016	2017	2012-14 Average		2014-16 Average	
			ATSI ²	Other ²	ATSI #	Other #	ATSI #	Other #				#	%	#	%
Grevillea	Metro	✓	✓	✗	16	0	17	0	✓	✓	✓	6.0	16.0	8.7	18.6
Coojong	Regional Town	✓	✓	✓	1	1	17	0	✓	✗	✗	14.3	82.6	18.3	88.7
Boronia	Regional City	✗	✓	✓	15	6	17		✓	✗	✗	23.3	43.1	14.7	37.0
Eucalypt	Metro	✗	✓	✓	9	5	18		✓	✓	✓	9.3	28.7	9.7	27.6

The KindiLink and kindergarten teachers, AIEOs and principals were asked about their teaching background and the rationale for the decisions made about the implementation of KindiLink. Additionally, they were asked for their insights into the implementation of the initiative and the impact on families and their children. The families were asked about their decision to come to KindiLink and to share information about their child. They were asked to describe what they liked or did not like about KindiLink and what considerations made them attend regularly. The community members were invited to talk about their role and link to KindiLink. All participants were asked about their perceptions of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building the children's social emotional language and cognitive capabilities and the capacity and confidence of parents as their child's first teacher. Questions were asked about the impact of KindiLink on building productive relationships between the family, school and community and if KindiLink had had an impact on improving attendance at Kindergarten. Finally, participants were asked about their overall reflections, which included the identification of successes and challenges, issues of sustainability and attendance, and insights that could help inform future decisions about KindiLink. All participants were given the opportunity to add further comments about KindiLink. In addition, the principal provided school documents such as KindiLink registration and attendance data, and the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data. The teacher and AIEO provided planning documents and timetables.

Each researcher completed their case study in draft form and sent it back to the school for participants to clarify, amend or add any further data or information. Drafts were shared across the research team for further clarification and identification and discussion of key findings.

In the analysis of individual data sets a number of headings became apparent that were used to uniformly describe each case for ease of comparison. The headings are:

Community and school context: this describes the community and school context with the demographic data of the number of families registered for KindiLink. This is followed by a brief description of the research participants who took part in the interviews and observations across the days spent on the site.

Implementing KindiLink: this gives a detailed picture of the way in which KindiLink was implemented, including the decision about whether to offer KindiLink to Aboriginal families only or to invite all eligible families. Ways of recruiting families and maintaining attendance are explained, along with approaches to planning.

Supporting children's social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities: this documents the teacher's, AIEO's and kindergarten teacher's perceptions of children's engagement in KindiLink in ways that support their learning and development. This is further illustrated through an analysis of photographs of children and families engaged in a variety of activities. The way in which the children have progressed is further discussed in relation to their transition to Kindergarten.

Building the capacity and confidence of parents as their child's first teacher: this outlines the impact of KindiLink on parent engagement in KindiLink and with their child both at school and at home in ways that enhance their self-assurance and recognition of the importance of their role as their child's first teacher.

Building productive relationships between the family, school and community: this describes how KindiLink has fostered positive communication, collaboration and consultation with families and the broader school community. National Quality Area 6: 'Collaborative partnerships with families and communities' is used to illustrate specific examples of relationship building.

Overall reflections: this reveals outstanding aspects of KindiLink as well as the challenges and insights that will contribute to future decisions about KindiLink.

Summary: this constitutes an overview of key findings from across each case study.

The four case studies are followed by the presentation of key findings. These are derived from an exploration of each section across the four case studies. They explore the similarities and differences across the four case studies. The key findings have also been integrated into overall findings presented in Vol 1.

Inevitably, each case study represents the individual researcher's perceptions and synthesis of the story of KindiLink told by the participants. However, in writing their case study each researcher aimed to ensure the voice of the participants has been clearly heard and their accounts of the implementation and impact of the KindiLink initiative have been honoured. The following sections document each case study.

2. Grevillea

2.1 Community and School Context

2.1.1 Demographics

Grevillea is located in a metropolitan area of Perth identified as having a low socio-economic status (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Over the last two decades, the demographic has changed significantly. As explained by the principal of Grevillea, the school once hosted Anglo-Australian and Aboriginal students almost exclusively, but now includes students from approximately 42 different cultural backgrounds. This demographic shift has impacted on engagement and it has taken many years for parents to engage fully with the school. The principal values partnerships and community engagement and has established numerous positive partnerships during his nine years in the role. Despite positive changes in attitudes, behaviour and achievement, the principal indicated: *“many students attending the school are still weak in not only the key areas of literacy and numeracy, but also social skills, core strength and speech”*.

Since the school is located in a low socio-economic area, and in recognition of families and children who are struggling, the school offers a daily breakfast program to all past and present families and students. Volunteers, tertiary students, parents and local organisations support the program. The school, a 2018–2019 Teacher Development School (STEM and Digital Technology), has developed partnerships with three churches, the local council, local businesses, a university faculty, the on-site Child and Parent Centre (CPC), and two other primary schools. It is one of 10 schools participating in a digital technologies project with Western Power, where students work closely with an engineer.

Over the years, the school has established and maintained strong links with the local Aboriginal Association, a not-for-profit Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. The Association is supportive of KindiLink, having previously run a similar program for 3-year-olds that subsequently closed due to funding cuts. KindiLink’s current Aboriginal Indigenous Education Officer is an active member of the association.

2.1.2 Registrations

In 2016, 16 families with a 3-year-old Aboriginal child registered for KindiLink – 14 of these were active in Term 4. Five of these families lived inside the catchment area. Eleven parents had registered their child for Kindergarten in 2017, seven in the same school as KindiLink.

In 2017, 17 families with a 3-year-old Aboriginal child registered for KindiLink. Of these, between 11 and 12 families were active in Terms 1, 2 and 3. The majority of children and parents who attended KindiLink in 2017 were female. All families identified as Aboriginal; four families attended with younger siblings and 14 attended with older siblings. Nine families had children enrolled in the same school as KindiLink; six of those lived in the local catchment area. In 2017, the eight families who agreed to participate in the study indicated they would register their child for Kindergarten. Two parents chose to enrol their children in Kindergarten elsewhere because it was closer to home than the KindiLink school.

2.2 Case Study Participants

2.2.1 School staff

The KindiLink teacher and AIEO have been involved in KindiLink since its inception in 2016, the KindiLink teacher having worked at the school for 22 years and the AIEO for 15 years. The AIEO is a Nyoongar (LOTE) teacher at the school and the KindiLink teacher is also one of the kindergarten teachers. She was involved in the establishment of the local Aboriginal Association Kindergarten for 3-year olds, and the KindiLink initiative was the first time she had worked with children younger than kindergarten age.

The second kindergarten teacher has worked at the school for 14 years. During that time, she has taken on the role of kindergarten teacher, pre-primary teacher for one year, and Aboriginal kindergarten teacher between 2004 and 2006. She is a senior teacher and is on the School Board.

2.2.2 Families

All eight families who attended KindiLink during the data collection period agreed to be interviewed – they comprised seven mothers and one grandparent.³ Seven parents identified themselves as Aboriginal, and all but one identified their child as Aboriginal. The parent who did not identify as Aboriginal identified her child as Aboriginal. All but one child who attended KindiLink were girls. Four of them were brought to KindiLink by other family members, including a mum, a dad, a grandmother and an aunt. Seven had between two and four siblings and of these, two attended the school that hosted KindiLink and one had previously attended KindiLink in 2016. The other siblings were either too old to attend primary school or outside the school catchment area. Prior to KindiLink, four of the children had attended a playgroup and one had attended an Aboriginal playgroup. Five parents came to KindiLink on both of the 2 days a week it was offered; two came at least 1 day per week and 2 days whenever possible; and one came on 1 day because she attended an art class with her child on the second KindiLink day.

2.2.3 Community members

The representative from the local community belonged to the Aboriginal Association ‘Best Start’. She had been the coordinator and activity leader for seven years prior to attending KindiLink with her child and identified herself and her child as Aboriginal. Although Best Start is no longer in operation, she is still involved in the Aboriginal Association and claims that KindiLink is the “*only thing out there for parents*” with young children.

2.3 Implementing KindiLink

The school has a permanent space dedicated to KindiLink. Funding to improve the area has gone into additional kitchen units and a sink. Staff availability, school timetables and family needs (such as travel time) were taken into account in the planning, where it was agreed that two 3-hour sessions were most appropriate for staff and families. In addition, the school was fortunate to have two “*excellent staff willing to accept the challenge in starting off KindiLink*”. The principal explained they were “*fortunate to retain sole use [of the space], although on occasion, CPC staff use this area*”.

After consultation with the teacher, AIEO and ECE Deputy Principal, the principal announced their decision to offer KindiLink to Aboriginal families only, both from inside and outside the school’s catchment area, due

³ The mothers and grandmother are referred to as parents, unless otherwise specified.

to concerns about a future lack of space for new Aboriginal families. In 2015, potential Aboriginal KindiLink families were invited to a school breakfast. All siblings were welcomed from the start and encouraged to continue attending. The playgroup, run by the Child and Parent Centre (CPC) at the school (including a 3-year-old playgroup), and the Aboriginal Association, which until recently ran an Aboriginal playgroup, also generated interest. In 2016, parent, child and sibling attendance at KindiLink was sufficiently high to defer extending the program more widely in 2017.

2.3.1 Recruitment

Families were recruited from the local intake area and the wider community via email to principals in local schools, the CPC, the local Aboriginal Association, shop window advertisements and a local Child and Family Centre, which assists parents to select and access early childhood and family services. In addition, the AIEO and other Aboriginal staff in the school recruited families through their own networks, by word-of-mouth, home visits and face-to-face conversations – these were believed to be the most successful means of recruitment. The AIEO emphasised the importance of encouraging families, understanding and recognising different lifestyles and events that might impact on arrival time and readiness to engage in KindiLink. Some families were involved in other initiatives delivered by the local Aboriginal Association and others attended the on-site CPC playgroup.

The parents had heard about KindiLink from several sources. These included other family members who attended, sibling/s who previously attended KindiLink, community members (e.g., the AIEO), and through their ongoing relationships with the kindergarten, school, local day care and the Aboriginal Association. One parent was upset about the closure of the Aboriginal Association playgroup, yet supported KindiLink as she felt there was room for both. The parents registered for KindiLink because they viewed it as a good opportunity to support their child's learning and development, make new friends and prepare their children for school.

2.3.2 Attendance

One father attended KindiLink in 2016, but in 2017, only mothers and grandmothers attended with the children. Both the teacher and AIEO hoped to involve more fathers in 2018. Initially attendance at KindiLink was sporadic for some families, but had improved as the year progressed. The principal, teacher and AIEO were all concerned about rates of attendance. They explained that some families had difficulty maintaining attendance at KindiLink because of issues related to health, drug and alcohol addiction, rent inspections, appointments, lack of transport and social issues. Some families felt “*shame*” and would not attend because their children did not have clean clothes or shoes, or did not behave in “*appropriate ways*”. Other issues included parents losing their driving license, weather conditions and the distance to KindiLink.

During 2017 the teacher and AIEO used additional means of communicating with families to increase attendance and involvement in KindiLink. These included, email, text messages and face-to-face conversations. These communications served to convey information about session activities, preparation for excursions and special events such as NAIDOC Week, and invitations to new Aboriginal families. In addition, several strategies were developed to sustain attendance and encourage new registrations, including:

- Ensuring a warm and personal welcome to each family at every session through ‘yarning’ and giving families space to feel relaxed and comfortable;
- Developing an awareness of individual family issues and providing information about where to get support;

- Encouraging ownership through respect and recognition of Aboriginal families culture and language/dialect;
- Being aware of and meeting different needs, as well as modelling positive parenting strategies;
- Encouraging families to come to KindiLink for a chat, fun and to make new friends; and
- Encouraging families to invite and bring other families, home visits and working with agencies such as the Aboriginal Association and the CPC.

When asked why they kept returning to KindiLink, the parents gave a number of reasons. These included their child’s desire to attend (asking “*how long until we go?*” and “*can we go today?*”); the learning that takes place at KindiLink for themselves and their child; and the friendships that they formed. One parent mentioned feeling guilty if her child missed KindiLink because it was so important for her development. Another explained that KindiLink was a priority and so she made sure she brought her child, while another parent described KindiLink as responsible for “*getting me out of the house and having a break*”.

2.3.3 Planning

The KindiLink teacher and AIEO followed the KindiLink timetable, but also had a flexible approach to take into account family needs. Each week they planned the content of the KindiLink sessions together using the Weekly Plan. They reflected on implementation and the outcomes of the previous sessions, using a specific theme to guide their planning. An observation sheet was used to record information about each child at every session, and feedback from the families about integrating Aboriginal culture and language/dialect into activities was also sought. The KindiLink teacher and AIEO regarded tactile and sensory activities as particularly important, and were planning to introduce a bush garden the following term. Information about LearningGames® was displayed across the classroom to help families understand how to support their child’s learning.

KindiLink timetable 2017
08.45-09.00 Puzzles, etc.
09.00-09.15 Outdoor GMS development (weather permitting)
09.15-09.25 Mat songs and games. Explain activities to parents and discuss the skills and concepts that children are developing
09.25-10.30 Indoor activities including craft, painting, dramatic play, LearningGames®, writing centre, block play, etc.
10.30-10.40 Shared fruit
10.40-11.15 Outdoor play
11.15-11.30 Story time
11.30-11.45 Dancing and Goodbye song

KindiLink Timetable

KindiLink Weekly Plan		Term 3 Week
	Tuesday	Wednesday
Mat/Song		
Literacy		
Writing Centre		
Playdough table		
Sensory/Science/Maths table		
Block Area		
Home Corner		
Reading Area		
Puzzles/Manipulatives		
Painting Area		
Craft Tables		
Outdoor Area		
Learning Games		

KindiLink Weekly Plan

KindiLink Observations Term _____ Week _____ 2017	
Chance	
Chloe-Nelle	
Ella	
Eve	
Jade	
Kai	
Layla	
Maddison	
Maddison-Jade	
Maxx	
Shayne	
Thomas	

KindiLink Observations

Image 2.1: KindiLink planning

Displaying children's work to create a vibrant environment, highlight achievements and show respect for the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families was also an important part of planning.



Image 2.2: Classroom displays

Initially, implementing KindiLink was a challenge for the KindiLink teacher. She had worked hard to create ways of working with parents, while also making younger siblings welcome and engaging the 3-year-olds in a variety of activities with their parent. The AIEO also indicated that she had acquired additional skills in working with parents as their child's first teacher and helping them to engage with their children through activities.

2.3.4 Feedback from families

The teacher and AIEO reported some parents took a long time to develop the confidence to provide input into KindiLink, but believed the majority of parents now felt 'at ease' with the staff. Parents were happy to offer suggestions and take the initiative in activities. They supported and got involved in planning and delivering activities that embody the culture and/or language/dialect of Aboriginal families, and will lead an excursion later this year. The teacher recently sought more formal feedback by recording the parents' comments about KindiLink on a flip chart. Parents shared their views about KindiLink – what they liked and what could be changed or added – their suggestions were subsequently implemented into session planning as far as possible. The KindiLink teacher and AIEO stressed the importance of integrating aspects of the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families into the program as a means of showing respect and deepening the children's appreciation of their cultural heritage.

2.4 Supporting Children's Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

The principal reported that the children who attended KindiLink in 2016 *"faced a smooth transition into Kindergarten as they were confident in their surrounds, knew the teacher and support staff and had the KindiLink teacher as one of their kindergarten teachers"*. In addition, KindiLink children appeared to have a better understanding of the routines and more social skills compared to the previous cohort of children who did not attend KindiLink. The principal observed some of the children from KindiLink were *"behind some other students, but they had improved language and cognitive skills"*. According to him, the KindiLink children were more confident and started kindergarten with a higher level of willingness to engage than some of the previous cohorts.

2.4.1 Engagement in activities

The KindiLink teacher and AIEO indicated that KindiLink was making a difference to the social, emotional, language and cognitive abilities of the children as the year progressed. In particular, they observed children spending more time engaged and absorbed in play and activities, and concentrating for longer periods of time. Children were also more cooperative and willing to share. They appeared to be emotionally more independent and willing to play alone or with other children, signalling a lessened dependence on family members, and were using their initiative to make their own choices. In addition, some families asked for strategies to support social behaviour and emotional regulation. Working alongside the KindiLink staff consolidated the implementation of strategies, which in turn contributed to the children's development.

As the KindiLink teacher and AIEO modelled and discussed with families, ways of interacting with their children, they witnessed the children talking more, using a wider range of vocabulary and confidently conversing with their parents. In addition, the teacher recorded evidence of the development of literacy and numeracy concepts. These included talking about a book, holding the book the appropriate way, and pointing to words and illustrations. Numeracy concepts included sharing objects equally and sorting objects by shape and colour. Completing puzzles, recognising and identifying common objects and pictures, and creating a narrative through play were also examples of cognitive development.

The parents indicated that KindiLink had supported their child's learning and development in several ways. They described particular skills, such as hand-eye coordination, physical development and enhanced recognition of colours, shapes, letters and numbers. The importance of interaction and opportunities to engage in activities with their child was also identified. Three parents mentioned the way in which KindiLink had supported their communication and speech by helping them to think about asking questions to extend conversations. They also felt that KindiLink supported social skills and friendships between children and families.

Other benefits identified by parents mirrored those identified by KindiLink staff, namely helping children to become independent and transfer skills to their home environment. Learning about the routines and the structure of activities such as 'mat time' were also singled out. Parents reported enjoying talking with other parents, the teacher and AIEO, seeking advice and watching their child succeed and progress.

The following section identifies some of the learning that was observed during the visits to KindiLink. Some activities are captured in photographs and the photographs are described. The photographs and descriptions are followed by evidence of learning and development. The evidence of learning and development is linked to the learning outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009). The EYLF is used in the KindiLink sites as a basis for making judgments about children's learning and development. The Western Australian Kindergarten Guidelines, Learning Development Areas (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2016) have also been used as a means of identifying broad learning areas. Descriptions of the Learning Development Areas were used as a guideline and adapted where necessary, rather than applied rigidly. The intention is to indicate the learning that was evidenced through the observations. It is not an analysis of individual children. It is important to stress that there was considerable overlap in the children's learning across the activities, but only the main aspects were identified for the purpose of this report, in order to avoid repetition. In addition, the level of attainment for each child varied as they engaged with activities at their own level and pace.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Communicating
Book sharing and puppets with parents	Building children’s capabilities	Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities
<p>Photo 1: Parents using a puppet to engage child in conversation. They each take turns at holding the puppet.</p> <p>Photos 2 and 3: Parents talking to children about the book they are sharing. Pointing to, naming and reading the words and making a connection between the words and the illustrations.</p> <p>Photo 4: Parent engaging younger sibling in book sharing, encouraging both children to join in.</p>	<p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.</p> <p>5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.</p> <p>5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.</p>	<p>Children and adults were observed being able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain conversations • Use speech that could be understood by others • Listen to others • Use simple sentences when speaking • Use turn-taking in conversations • Use simple non-verbal ways of communicating through gestures and signs • Share a range of texts for enjoyment • Identify key ideas from simple texts • Use books/texts appropriately – turn pages.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Learning and thinking
<p>Baking, creating, singing and dancing with parents</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Making cupcakes, parents model supporting and then encouraging children to work independently.</p> <p>Photo 2: Sticking and glueing, child is engaged in cutting, glueing and sticking shapes into her book while her mum talks about what she is doing and encourages her.</p> <p>Photo 3: Making animal shapes with playdough. The child has moved from playing in the sandpit with animals, including snakes, and is now engaged in creating a snake that he then paints.</p> <p>Photo 4: Singing and dancing, some of the parents and children dancing and singing as instructed through a digital program on the smart board.</p>	<p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.</p> <p>4.2 Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.</p> <p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.5 Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and adults were observed being able to: • Express curiosity and wonder about experiences • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Manipulate objects • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Persist even when task is difficult, and experience the satisfaction of achievement • Explore and experiment with form, shape and colour • Use simple tools to create • Combine singing and dancing • View and listen to simple printed, visual and multimedia texts and music (from WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines KCG: Communicating).



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Identity and Wellbeing
<p align="center">Indoor and outdoor physical activities and sandpit with parents</p>	<p align="center">Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p align="center">Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Children engage in a sequence of jumping, hopping and bouncing independently of adults.</p> <p>Photo 2: Parent supporting child’s exploration of outdoor apparatus, encouraging jumping and dancing.</p> <p>Photo 3: Parent and children working together to create sand pies and castles.</p> <p>Photo 4: Parents provide physical and verbal support to encourage children to balance, throw beanbags into circle and progress through an obstacle course. Children use skills from indoor physical activity to support outdoor activities.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>1.1 Children feel safe, secure, and supported.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</p> <p>3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.3 Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initiate interactions and conversations with parents ● Form stable relationships within KindiLink environment ● Join in play with enjoyment and satisfaction ● Join in group activities, such as obstacle course ● Approach new activities with a positive attitude ● Persevere with tasks ● Make new discoveries ● Demonstrate an increased capacity for self-regulation ● Respond to ideas and suggestions from others ● Show some confidence in their abilities ● Show curiosity and engagement ● Use home language at KindiLink ● Take turns in small group situations ● Develop capacity to self-regulate ● Make choices and accept challenges ● Move around environment safely ● Develop hand/eye/ hand/foot coordination ● Demonstrate a willingness to participate in energetic physical activities including dance, movement & games.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Connecting and contributing
<p>Activities promoting language/dialect, culture and identity</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from environment displaying children’s work</p>
<p>Photo 1: Collage created by parents and children related to topic on sea creatures and labelled in Language.</p> <p>Photo 2: Individually painted handprints with names.</p> <p>Photo 3 : Birthday chart</p> <p>Photo 4: Children’s portraits with body parts in Language surrounded by hand prints.</p> <p>Photo 5: Collage of Harmony day photographs of activities, surrounded by hearts made by children and parents.</p> <p>Photo 6: Hand and foot prints with captions in Language and English.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>1.3 Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.</p> <p>1.4 Children learn to interact with others with care, empathy and respect.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world</p> <p>2.1 Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities.</p> <p>2.2 Children respond to diversity with respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build an understanding that people can speak different languages • Explore their own (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’) culture • Investigate ATSI people’s artwork and artefacts • Listen to others and share ideas • Explore their immediate world using their five senses • Describe both verbally and non-verbally what they see, hear, touch and feel • Take part in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander festivals and celebrations



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) All areas
<p align="center">Playdough and painting</p>	<p align="center">Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p align="center">Evidence from observed activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Painted snakes. Shared reading of <i>Rainbow Snake</i>, encouraging parents to read the book with their child, followed by making and painting rainbow snakes that were then displayed.</p> <p>Photo 2: Parent sorting and organising materials for children at a table for the game <i>Make a Face</i>. Two children engaged in sensory play with the dough, while looking at the adult and following instructions: “roll, squeeze, pull”. Adult praising child’s efforts: “that’s pretty cool – look”. Adult modelling actions while talking to the child: “watch me, look like this...” as she rolls the dough between her hands. Another mother and child join group and begin to play, supporting and encouraging each other. Lots of laughter as children show parents their faces.</p> <p>Photo 3: Children’s names displayed on a table to encourage them to recognise, write and talk about their name. Some children picked up their name to display it next to their snake and/or match it with the name written next to their snake.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>1.2 Children develop and display their emerging autonomy.</p> <p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow their own interests with enthusiasm, energy and concentration (Learning and Thinking) • Explore the properties of familiar objects/substances (playdough, paint) (Learning and Thinking) • Explore different ways of creating things (Learning and Thinking) • Use small muscles for implements such as pencils, scissors and paintbrushes with some control and coordination (Wellbeing) • Act upon simple instructions and statements (Communication) • Increased use of vocabulary (Communication) • Know that languages other than English are used in the home and school (Communication) • Recognise familiar written symbols in context, such as their name (Communication)

2.5 Building the Capacity and Confidence of Parents as their Child's First Teacher

The principal described the increased capacity of parents as follows: *“This is very evident in the way parents speak and interact with their children, using ‘teacher talk’ and providing targeted guidance to their children. They are increasingly aware of utilising situations for improved educational outcomes”*. The principal also observed parents’ growing confidence as their child’s first teacher, since they used *“more targeted conversational language and have transferred some elements to their home life”*. In addition, parents were increasingly of the view that KindiLink activities were relevant for their children, and used strategies and activities from KindiLink at home.

The KindiLink teacher and AIEO both agreed that KindiLink had increased the capacity and confidence of parents who attended regularly. Parents became involved in activities using direct instruction, open-ended questions and modelling to engage their own and other children in learning. They used positive encouragement and strategies to facilitate appropriate behaviour. Parents appeared more confident in their interactions with their children and KindiLink staff, evidenced by the way they asked questions, made suggestions and engaged their children in activity-based conversations. The teacher and AIEO strived to model children’s engagement in activities and to explain the purpose of activities to parents. They reported that sensory and gross motor skill activities seemed to generate the most engagement from families and interaction between parents and children. These activities included painting, baking, playdough and craft as well as outdoor games, such as an obstacle course. A preference for such activities may be attributable to a lack of these facilities and materials in the home environment, as well as the tactile nature of the experiences for stimulating creativity and emotional soothing. The KindiLink teacher and AIEO considered the LearningGames® important, and while families engaged in some of these activities, the KindiLink teacher felt some parents did not pay a great deal of attention to the purpose of the games or how to play them because they already knew how to engage their child. In addition, they felt many families did not play the games at home. However, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO persisted in talking to parents about the LearningGames® and their potential benefits, talking through and pointing out the information about them around the room.



Image 2.3: LearningGames®

The AIEO noted that in addition to engaging in learning activities, the parents had come to expect and appreciate the routine of many KindiLink activities, including fruit time, story time, shared reading time and outdoor play. They had also begun to try out activities at home (making playdough, cooking, shared book

reading), and some asked for support in specific literacy and numeracy tasks, e.g., teaching their child to write his or her name. The AIEO suggested that parents recognised the benefits of the links between home and KindiLink, and showed appreciation for their child's achievements.

The KindiLink teacher reported that some families had made informal requests for information about service providers, and their subsequent visits to speech therapists, occupational therapists and/or community child health nurses suggest increased parental confidence as they negotiated all the inherent complexities. Information about early childhood learning and support services was prominently displayed around the room. One parent mentioned the information had helped her to understand her child and his development.



Image 2.4: Information for parents

The parents commented on their growing capacity and confidence. Seven parents explained how KindiLink had given them the confidence to support their child's learning and development. They were able to guide and engage their children in different activities and lead some of those activities, such as shared reading. Several felt more confident to converse with their own and other children, and identified development of communication skills through adult-child conversations as a major achievement for their child. The parents indicated they liked all the activities, in particular singing, dancing (although some parents were too 'shy' to join in) and activities that develop fine motor skills and help children to solve problems. They also liked outdoor play as it enabled the children to "let off steam and get rid of energy" while developing their physical capabilities. Parents stated the children liked everything at KindiLink, especially the "hands-on" activities, such as painting, drawing, colouring in, playdough, indoor activities, puzzles, mat time, books and glueing. They also described their children's developing independence in terms of "talking more" and interacting with other children. With the exception of one parent who mentioned that her child preferred to play rather than sit in "formal activities", all the parents and children liked everything about KindiLink.

One parent expressed the view that KindiLink was a positive environment where she felt respected and equal to others. Another explained how she was more confident in supporting her child instead of taking him home when he became distracted or disruptive. Others indicated that the care and partnership offered to families by the teacher and AIEO helped some parents manage their children's behaviour at home and outside school. Several parents mentioned that meeting and building relationships with other parents provided them with insights into learning and development as well as personal support. Some parents met outside the KindiLink sessions and continued to support each other as their children transitioned to Kindergarten.

2.6 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, School and Community

The principal, teacher, AIEO and community representative all described how KindiLink had fostered positive relationships between the school and Aboriginal families. These relationships had developed over a number of years through KindiLink-related activities. For example, home visits, where teachers and AIEOs invited families to the school to register in KindiLink, served as a means of delivering positive messages to parents. Links with the local Aboriginal Association also strengthened relationships and promoted KindiLink to families and the wider community.

The community representative explained that the relationship between the school and the broader community is constantly evolving as new partnerships form and consolidate. KindiLink has established links with other KindiLink sites, and holds collaborative sessions with on-site CPC staff. Several joint initiatives have been undertaken or are in the process of negotiation, including a Bush Tucker garden, jointly established with the CPC; National Simultaneous Storytime, a joint activity with the local library; and Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, to be hosted in conjunction with the local Aboriginal Association. KindiLink's NAIDOC Week events and other cultural celebrations involve the whole school and help KindiLink families and children to familiarise with the broader school community. The principal noted, although it is hard to gauge the effectiveness of KindiLink in building productive relationships between Aboriginal families and the broader school community, *"the school maintains good standing in the community and is seen as supportive of Aboriginal families"*. The community representative stated that KindiLink had developed a reputation for *"friendly staff and good attitudes and understanding of family issues, while bringing families together"*. The encouragement and understanding offered to families impacted on the broader community, especially through its links with the Aboriginal Association that promoted KindiLink.

The parents felt unanimously that KindiLink had helped to build good relationships between themselves and the school, and no-one raised any negative issues. Communication was effective; families felt involved and informed. They received information directly from the teacher and AIEO when at KindiLink, or via newsletter, text, email or written notes. One parent reported that the mother's group at the local Aboriginal Association shared information about KindiLink, encouraging families to attend. Another parent explained she felt comfortable to ask for information and always received a quick and helpful response.

There was ample evidence of sustained relationships at KindiLink. Five parents reported having made new friends through KindiLink; some *"caught up out of school, met in the park or visited each other's homes"*. None of the parents had accessed support services through KindiLink – two stated they did not need support services and another said she was aware of the services that were available. One parent claimed she felt at ease asking the KindiLink team for information about support services and was confident of receiving helpful information. The KindiLink teacher commented that informal referrals to the speech therapist, occupational therapist and community child health nurses had also helped forge relationships between Aboriginal families and the broader community.

The following examples (Table 2.1) relate to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA 2011, p.11), Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 2.1: Grevillea School - examples of productive relationships between families, school and community

Examples of productive relationships	NQS National Quality Area 6
Relationships are at the heart of the success of KindiLink. The KindiLink teacher, AIEO and the principal all work hard to create a warm and welcoming environment that acknowledges and builds on the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families. Families described KindiLink as a strong, inclusive community where they felt safe and supported in their child’s learning.	6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
Initially, community members were invited to a morning tea to introduce KindiLink. Families were encouraged to bring younger siblings and familiarise them with KindiLink. Staff support the registration process for KindiLink as well as Kindergarten.	6.1.1 There is an efficient registration and effective orientation process for families.
Families share information about their children and contribute to program decisions. Families take activities and ideas home, extending children’s learning.	6.1.2 Families have the opportunity to be involved in the service and contribute to decisions.
Families access information about KindiLink in many different ways; including home visits, word of mouth, school newsletters and texts.	6.1.3 Current information about the service is available to families.
The central aim of KindiLink is to support parents as their child’s first teacher, increasing their confidence and capacity. The principal, teacher, AIEO and families provided examples of how this had developed throughout the year.	6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role, and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.
Honouring the culture and language/dialect of the families is an integral part of KindiLink. Families contribute and create activities that incorporate their culture and language/dialect. In addition, cultural celebrations are planned in conjunction with families who sometimes take the lead. Knowledge and understanding are shared between families and the teacher/AIEO in a two-way process.	6.2.1 The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child’s learning and wellbeing.
Information is available to families about service providers, and the teacher and AIEO help families to access appropriate services when needed.	6.2.2 Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
Productive relationships between the school and the broader community are constantly evolving as new relationships are formed and consolidated. This includes the onsite CPC, the Aboriginal Association and the local library. The AIEO is a central member of the community and a key agent in building and consolidating these relationships.	6.3 The service collaborates with organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.

Examples of productive relationships	NQS National Quality Area 6
<p>There is a CPC on site and connections are being developed between CPC and KindiLink. KindiLink families and the AIEO are members of the local Aboriginal Association and this supports a developing relationship. The Aboriginal Association promotes KindiLink and encourages families to register and attend.</p>	<p>6.3.1 Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.</p>
<p>The KindiLink teacher is also the kindergarten teacher at the school, which creates a positive transition to Kindergarten for families, as they are familiar with the teacher and some of the routines and environment.</p>	<p>6.3.2 Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.</p>
<p>The teacher and AIEO support families and access support services where appropriate. Informal referrals are provided if parents indicate they would like help. As parents become more confident in observing and working with their children, some are asking about developmental milestones and support, particularly in relation to language learning.</p>	<p>6.3.3 Access to inclusion and support assistance facilitated.</p>
<p>Throughout the year there have been several cultural and literacy events in collaboration with the Aboriginal Association and the local library. KindiLink strives to promote the initiatives in the community in a number of different ways, however, the AIEO, parents and children are KindiLink's greatest ambassadors.</p>	<p>6.3.4 The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.</p>

2.7 Improving Attendance during Schooling

2.7.1 Transition to Kindergarten

While it is not possible to ascertain the long-term impact of KindiLink on Kindergarten, it is possible to identify some aspects mentioned by the teacher and the AIEO that may impact on children's engagement and future school attendance. The KindiLink teacher, the AIEO and the kindergarten teacher agreed that KindiLink children were "*streets ahead*" in all aspects of their development compared with children who had not participated in KindiLink (including previous cohorts of kindergarten children prior to the establishment of KindiLink). They felt that the majority of KindiLink children were well prepared for the transition to Kindergarten. The KindiLink teacher described the children who attended KindiLink as "*better prepared and much more confident*" than those who had not. KindiLink had supported the children's cognitive development – many had knowledge of "*basic concepts, such as shapes, colours, numbers*" and were familiar with routines; as a result they started Kindergarten as independent, confident, competent children.

Parents echoed the views of the teachers and the AIEO, assured in the knowledge that KindiLink would support their children's transition to Kindergarten. They identified the routine, relationships with the teacher and AIEO, and how their children had learned to communicate, interact, share and respect each other, the environment and the resources as contributing factors. They also mentioned their children were more "*advanced*" in their learning, more independent and less likely to suffer from "*separation anxiety*". They felt confident that Kindergarten would be a positive and productive experience for their child.

The community representative also felt that KindiLink had helped families to socialise and improve their confidence and skills. She indicated that helping families to familiarise with the school environment made parents "*feel valued and welcomed and confident to be at the school*". Furthermore, she noted that helping children to develop a range of skills had a positive impact on their learning and "*readiness*" for Kindergarten. She believed all these aspects were important means of increasing registrations and attendance at Kindergarten.

Links between KindiLink and the Kindergarten were seen as an important means of ensuring continuity and encouraging families to enrol and attend Kindergarten. All KindiLink children attended the same kindergarten class, where the teacher was replaced by the KindiLink teacher when she was undertaking duties other than teaching (DOTT). The kindergarten teacher incorporated aspects of the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families into her program and collaborated with KindiLink, the CPC and the pre-primary school during NAIDOC Week. She explained that building relationships had additional outcomes over time – parents were more confident in approaching the school for support and accessing school-related support services, such as the Calm and Connected program. Parents were also more inclined to take up referrals to support services.

Moreover, the principal, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO felt the kindergarten registration process at the school was supportive. Families were given help to access MyGov and the link to Medicare to obtain information about vaccinations. The principal noted that not all KindiLink families went on to attend the school kindergarten, but as stated earlier, seven KindiLink children had enrolled in 2017. The KindiLink teacher reported a positive influence of 2016 KindiLink on kindergarten attendance in 2017, explaining that children had attended more regularly. KindiLink had made a difference to Aboriginal families by not only ensuring a smooth transition for families, but also strengthening relationships between the families, school and community. She believed this was partly due to the relationship established by the AIEO with the families and her interaction with families during shared KindiLink and kindergarten playtime. She also acknowledged

the opportunity given to her by the many families from the Kindergarten and KindiLink to consolidate and extend these relationships.

2.8 Overall Reflections

Overall, the principal, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO were very positive about their KindiLink experience, and specifically mentioned the generous support from the KindiLink team in the Early Childhood Branch. The principal talked about the success of KindiLink in fostering *“engagement with Aboriginal families a year earlier than normal in a less formal manner”*. This enabled the principal to visit families regularly and build trust. The KindiLink teacher described families who were more confident and prepared for school. As she got to know families better and develop her role, she became more confident and able to engage and work with families in different ways.

All eight participating parents fully endorsed KindiLink, claiming it had made a difference to them and their children. They recommended KindiLink to others and indicated they would continue to do so in the future. They described how important KindiLink had been to their families as a way of helping them and their children become familiar with the school environment and increasing their confidence as their child’s first teacher. One parent suggested expanding KindiLink to more schools; another suggested a *“pick up and drop off”* might help some families. All parents hoped KindiLink would continue, especially for Aboriginal families, as articulated by one parent: *“It’s the best start they can have”*.

Four parents offered suggestions, including new ways of doing particular art activities, a KindiLink shirt for 2018 and laminating some of the take-home ideas. Two parents stated they were very happy with the program as it was.

2.8.1 Challenges

The principal, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO identified a number of challenges. These included the building, furniture and facilities, registration, sustained attendance and teacher confidence. The challenges associated with creating a safe and effective infrastructure for KindiLink were quickly resolved with modifications to the original building and facilities. However, gaining and sustaining registrations have continued to be an issue. The KindiLink teacher talked about her disappointment when families registered but did not return. The circumstances of many families continue to be a barrier to their attendance; however, the knowledge and standing of the AIEO in the local community has proved to be a major advantage, as families feel comfortable asking for help and advice, and felt comfortable at KindiLink, all of which helps to sustain attendance.

In terms of pedagogical practices, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO described having to adapt to working with 3-year-olds and younger siblings. The teacher was early-childhood trained, but unfamiliar with working with children and their families. She had to develop appropriate activities and learn to work with families, letting them take the lead as their confidence grew. She explained that some activities proved more challenging than others, for example, engaging parents in mat time or singing and dance and helping them to understand the learning outcomes of these activities.

2.8.2 Insights

The principal, teacher and AIEO all offered insights that may inform future decisions about KindiLink. The principal mentioned that the location of the school and accessibility to local communities/suburbs was

problematic and impacted on attendance, as many families had to negotiate large multi-lane roads and public transport, drive or walk to KindiLink. The teacher recommended continuing to offer KindiLink to Aboriginal families only in order to encourage registrations and attendance, as some may have felt uncomfortable with non-Aboriginal families and would therefore not attend. She also suggested KindiLink needs to be flexible to meet the needs of families, arguing: *“one size does not fit all”*. The KindiLink teacher spoke about the importance of introducing and modelling the LearningGames® to parents, as a central component of KindiLink. She explained that the structure and content of the LearningGames® had potential to support parents at KindiLink and at home to engage with their children in learning a range of concepts and skills that would form the basis of their early education.

Finally, the principal and the teacher reiterated that staff selection was crucial to the program’s success. The principal noted: *“We were very fortunate in this area with having two quality staff, who were prepared to take on the challenge”*. The KindiLink teacher mentioned the AIEO was well known and respected in the community, and this made a significant difference to family registrations and participation in KindiLink. The teacher concluded by emphasising the importance of working side by side with parents, sitting, talking and modelling ways of engaging children in learning, thereby helping parents to understand their role as their child’s first teacher.

The community representative endorsed this view, stating *“staff are fantastic at this site... [they] encourage families to be involved in education”*. She also highlighted the potential of KindiLink to be extended to all Aboriginal families with children between birth and five years, especially because there are no Aboriginal playgroups. In addition, transport for families who lived outside the catchment area was seen as a way of increasing attendance.

Many insights were gained from the parents in their descriptions of the *“really good things”* that happened at KindiLink. These included recognising and celebrating the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families, joining with the Aboriginal Association and celebrating NAIDOC Week. Parents also appreciated the chance for everyone to work together, see their children grow, learn and form relationships with other parents, and share conversations and advice.

2.9 Summary

KindiLink was implemented at Grevillea two years ago, starting with preparation in 2015 and opening for registrations in 2016 and 2017. The school is located in a culturally diverse, low socio-economic community, and its population is prone to some developmental vulnerabilities. However, the school has a proven capacity for community engagement and has built strong partnerships, in particular with a local Aboriginal Association. The KindiLink staff (teacher and AIEO) have both been at the school for considerable periods of time and are personally well connected to the community. Coupled with a permanent space for the KindiLink classroom, these factors were seen as good foundations for successful implementation.

In 2017, seventeen Aboriginal families registered for KindiLink – eight families contributed to the case study data collection. The program was offered to Aboriginal families both inside and outside the school’s catchment area, which meant that some participating families had to travel some distance, impacting not only on their attendance, but also potentially disrupting flow-on to Kindergarten at the same school.

In 2016 and 2017, KindiLink attracted a healthy level of interest and participation. Bolton’s successful recruitment process involved reaching out to families (in 2015, potential families were invited to a school breakfast), followed by ongoing promotion through the school and existing partnerships, such as the on-site

Child and Parent Centre and Aboriginal Association. Face-to-face encouragement through events and home visits were found to be the most successful means of engaging new families.

Whilst attracting registrations was not difficult, there were some challenges with maintaining attendance at KindiLink, as families' time and resources were pulled in other directions (e.g., families facing health and social issues, drug and alcohol addiction, etc.). To counter this, many of the initial recruitment strategies were maintained throughout the year to keep families attending and engaged. Communication with families was ongoing – via email, text messages, conversations, home visits – and staff continued to offer encouragement, maintaining a welcoming environment inclusive of siblings and generally doing what they could to facilitate attendance for families.

The focus on attendance seems a worthwhile investment, as the feedback from parents indicates a desire to keep returning. Their reasons for doing so were largely described in terms of the benefits they perceived for their children (such as enjoyment and learning) and for themselves (such as talking with other parents, seeing their child grow and develop, and accessing information about support services).

For the teacher and AIEO, planning and implementing KindiLink involved a considerable amount of reflection. Staff had to adjust to a multi-age cohort of children and align their expectations appropriately. Planning involved accounting for families' needs, incorporating their feedback and considering ways of eliciting participation. This was intensive at first, but over time, as trust between staff and participants developed, parents came forward voluntarily to offer input and suggestions and took on leadership roles in planning and implementing activities. The approach taken by staff to planning allowed KindiLink to be a highly adaptive initiative that evolved organically to incorporate aspects of the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families.

In terms of outcomes, staff observed the difference KindiLink made to children's social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities. Their concentration and focus deepened, they were more independent and had developed their abilities to communicate, interact, share and respect each other. Other developments in conversational abilities and mastering specific literacy and numeracy tasks were also noted. Importantly, the principal, staff and parents all reported that the 2016 KindiLink children enjoyed a smooth transition to Kindergarten. They were confident and ready to engage.

Parents reported gaining skills, advice, ideas for activities, and learning strategies, which they then transferred to the home and practised ways of interacting with their child that helped stimulate and support their child's learning. Parents also gained an understanding of their child's development, and with this understanding came the confidence to initiate more formal exchanges and/or ask for referrals to support services where appropriate.

Other ongoing benefits of KindiLink included fostering positive relationships between the school and the community, especially the Aboriginal community (KindiLink could easily be linked to broader events in the community, such as the NAIDOC Week celebrations). Families spoke of a very positive first experience with the school environment, an opportunity to get to know the staff and principal and develop positive relationships. This could potentially be of ongoing benefit to parents' confidence and the quality of their interactions with the school over the course of their child's education.

Reflecting on the implementation of KindiLink led the Grevillea school staff and principal to conclude that they could maximise results by offering the program to Aboriginal families only, and by having knowledgeable, committed staff with a flexible approach. On a day-to-day level, the teacher and AIEO

reported that taking time to demonstrate the LearningGames® to parents, actively encouraging parents to play with their children at home and increasing their skills to be their child's first teacher were important contributors to success. Parents reiterated these insights and reflected on the inclusion of the culture and language/dialect of Aboriginal families in KindiLink activities that made families feel valued and recognised.

3. Coojong

3.1 Community and School Context

3.1.1 Demographics

Coojong is located in a remote area of Western Australia, identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)* as a low socio-economic area with a high percentage of extremely vulnerable Aboriginal students. Prior to the establishment of KindiLink, the principal had explored the possibility of an onsite playgroup, as he perceived there to be strong demand. Good relationships already existed with Child Care Centre staff that came to the school one day per fortnight to help transition the children to the Kindergarten program. At that time, a state government-funded Aboriginal community playgroup, Best Start, was catering to 3-year-olds in the community, and when funding for the Best Start program ceased, the families joined KindiLink. The principal welcomed the advent of KindiLink as a timely initiative to fill the gap and meet the needs of the community. All the families interviewed had previously participated in the Best Start playgroup. Initially located in an offsite facility on the Child and Parent site, KindiLink re-located in 2017 to a transportable building on the school site. The manager of the Best Start program partly ascribed the success of the KindiLink initiative to having a dedicated space on the school site: *“I know from experience, working as a Best Start coordinator, if you have a dedicated space where families feel safe and belong, your program will work. You have transport, you have food and you have good staff, so, I think it’s working pretty well on the school site”*.

3.2 Case Study Participants

3.2.1 School staff

Both the principal and KindiLink teacher have worked at the school since 2015. Previously, the Aboriginal Indigenous Education Officer (AIEO) worked at the school as an EA for several years, returning in May 2017 in the joint role of AIEO and EA. The kindergarten teacher was a recent graduate when she took on the role full-time at the beginning of 2017. The KindiLink teacher commenced in 2016 at the same time the pilot started. In addition to her other duties, such as mentoring and communicating on social media sites and in school newsletters, she is a level-three classroom teacher and also provides support teaching in Year 4 and pre-primary classrooms. The AIEO is the only staff member who had experience working with playgroups of children younger than kindergarten age.

3.2.2 Families

Six families participated in the data collection. Five of the families, comprised of three mothers and two grandmothers, also agreed to be interviewed. All the families identified themselves and their children as Aboriginal and all attended the KindiLink initiative 3 days a week. Three of the families had younger siblings who attended regularly, while three families had older siblings who had previously attended or were currently attending the school. Some of the siblings were teenagers or adults, and for the most part the children were brought to KindiLink by their mothers and grandmothers. One family did not live within the intake area but travelled specifically to attend the KindiLink initiative. All the families interviewed indicated their children would be enrolling in Kindergarten at this school.



Image 3.1: Information for families about setting up the program routines

3.2.3 Community members

The community member interviewed was employed as WA's Aboriginal Project Manager for the 'Act, Belong, Commit' campaign and identified herself as an Aboriginal woman, part of the Aniwan nation from Uralla, New South Wales. She had been in WA for 18 years and at [community name] for 3 years, commencing her association with KindiLink in 2017 as one of the agencies helping to form the [community name] community program at the Child and Parent Centre. She had also worked in the Best Start program for five years.

3.3 Implementing KindiLink

3.3.1 Recruitment

To recruit participants, the KindiLink teacher and AIEO visit Aboriginal families in the community and provide them with a KindiLink brochure. They also advertise in the school newsletters, on social media and put up flyers in the town. Many registrations are the result of word-of-mouth referrals – the KindiLink teacher indicated that the parents are the best advocates for the school. For the many families that were already attending the Best Start program, the transition was a smooth one. The KindiLink teacher related some of the most effective messages for encouraging participation: *"Giving them that strong sense of belonging here and knowing that culture is valued here"; "Families as first teachers is valued here"; "There is no expectation on them to be doing certain things here"; "They can come here, and they're playing and learning, that's the main thing that's important – that they're playing and learning, but they're doing so sort of in a less structured environment"*. The AIEO mentioned that many parents like attending KindiLink because they can talk to someone, and the young mums turn to the older mums for advice. She played a large part in recruiting new families to the initiative: *"Well, I know a lot of people in the community, my partner's from Coojong, so a lot of the Indigenous families I know on a personal level. And to get them to come in really, I'll just, if I saw them outside of school, I'll just ask them to pop by really. And just let them know that it's there for the kids ... yeah,*

no, it's hard to explain. It's just kind of like a natural thing that I would see them out and about". Mothers and grandmothers were attending KindiLink with younger siblings as well as 3-year-olds, the latter comprising ten registrations, eight of those Aboriginal. Currently, four Aboriginal 3-year-olds attend along with several participating siblings. To boost attendance, a bus picks up the children and their families and drops them off in the town and nearby community. Parents communicate by text message if they need a lift. From time to time, the KindiLink teacher drives to the homes of regular participants who haven't yet confirmed by text, and drops in to encourage them to attend.



Image 3.2: Welcome to KindiLink sign



Image 3.3: The KindiLink playground

3.3.2 Attendance

Several strategies are used to encourage ongoing attendance, including positive feedback about improvements in the children's learning and development since coming to KindiLink. Praising the parents and building their confidence is also an important strategy. The KindiLink teacher commented: *"When I gave one of my parents a compliment the other day about how I feel like she's grown and so much more confident than when she first came, you know, she's doing a lot more with the kids and she said, 'Yeah, actually, yeah, I am,' so, making her feel good about coming to something like this is important"*. Communication between families and the school takes place mainly through social media on the school's Facebook page. A school newsletter also updates families about KindiLink. The KindiLink teacher communicates with families via text message or drops information into their mailbox. A variety of methods are continually used to forge links between families and the KindiLink teacher, as evidenced by: *"any which way that we can contact them, we do. And I try to do it in every single way. I don't go, oh, well, I can't get through to them one way, I'll give up because then we won't get anyone in"*. The families interviewed described two ways in which they were recruited: by word of mouth from other locals and through the Best Start program that was replaced by KindiLink. They mentioned that communication with KindiLink takes many forms, such as Facebook, newsletters, word of mouth, the website, text messages and announcements put up in the classroom by the KindiLink teacher.

3.3.3 Planning

The AIEO and KindiLink teacher meet fortnightly for planning. They use the Remote Early Years Learning Framework, especially designed for Aboriginal educators, to evaluate what is working well and what more needs to be done. They explore new ideas online, go through the LearningGames® and try out new activities, as well as eliciting feedback from the families about what they would like to include. Unlike classroom teachers, the KindiLink teacher claimed the skills she needed most in this role were communication and building relationships with many different people. On the other hand, the AIEO considered knowledge of her culture the most needed skill.

The KindiLink teacher and kindergarten teacher have regular informal discussions to collaborate and reflect on what has been happening in their classrooms. The early childhood team, comprised of the KindiLink, Kindergarten and pre-primary teachers and AIEOs meet once a week and work in partnership. The National Quality Standard is used as a benchmark for reflecting on what they are currently doing and setting new goals. The KindiLink teacher mentioned that the early childhood team also meets occasionally with other schools in the district to discuss the NQS: *"Building a reflective culture, working as a team to enhance outcomes for students"*.

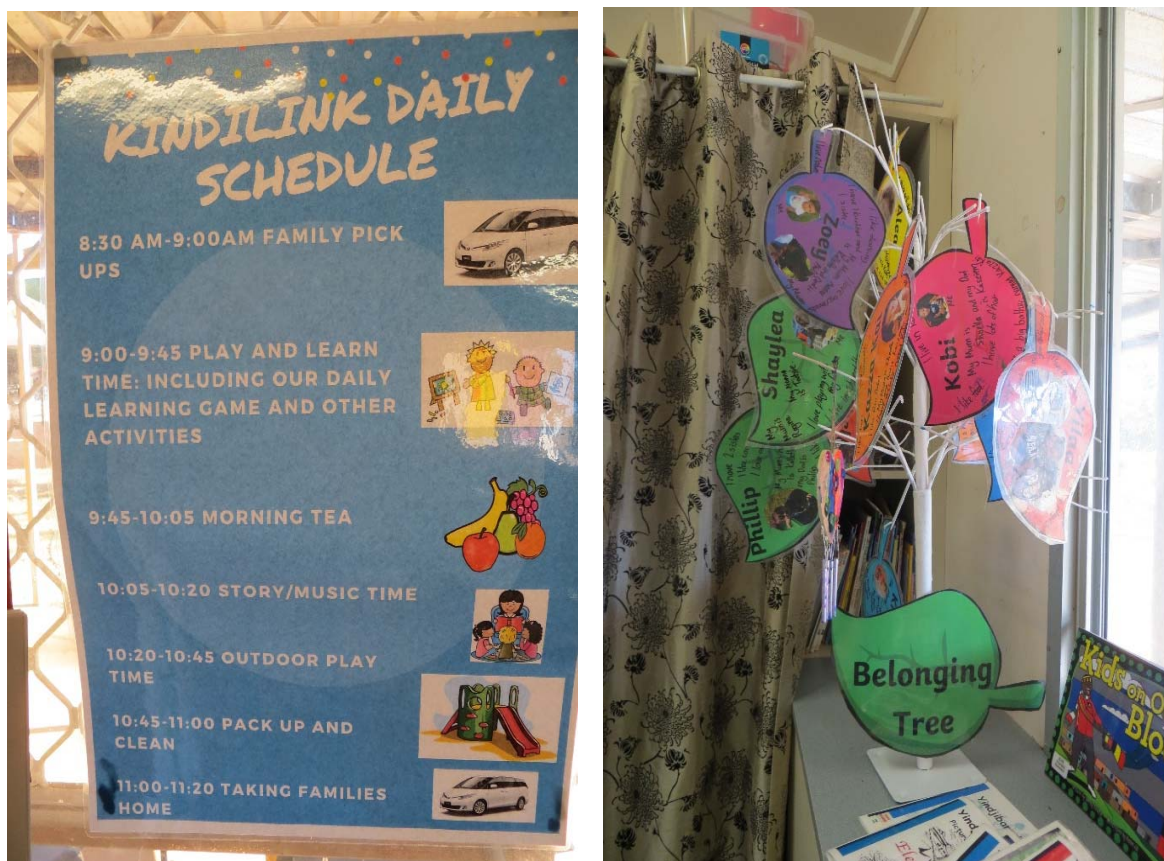


Image 3.4: Classroom displays

3.3.4 Feedback from families

A grandmother and regular participant in the KindiLink initiative recalled similar programs in the community that have operated under different names over the past 29 years, many of them attended by her own children. She has six children, seven adopted children and five grandchildren, is well known in the community and a strong advocate for initiatives like KindiLink.

Many families reported that their children loved everything about KindiLink – there wasn't anything they did not like about it. They acknowledged the contribution of KindiLink to their children's learning and development, with particular reference to:

- Making friends
- Learning to share
- Finding their own personality
- Developing patience
- Learning to use manners
- Becoming independent and not so clingy
- Learning how to behave, being calmer and not fighting
- Learning how to talk to others and listen
- Learning to sing songs, nursery rhymes and say numbers
- Learning to do craft, using scissors and a paintbrush
- Sitting at a computer



Image 3.5: Developing independence

3.4 Supporting Children’s Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

The KindiLink teacher reported noticing a big difference between the current cohort and previous ones when they transitioned to Kindergarten. Her observations of the children included:

- A lot more outgoing
- More confident
- Able to separate from parents
- Able to interact with people outside their environment
- Using more language
- Beginning to regulate emotions
- Able to use the toilet
- Following routines
- Following instructions
- Taking turns and sharing
- Improved fine motor skills, and
- Involved in more of the activities



Image 3.6: Indoor activities

The kindergarten and KindiLink teachers received similar feedback about the children’s growth and development, the KindiLink teacher adding: *“The differences have been noticeable in the students who attended KindiLink last year. The most significant thing that I observed was their confidence interacting with others. They were familiar with a school environment and appeared to be more relaxed and comfortable in the classroom setting. Another big difference that I quickly noticed was their ability to follow instructions and follow routines. It was such a blessing at the beginning of Term 1 when I had students who could pack away their learning experiences without me having to spend time explicitly teaching that skill”*. The kindergarten teacher recounted the positive difference made to the whole class by the six children who transitioned from the KindiLink initiative. Feedback from the families reflected their confidence in KindiLink to help their children in Kindergarten with sharing, listening, playing with other children, being able to sit still and fitting right in.

3.4.1 Engagement in activities

According to the KindiLink teacher, elements of the timetable that work well are conversation, reading, songs and playing. She emphasised the need for a particular focus during play, such as enhancing fine motor skills or use of language. The LearningGames® are considered to be good, but best completed in a more indirect way. The KindiLink teacher prefers to engage parents one-on-one in the LearningGames® rather than as a group *“because they feel like they’re being lectured to if it’s more than one of them sitting there listening to you do it”*. The LearningGames® are often repeated, with the same game presented over a whole week. The families commented that the children like:

- Playing with other children
- Hands-on things to smell and touch
- Singing
- Story reading

- Outdoor activities
- Excursions to the library, youth centre and park



Image 3.7: LearningGames®

The KindiLink teacher emphasised the importance of Language and attempted to use the local language as often as possible. She was learning the local language as she came from a different community and had several language books on display for teachers to use as a reference. On the bus one morning the researcher met one of the children’s grandmothers, an elder in the community, who mentioned how impressed she was that her granddaughter was able to communicate better and sing many songs. She suggested to the KindiLink teacher that she teach the songs in [name of Aboriginal language] language and offered to teach her, which the KindiLink teacher agreed to follow up.



Image 3.8: Books related to families’ culture and language/dialect

On the first day of the researchers’ visit the usual routine was not followed. This may have been because the staff and families were unsure of what to do or what to expect during the visit, or perhaps they needed time to get to know the researchers and develop relationships. The following 2 days were different, and the routine shown below was implemented in a flexible way.

KindiLink Daily Schedule	
8:30 – 9:00am	Family pickups
9:00 – 9:45am	Play and learn time including our daily learning game and other activities
9:45 – 10:05am	Morning tea
10:05 – 10:20am	Story/music time
10:20 – 10:45am	Outdoor playtime
10:45 – 11:00am	Pack up and clean
11:00 – 11:20am	Taking families home

According to the KindiLink teacher, parents like the structure and routine of the sessions and sometimes ask for certain songs to be included – their suggestions are implemented wherever possible. One parent recently suggested having a barbecue using the vegetables grown in the garden; this has now been earmarked for the break-up party. The KindiLink teacher believes the parents enjoy participating in craft activities and raised the alarm when they were withdrawn from adults to encourage interaction with the children. Other community programs were offering art and weaving activities for parents while their children engage in their own activities, and some of the families left to join them. The parents wanted to let the children go and do things for themselves: *“So, having the parents be with them, shadowing them, doing things, is a bit of a foreign concept, it’s something that they’re having to learn, that it’s good for them to do that, to help their child progress and develop”*. Interviews with the parents revealed they like doing art, craft and painting, and are unhappy when activities are not provided for them. One parent emphasised the importance of meeting, greeting and socialising from a social and cultural perspective.

The following section identifies some of the learning that was observed during the visits to KindiLink. Some activities are captured in photographs and the photographs are described. The photographs and descriptions are followed by evidence of learning and development. The evidence of learning and development is linked to the learning outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009). The EYLF is used in the KindiLink sites as a basis for making judgments about children’s learning and development. The Western Australian Kindergarten Guidelines, Learning Development Areas (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2016) have also been used as a means of identifying broad learning areas. Descriptions of the Learning Development Areas were used as a guideline and adapted where necessary, rather than applied rigidly. The intention is to indicate the learning that was evidenced through the observations. It is not an analysis of individual children. It is important to stress that there was considerable overlap in the children’s learning across the activities, but only the main aspects were identified for the purpose of this report, in order to avoid repetition. In addition, the level of attainment for each child varied as they engaged with activities at their own level and pace.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Communicating
<p align="center">Puppet play and small group time</p>	<p align="center">Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p align="center">Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Educators and parents using puppets to engage children in learning new words and to converse with one another about the book they are sharing.</p> <p>Photo 2: Children are encouraged to select a special song they would like to sing by helping to find it on the computer and then sharing it on the Smartboard for parents and children to sing along. They point to familiar pictures of their favourite songs and communicate what they would like to sing.</p>	<p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.</p> <p>5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.</p> <p>5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain conversations • Use speech that can be understood by others • Listen to others • Use simple sentences when speaking • Take turns in conversations • Use simple non-verbal ways of communicating through gestures and signs • Share a range of texts for enjoyment • Identify key ideas from simple texts



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Learning and thinking
Playing and creating	Building children's capabilities	Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities
<p>Photo 1: Educators and parents encourage children to engage in a sorting game, naming shapes and colours and then posting them into the matching container.</p> <p>Photo 2: Stacking blocks and learning about problem solving, trial and error in order to create a tower.</p> <p>Photo 3: Sensory exploration activities for children to sort, classify, discover and create.</p>	<p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.</p> <p>4.2 Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.</p> <p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.5. Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express curiosity and wonder during experiences • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Manipulate objects • Persist even when tasks are difficult, and experience the satisfaction of achievement • Explore and experiment with form, shape and colour • Use simple tools to create



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF) (adapted)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines
Indoor activities and routine times with parents	Building children’s capabilities	Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities Identity and Wellbeing
<p>Photo 1: Children are helped to make handprints and develop a sense of identity.</p> <p>Photo 2: Morning fruit time is an important part of the day to talk with one another and learn about healthy eating for wellbeing.</p> <p>Photo 3: Parents and educators foster children’s wellbeing when encouraging them to wash their hands independently.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity 1.1 Children feel safe, secure, and supported.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing 3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners 4.3 Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate conversations • Form stable relationships in the KindiLink environment • Join in play with enjoyment and satisfaction • Make new discoveries • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Show confidence in their abilities • Use home language/dialect at KindiLink • Take turns in a small-group situation • Develop capacity to self-regulate • Negotiate friendships and build respectful relationships • Demonstrate self-help skills and engage in health routines that promote healthy lifestyles, good nutrition, safety and personal hygiene practices.

3.5 Building the Capacity and Confidence of Parents as their Child's First Teacher

The KindiLink teacher was of the view that families had acquired skills by attending the initiative that they would not otherwise have learnt, including skills modelled by the teacher and AIEO, such as participating in activities with the children, talking with children more frequently and managing behaviour. The AIEO reported some mothers were fearful of taking their children to the shops or out on weekends because they would “go crazy”. As a result, many resorted to staying home and were reluctant to take their children out due to lack of confidence in their parenting skills. However, as time went by, the AIEO observed the parents becoming more confident and helping each other out with parenting advice and support. She added that since attending KindiLink, parents had developed behaviour management skills and techniques that made them more confident to go out and not stay locked up at home. The parents frequently texted the AIEO and KindiLink teacher to tell them about the good things their children were doing at home, like sharing, asking for a story at bedtime, helping mum clean or make dinner. This was confirmed in the family interviews where parents discussed how KindiLink had “helped us to gain skills as parents and grandparents”. The activities at KindiLink could now be done at home, like “creating a space at home... toy area, dress-up area, mud, sandpit area”. Other activities parents were doing at home included cutting, singing songs, talking to their children, cooking, going to the park and bike riding.



Image 3.9: Sequencing game

One mother added that being at KindiLink was helping her post-natal depression because she was able to access helpful support from the other women. By attending KindiLink she was getting out of the house and doing things that made her feel better. This mother believed she had learnt to be more patient, no longer screamed at her children all the time, and was a better mother and a better person for it. Two of the parents described how their children's attendance at KindiLink and Kindergarten had helped the children settle in.

The principal talked about one KindiLink mother who, despite being from an abusive environment and having substance abuse issues, had turned her life around. He recalled an incident in 2015 when she was hurling abuse at children who were teasing her daughter while her baby dangled over her arm. She usually spent her weekends gambling and drinking, yet the previous Friday night she had called the KindiLink teacher to ask how to make playdough, evidently having stayed home to be with her children. When the KindiLink teacher rang back later the mother had not been able to make the playdough, and so the KindiLink teacher dropped some off for her the next day. The principal, who had accompanied the KindiLink teacher, was impressed to see a little playground set up on the front lawn, with a swing set, trampoline and other play items, which the mother had bought with money received from a recent pay-out. The principal attributed this mother's transformation to the influence of the KindiLink initiative: *"Not often we see that, usually there's big money goes in, just goes out, and it's not on the sustainable items. Where, these kids have now got a little playground at the front of their house, and I thought, that's really awesome, and I'd love to think that KindiLink played a part in that journey"*.

In her response to whether KindiLink helped to build the capacity and confidence of the parents, the community member highlighted the importance of *"acknowledging the partnership last year, with the other agencies, what KindiLink was part of"*. The community member praised the efforts of the KindiLink teacher to help build the capacity and confidence of parents in the community: *"she's linking with other KindiLink, other agencies, and I'm finding that the parents are really confident and, vocal and safe to be vocal as well. So, they've come on a journey, and they're building up other women as well, other mums, yeah so, I think they're going well"*.

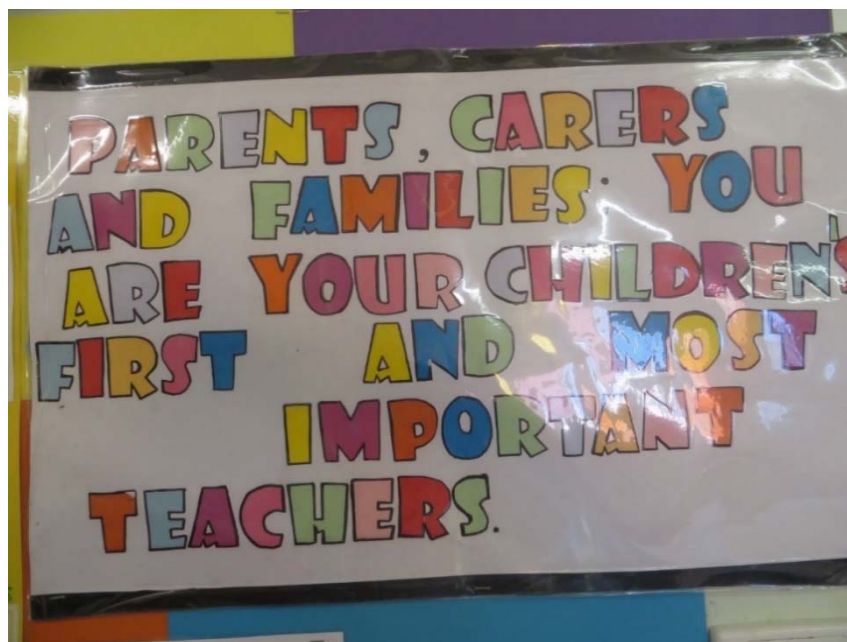


Image 3.10: Reinforcing KindiLink message

3.6 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, School and Community

Relationships are a key component of the school's operational plan, purpose and priorities, and this school has adopted a holistic approach that incorporates the KindiLink initiative. The principal stated: *"Relationships are the cornerstone of everything we do at Coojong. Relationships is the key for our school improvement and that's relationships that the staff have with each other, the relationships staff have with the students, and the relationships we have with the families. We really do see that when we're working as a unit together, where we're respecting all relationships and respecting families as the first educators, that's where we get our successes. That's where we get the level of trust that we need to really ensure that our school is a successful school"*. The school values mutual partnerships and communication to enhance student outcomes. The principal regards KindiLink as an integral part of the school community, as evidenced by the location of the premises, the signage within the school and the familiarity of school staff with program dates and events, which are prominently featured in school newsletters and on the school Facebook site. Relationships with families and children are a core element of the KindiLink initiative and this fits in well with the school's priorities. The KindiLink model of focusing on the parent and child as a family unit is important to the principal, and they were fortunate to have an Aboriginal early childhood teacher on staff who could fill the role of KindiLink teacher and continue to strengthen relationships.

Asked about developing positive relationships, the KindiLink teacher responded: *"I think it's been really important in terms of building that because, we're getting more families through the gates, and more families are coming here. And so, we're having, you know, at events that we have in the school, there's more parents turning up because of, since we've had KindiLink, because they're getting used to being in the school environment, they know me, the teacher here. So, I think that's helping to build relationships as well"*. According to her, the KindiLink mums enjoy attending KindiLink and are more comfortable about entering other areas of the school. Having the initiative onsite has familiarised parents with the school environment and built relationships with teachers, AIEOs and the office staff at the school. As a result, they are also more involved in their older children's schooling; they visit the upper school and are more engaged in school assemblies and events like sports carnivals. The families confirmed that KindiLink made them feel comfortable to go to the school. One parent said she *"felt at home and more welcomed"*. Another said: *"you are not judged here, you can relax"*. These comments from the families reinforce their perceptions of KindiLink as a family environment where the older children can come over to see the aunts and uncles and mix with their nieces and nephews. One mother likes to be called *"aunty"* by the children because it makes her feel comfortable and welcomed. Several parents mentioned excursions to the library and other towns for NAIDOC celebrations as highlights – they enjoy sharing food, getting out, networking and being a part of the community. The kindergarten teacher commented: *"I have noticed that when there have been special events at the school, such as Mother's Day morning tea or NAIDOC Week celebrations, families that attended KindiLink are more likely to be involved than those that did not"*.

Families view the school as a positive place and are inclined to stop and talk to the principal and strengthen relationships through such encounters. The principal said families even talked to him in the street. The kindergarten teacher expressed the view that the families are more confident to talk to her because they've already built a relationship: *"... with five out of the six kids that went to KindiLink, I have constant weekly, if not daily interactions with the families about their learning, and what they've been doing in the classroom"*. She emphasised this difference compared with parents of children who did not attend KindiLink.

Through KindiLink, the families have become familiar with other services, including Yandina (provide free clothes), a community group helping teenagers, support from an unnamed organisation for a child with obesity issues, the Child and Parent Centre and, most popular of all, the Bingo sessions held in a nearby hall. A number of the parents and families who attend KindiLink are also connected to other organisations in the community, such as Aboriginal corporations, Elders Yarning and art groups, and talking about KindiLink has forged stronger connections. The whole community is invited to events at KindiLink, like Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day activities. The school is aware of the all-encompassing kinship system and ensures that everyone is invited and feels valued when they come along. During the last week of the KindiLink term an excursion was organised that focused on country and families, a suggestion made by one of the families and facilitated by the KindiLink teacher. Children and staff went fishing, enjoyed damper and kangaroo stew, sang songs and shared stories, reflecting the belief of both the KindiLink teacher and AIEO in the significance of culture to underpin the initiative. Despite being from different tribes to the families, the KindiLink teacher and AIEO have been accepted into the community. One grandmother commented that the KindiLink teacher is good at "*gathering, caring and sharing*".

The following examples (Table 3.1) relate to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011, p.11), Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 3.1: Coojong School - examples relating to National Quality Standard, Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.


Observation	Description
	<p>Parents/grandparents and children engaged in one-to-one activities.</p> <p>Photo 1: The AIEO and teacher modelled how to paint the children’s hands and make a print on the calico bags. The parents then continued making prints with their children. The parents encouraged other children and siblings to make a bag.</p> <p>Photo 2: The children were engaged in water play with a parent sitting close by. The parent shared with everyone that her son has his own fishing line and goes fishing sometimes. The boy responded by making noises pretending he had caught a fish. There were not enough fishing rods for everyone to join in at the same time. The parent suggested the children share rods and wait their turn.</p>
Building children’s capabilities	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Emotional • Cognitive • Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging participation • Talking and sharing stories • Naming colours • Sharing and cooperating • Following directions • Regulating emotions.
Parents/carers confidence and capacity	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelling what do • Giving instructions • Engaged in child’s learning • Communicating with confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with children • Using a wide range of vocabulary and questioning • Fostering sharing and caring for others • Taking the lead when teacher and AIEO were not there.

Table 3.2: Coojong School - examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community

Examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community	NQS National Quality Area 6
<p>Relationships are a key component of the school’s operational plan, purpose and priorities, and this school has adopted a whole-of-school approach that incorporates the KindiLink initiative. The school values mutual partnerships and communication to enhance student outcomes.</p>	<p>6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.</p>
<p>To recruit participants, the KindiLink teacher (who is Aboriginal) and AIEO visit Aboriginal families in the community and provide them with a brochure about KindiLink. They also advertise in the school newsletter, on social media and put up flyers in the town. Many registrations are the result of word of mouth; the KindiLink teacher indicated that parents who attend are the best advocates for the school. Staff provide families with good support for the registration process.</p>	<p>6.1.1 There is an effective registration and orientation process for families.</p>
<p>Families share information about their children and contribute to program decisions, such as excursions for NAIDOC Week, going out on country fishing, eating damper and kangaroo stew as well as singing and sharing stories. Families take activities and ideas home, extending children’s learning.</p>	<p>6.1.2 Families have the opportunity to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.</p>
<p>Communication between families and KindiLink occurs in many ways, such as Facebook, newsletters, word of mouth, the website, text messages and announcements put up in the classroom by the KindiLink teacher.</p>	<p>6.1.3 Current information about the service is available to families.</p>
<p>According to the KindiLink teacher, Language is extremely important, and she attempts to use the local language as often as she can. The KindiLink teacher regularly provides positive feedback about each child’s learning and development to the families. The AIEO mentioned the parents’ growing confidence and helping each other out with advice and support related to parenting issues. Both the KindiLink teacher and AIEO believe in the importance and significance of culture in underpinning the program. The central aim of KindiLink is to support parents as their child’s first teacher by increasing their confidence and capacity. The principal, teacher, AIEO and families provided examples of how this had developed over the year for many parents.</p>	<p>6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role, and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.</p>
<p>Praising the parents and building their confidence as parents is an important strategy. The culture and language/dialect of the families are integral to KindiLink. Families contribute to and create activities that incorporate their culture and language/dialect. In addition, cultural celebrations are planned and sometimes led by families. Knowledge and understanding of the child are shared between families and the teacher/AIEO in a two-way process.</p>	<p>6.2.1 The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child’s learning and wellbeing.</p>

Examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community	NQS National Quality Area 6
<p>Productive relationships between the family, school and community are strongly encouraged by the school ethos and fostered by the KindiLink teacher who is Aboriginal and has a respectful and sensitive approach to families. She is aware of the importance of country, community, culture and language/dialect, which have helped forge strong links within the community. Information is available to families about service providers, and the teacher and AIEO help families access appropriate services when needed.</p>	<p>6.2.2 Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.</p>
<p>Through KindiLink, the families have become familiar with other services, including Yandina (providing free clothes), a community group helping teenagers, support for a child with obesity issues, the Child and Parent Centre and, most popular of all, the Bingo sessions held in a nearby hall. A variety of parents and families who attend KindiLink are also connected to other organisations in the community, such as Aboriginal corporations, Elders Yarning and art groups.</p>	<p>6.3 The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.</p>
<p>The principal engages community services that are relevant to the needs of the KindiLink families. Several parents mentioned excursions to the library and other towns for NAIDOC celebrations as highlights. They like the aspects of sharing food, getting out, networking and being a part of the community.</p>	<p>6.3.1 Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.</p>
<p>The principal observed a smoother, less traumatic transition to Kindergarten for children who had attended KindiLink. The location of the KindiLink building on the school site, right next door to the kindergarten room, has enabled effective communication between the two programs. The KindiLink teacher, who has been in the role since the beginning of the pilot, noticed a big difference between children who transitioned to Kindergarten more recently and in previous years. Feedback from the families indicates their confidence in KindiLink to help their children when they go to Kindergarten with sharing, listening, playing with other children, sitting still and fitting straight in.</p>	<p>6.3.2 Continuity of learning and transitioning each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.</p>
<p>The teacher and AIEO assist families to find information and access support services where appropriate. Informal referrals are provided for parents who ask for help.</p>	<p>6.3.3 Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.</p>
<p>The entire community is invited to KindiLink events, like Mothers’ Day or Fathers’ Day activities. The school is aware of the all-encompassing kinship system and ensures everyone is invited and feels valued when they come along.</p>	<p>6.3.4 The service builds relationships and engages with the local community.</p>

3.7 Improving Attendance during Schooling

3.7.1 Transition to Kindergarten

The principal observed a smoother and less stressful transition to Kindergarten for children who had attended KindiLink, commenting: *“that kindy class has been our best kindy class in terms of school engagement, school readiness and school achievement”*. When asked how many students went on from KindiLink to the kindergarten class, he responded: *“I’d have said probably about three-quarters would have enrolled here, and then the rest would have gone to [town name] or have now transferred”*. He noted a 5.5% improvement in kindergarten attendance in 2017. The KindiLink teacher added that earlier transition of the children to Kindergarten, prior to the start of the 2017 school year, had helped registrations and smoothed the flow into a new classroom. This was evident during the research team’s Term 3 visit when some children were observed attending KindiLink 3 days a week and Kindergarten on the other 2 days for half a day. The KindiLink teacher reported: *“Some of the kids that haven’t been to things like KindiLink or any other early learning program, they’re less used to that experience, so there’s days where they don’t want to come, and parents will not push them to come because they’re not used to the experience. Whereas the kids that have been to KindiLink, they’re used to going to a program like this, so they’re fine from being away from their parents because they’ve built up their social emotional wellbeing, and their confidence with being at school”*. The principal believed that the mothers’ attendance at KindiLink demonstrates to the older siblings that she values school and recognises its importance. The KindiLink teacher reported that one of the regular KindiLink mothers now sends her older children to school more often.

KindiLink has helped children and families make connections with the kindergarten room. Towards the end of 2016 there were two 3-year-olds attending KindiLink 3 days a week and Kindergarten on the other 2 days to facilitate a smooth transition. The kindergarten teacher stated: *“There have been a few changes in my classroom that have been inspired by the KindiLink initiative. The biggest influence has been on the parent involvement, because I believe that the KindiLink initiative has almost created a shift in the parent involvement, they’ve created an environment that’s more comfortable for the parents to have a lot of event days here. And that gets the parents into our doors, so I think we had about five last term, where parents came to the school”*. The link between the two rooms is enhanced by their physical location: side-by-side in a demountable. From time to time, the kindergarten teacher takes her classes outdoors so that the KindiLink parents and children are involved in assisting with the transition process. KindiLink outdoor time coincides with outdoor play for the kindergarten and pre-primary students, making it a time for family to connect with older siblings and family members. The families made many comments about the importance of this to them.

3.8 Overall Reflections

3.8.1 Challenges

To ensure inclusiveness for all families in the community, the principal decided that participants in the KindiLink initiative should include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families with children from birth to 3 years of age. Restricting attendance to 3-year-olds would exclude certain families and numerous siblings who regularly attended and benefited from the program. However, there were no non-Aboriginal families attending at the end of 2017. One Aboriginal family member stated that the non-Aboriginal women did not sit and yarn during the KindiLink sessions, and that it was *“the only way to stop racism and to teach kids young”*. She went on to say: *“it is not a good environment when they come”*. One Aboriginal grandmother recalled a situation where the responses of the non-Aboriginal mothers had affected attendance by Aboriginal parents during a NAIDOC day at a nearby KindiLink initiative where all the mothers were *“white and they were all black”*. As they got off the bus the white women seemed to *“stiffen up”*, and the response

from the Aboriginal women was to *“step back as that is the only way we know how to deal with it”*. These comments came from only one participating family and may therefore not be indicative of all the families’ sentiments. There was no mention of racial tension by any of the school staff.

3.8.2 Insights

KindiLink sessions run in 2-hour blocks over 3 days, the principal having concluded that the program works best when parents attend more frequently and the children grow tired if the sessions are too long. All the families interviewed said they tried to attend on all 3 days. Many commented on the positive atmosphere of KindiLink that keeps them attending. Barriers to their attendance include a lack of transport and the unavailability of a bus. More recently however, some families were making their own way to KindiLink, particularly those that live close by or within walking distance. Registrations to the program come from far and wide, including one mother from a nearby town that runs its own KindiLink initiative. She chooses to drive all the way to attend each session, preferring the Coojong KindiLink because she receives a lot of support from the other Aboriginal mothers. The principal reported: *“there’s 70-plus different types of organisations in town, so it can be quite overwhelming”*. The large number and diversity of community services has compelled the principal to act as gatekeeper in deciding which organisations fit best with the school, and how and when they engage with the KindiLink initiative.

3.9 Summary

The KindiLink initiative is embedded in both the school community and the wider local community. Despite low numbers of regular participants, KindiLink has made an impact on the lives of numerous children and families. There are many reasons for the program’s success:

- Location on the school grounds in a dedicated building
- Having an Aboriginal KindiLink teacher as well as AIEO
- A school bus to pick up and drop off parents
- A strong program emphasis on the culture and language/dialect of the local people
- A strong group of families who are devoted supporters of the program
- A principal who values the program and has integrated it into a whole-of-school approach
- Strong communication between the KindiLink teacher and parents

More longitudinal data will affirm KindiLink’s role in improving the social, emotional, language and cognitive capabilities of Aboriginal children upon entry to Kindergarten. The short-term benefits relate mainly to social and emotional domains; however, there may be other areas that will continue to develop over the longer term. Our observations indicate strong evidence of the effectiveness of KindiLink in building the capacity and confidence of parents as their child’s first educators. Responses from school staff and families reinforce the positive influence of the program on their wellbeing and parenting skills, and in some cases it appears that the families may be benefiting even more from the program than the children – without doubt, they have formed a strong bond.

One area that needs further investigation is the reason for non-attendance by non-Aboriginal families, despite encouragement by the school.

The school ethos strongly encourages productive relationships between family, school and community, and is fostered by the KindiLink teacher who is Aboriginal and has a respectful and sensitive approach to families.

She is aware of the importance of country, community, culture and language/dialect in forging strong links with the community. The community member reiterated the pivotal role of the KindiLink teacher to the success of the program. While attendance at Kindergarten had improved by 5.5%, this was not necessarily the case in the rest of the school, and this may be a result of extenuating circumstances in the community that have impacted on students and families. Despite these factors, KindiLink has maintained its numbers and support from the families.

4. Boronia

4.1 Community and School Context

4.1.1 Demographics

Boronia is located in an outlying suburb of a rural town and caters for children from Kindergarten to Year 6. The school has a low ICSEA rating. Since being built in the late 1800s, new buildings have been added to the original structure; today the school boasts a large library and contemporary science and computing facilities and has a proud history in the community. The student population comprises approximately 300 students from diverse backgrounds – 35% are recognised as Aboriginal and 15% come from overseas, without English as their first language (My School website). The school website describes an emphasis on pastoral care and, as the principal elaborated, their philosophy is underpinned by a “*whole child*” view of learning and teaching. She believes the focus of the school should encompass more than “*academics*,” reporting that the staff “*worked very hard to create a calm and welcoming environment for families and staff. We work on also making sure that students’ needs are met, whether they be the bare essentials, such as food, care, clothing, etc. and also, we’ve got quite a good network with external agencies.*”

A range of services operates from the school, including an onsite dental clinic and a canteen that operates 5 days per week. The school employs a Chaplain who works as part of a team to address the social/emotional needs of students and provide support and guidance to families. To assist children’s development, the school employs an occupational therapist and a speech therapist, and also has a “*good relationship*” with the community health nurse.

The principal commenced at the school when an Aboriginal preschool was operating on the site. She said: “*certainly kids were encouraged to come to school, parents were encouraged to participate, but there wasn’t a driven focus, and resources [were not] put aside, to try and make that happen*”. It is evident that intentional resourcing and setting clear goals were important for sustaining participation and facilitating positive learning and developmental outcomes for children.

Cognisant of the AEDC data, the principal believed that something was needed to facilitate a connection between Aboriginal families and the school. The KindiLink initiative was aligned with other school plans that had a collaborative focus on building the school community on trusting, respectful relationships. The notion of KindiLink as a program that links families with the school and empowers parents fits well with the school’s philosophy that seeks to build a safe, calm space where all feel welcome. The principal added: “*so KindiLink is building that partnership with the parents, so they feel comfortable in being here, and I really think the KindiLink parents do feel quite comfortable*”.

4.1.2 Registrations

Throughout KindiLink’s two years of operation the same families have attended regularly. In 2016 there were 30 registrations, but this number declined when some families realised they could not simply “*drop off*” their children as they were also required to attend. This was contrary to the norm in the previous Aboriginal preschool program that had ceased to operate. In 2017 there were 17 registrations where 7 to 10 families attended regularly. Not all the children attended all three sessions; some families were from outside the school’s catchment area. The KindiLink teacher said there were other programs available to the families, amongst them a 3-up program at the local early learning centre and a playgroup at the high school for families with young children.



Image 4.1: KindiLink welcoming notices and pin-up board for community events

4.2 Case Study Participants

4.2.1 School staff

All stakeholders reported that recruitment of the right staff for KindiLink was crucial in its success. The principal had been in the school for 3 years and said that she had heard that the KindiLink teacher was an excellent early childhood educator but was on maternity leave from the school. She invited her in for an interview and asked if she was interested in working in the KindiLink initiative for 2016. The KindiLink teacher was born and raised and had studied her tertiary degree, a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), in town. This school was her first posting and with teaching and relief work she has been an early childhood teacher for ten years. She now works part time after 3½ years on maternity leave. This is the KindiLink teacher’s second year in the KindiLink initiative.

After her appointment, the principal consulted the Aboriginal Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) who recommended someone for the program. She was appointed as the AIEO for the KindiLink initiative, having worked as an assistant for nearly 20 years; 3 years at this school and 17 years at a nearby primary school. She is employed full time and divides her time between her roles as KindiLink assistant and AIEO for the school as needed. Asked what skills a KindiLink staff member needs, the AIEO replied: *“talking to the parents, making them feel comfortable”*. The kindergarten teacher is a recent early childhood graduate in her second year of teaching at the school.

4.2.2 Families

Eleven parents/carers attended during the data collection; one family declined to be interviewed and eleven adults (2 males and 9 females) consented. In one family, both the mother and father were interviewed. Whilst a female family member or carer accompanied most of the children to KindiLink, three fathers also attended the playgroup. One father assisted a family to the centre and left after they had settled. The other two fathers were regular participants – one accompanied his wife and the other alternated with his wife as work shifts permitted. Ten children aged 3 years were attending during the data collection period; of these, three identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Many of the children were accompanied by a sibling. The grandmother of one child attended multiple sessions while visiting from Perth. Not all the 3-year-olds were in the eligible age group for registering with KindiLink.

4.2.3 Community members

Two community members who were also AIEOs at the school were interviewed. One male AIEO had only been at the school for a few weeks, while the female AIEO had worked in the school for some time. Both had heard of KindiLink through conversations with the AIEO and they thought that KindiLink had a good name in the community and was successful as families joined in.

4.3 Implementing KindiLink

The KindiLink initiative operated in a demountable purpose-built kindergarten classroom, which opens out onto the children's playground, used by the kindergarten and pre-primary classes. The principal described being fortunate to have this spare space and – with some minor adjustments, such as the addition of a path for prams, baby-changing facilities and child-lock security gates – the space was made ready for the KindiLink initiative.



Image 4.2: The KindiLink centre and outdoor play area

Towards the end of 2015, the principal attended the KindiLink orientation and returned to the school to start the community consultation. A number of parents from the community were invited to the school for morning tea, where several aspects of the program were discussed. A number of questions were asked, such as: *“What do you think we need to do to attract Aboriginal parents?”* Discussion focused on details of timing, who would be present and how it might look. The principal found the process illuminating as issues were raised that she was unaware were preventing some parents from attending school, such as no path to wheel a pram. Parents wanted to know if they could bring younger siblings, how they would change their babies, and decided that 3 half-days would work well. They also discussed the intent for KindiLink to cater solely for Aboriginal families, but the consensus was that it should be open to all families. As articulated by one parent: *“Well, hey, my sister-in-law is not Aboriginal, but I would like her to come, because she’s my sister-in-law and our kids play together”*. She added: *“So you can’t stop people if they’re family”* and *“We should be, yes, targeting Aboriginal families, but we shouldn’t stop people who are not Aboriginal, because a lot of those people were part of our community anyway”*. It is from this discussion that the principal said the school took their lead.

While families with children who were turning three by June were the target population, it was soon apparent that families with 3-year-olds would not be turned away. The principal explained it was too confusing to monitor, so after discussion about age and the aims of KindiLink they decided: *“If your child turns three any time this year, just bring them in, and then many people, you know, they’ve got a 3-year-old but they’ve also*

got a one-year-old, or a baby, so they just bring them along as well, and we see no problem with that, because what we're trying to do is grow the confidence and capacity of the parents, so those children will be coming to our school anyway, so that doesn't matter". The staff made it clear to the families that although they attended KindiLink at an early age, they were not able to start Kindergarten until they reached the eligible age. The principal believed these families and children would be entering the school community, so it was beneficial to start building relationships early on. She viewed KindiLink as a unique opportunity to build the skills needed for a positive start at school. She said, *"Hopefully when the children start Kindergarten, and hopefully they do start Kindergarten, they will have some of those skills and will fit in and feel comfortable and be able to participate and feel confident".*

4.3.1 Recruitment

To recruit participants, the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO went out into the community towards the end of 2015 and placed a number of posters in shop windows along the main street and invited people they passed with young children to come along. They also visited an Aboriginal grandmother in the community with relatives at the school and informed her about the program. The AIEO described using *"word of mouth"* to let her family know, who in turn told others, thereby moving the message on. She explained how this worked in the Aboriginal community, as it was connected through the school with Aboriginal teachers, AIEOs and students who were related to one another. When KindiLink started, other parents also distributed flyers at social clubs and church groups. The AIEO said the main *"word of mouth"* message was to *"come try it out"*. The kindergarten teacher also commented on how the message spread through word of mouth, saying: *"I think there's quite a few kids this year, and obviously, if parents say that it's a good experience, they go and tell their friends, and that seems to be the best way just to tell everyone that it's available when it is. If they get positive reviews, it seems to spread, and hopefully more children will come"*. The parents/carers reiterated the value of hearing about KindiLink by *"word of mouth"*. Most of those interviewed had been informed by a family member or friend, one parent had made her own inquiries and the school had informed another parent.

Despite KindiLink having been advertised more formally in the school newsletter, school website, posters and letters to parents, the principal believed *"word of mouth"* was the most influential. To that end, she believed that having *"a really good AIEO"* assisted in spreading the word about KindiLink, because the Aboriginal community needed information that could not be found in a newsletter; such as who was there, what they were like, and the expectations of people who attend. Natalie (a pseudonym), the manager of corporate services in the school, said that KindiLink was also advertised in other schools' newsletters and every time someone enrolled in the school they were asked if the child had younger siblings.

The KindiLink teacher used social media to advertise KindiLink and posted all the weekly highlights on a closed Facebook site. Parents proudly shared the closed Facebook page with others and showed them what was taking place. She regarded this as the main avenue for advertising KindiLink because it was easy to access and, unlike a newsletter, could not get lost in delivery. Parents/carers affirmed this was one of the best ways to keep families connected and hear what was happening at KindiLink.

4.3.2 Attendance

KindiLink is conducted in three 2-hour sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Most parents/carers attend all three sessions; others attend two sessions due to other commitments. The 2-hour timeframe for the sessions was a change from the year before, and all parents expressed positive feedback. Most parents cited illness of the child or other family members as reasons for not attending.

Several factors affected attendance. The principal talked about a number of related families in the community who were in conflict with one another in 2016. She had tried to assist the KindiLink teacher to resolve the conflict but, in the end, one of the families had to leave. The AIEO explained the reasons for absenteeism were usually related to the health of a parent, the child or siblings. She described usually ringing families when they've been absent for consecutive sessions to check in on them and offer help, elaborating: *"If we don't see them for a while, we give a call to see if they've changed their mind, and they'll let me know if the child's been sick or they've been busy and stuff, and I write that down, so it's like a home liaison sort of ... like, they just give a call"*. The KindiLink teacher added that reasons of family business, house inspections and lack of transport to the centre all affected attendance.

The AIEO was asked what she thought encouraged families to attend and replied, *"You sort of make it really inviting"*. This theme was echoed by all; the administration team, educators, parents and carers. The parents/carers claimed they attended because their children really wanted to come and they had made some good friends at KindiLink. The KindiLink teacher also used social media – a closed Facebook page – where she posted photos of past activities and news of things to come. She thought it was important for families to know they can get advice and support from the centre. Services operating in the community were invited to visit, such as Ngala and the occupational therapist. The KindiLink teacher described these visits as a great success because the service providers were non-threatening, sessions were informal and the parents asked lots of questions.

The KindiLink teacher talked about attendance numbers and those she could record. She gestured around the room at the many people present, of which only three were on the KindiLink register, and explained that while the numbers appeared low on the attendance register, they did not turn away younger siblings, other family members, or unregistered 3-year-old-children. It was evident that fathers felt welcome at this KindiLink centre, as three fathers accompanied their children and were observed participating and conversing with staff and other families.

The KindiLink teacher considered the skills and knowledge needed to communicate effectively as important attributes for the KindiLink teacher and assistant. She said, *"communicating with parents is the biggest thing, knowing how to approach parents with certain things"*. She also believed that KindiLink teachers must be able *"to relate to the families"* and not *"force them to sit down"* or *"take part"*.

The reasons families described for enjoying KindiLink and attending regularly were:

- Getting out of the house
- Singing and joining in the activities
- Obtaining new parenting information
- Feeling comfortable with the staff and valuing their relationships with them
- Seeing the children learning and growing
- The social aspect: making friends, feeling a sense of belonging and building a network.

4.3.3 Planning

Both the KindiLink teacher and assistant described a collaborative planning process. The AIEO said she and the KindiLink teacher would talk about what they want to do and set out a weekly plan. They look in the *"book"* (a manual of Abecedarian LearningGames® to play with young children) and use some of the ideas. The KindiLink teacher said the *"book"* had been very useful and the AIEO had made some of the games for

parents to take home to play with their children. A few parents had taken the opportunity to borrow the games.

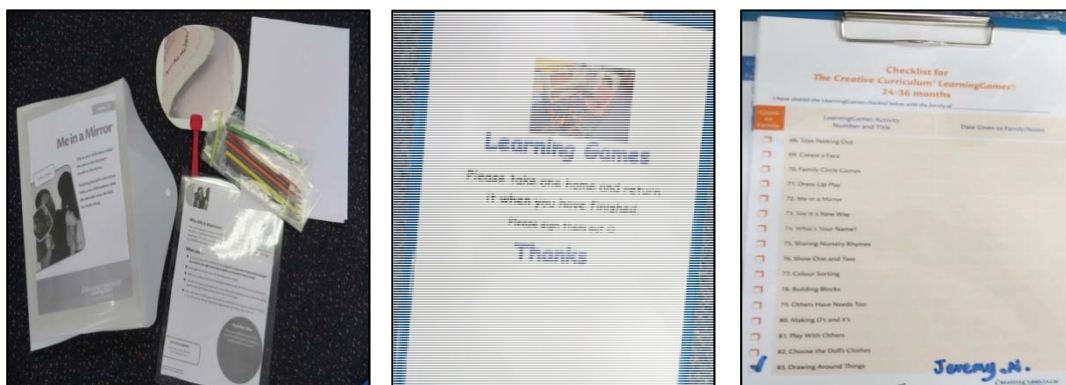


Image 4.3: Example of a LearningGame® and the sign-out sheet

To develop learning experiences, the KindiLink teacher informally reviews children’s development across domains and explores how this can be further developed. These experiences vary from parent/child reading time, a selection of table top and learning centre activities (indoors then outdoors) and whole-group time. She aims to familiarise the children with simple routines to facilitate a smoother transition to Kindergarten. The atmosphere in the centre during the session was relaxed and friendly, and the timetable flowed easily as children and parents/carers demonstrated an understanding of what was coming next.

KindiLink Time Table	Timetable				
<table border="1"> <tr> <th>Time</th> <th>Activities</th> </tr> <tr> <td>9.00am to 9.15am</td> <td>Doors open, tea/coffee, chat. Quiet play with range of activities</td> </tr> </table>	Time	Activities	9.00am to 9.15am	Doors open, tea/coffee, chat. Quiet play with range of activities	<p>9.00 - 9.15 Doors open. Tea /coffee, chat. Quiet play with a range of activities</p>
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9.00am to 9.15am	Doors open, tea/coffee, chat. Quiet play with range of activities				
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Time	Activities				
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9.30am to 10.00am	Activities				
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Time	Activities				
10.00am to 10.10am	Song time and wash hands				
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<table border="1"> <tr> <th>Time</th> <th>Activities</th> </tr> <tr> <td>10.50am to 11.00am</td> <td>Story and good bye</td> </tr> </table>	Time	Activities	10.50am to 11.00am	Story and good bye	
Time	Activities				
10.50am to 11.00am	Story and good bye				

Image 4.4: KindiLink timetable

The KindiLink teacher talked about how their planning had changed over the two years since starting in 2016, and stated that the new way of working has assisted the flow of sessions. In the first year, consultants from the Department of Education advised the KindiLink teacher to stand back a little from the activities, since modelling the activities to parents/carers had inadvertently caused the parents to stop participating with their children. Since then, they had worked hard to change their behaviour and encourage the parents’

interaction and engagement with the children and activities. There was a pictorial cue on the wall to remind them of this.

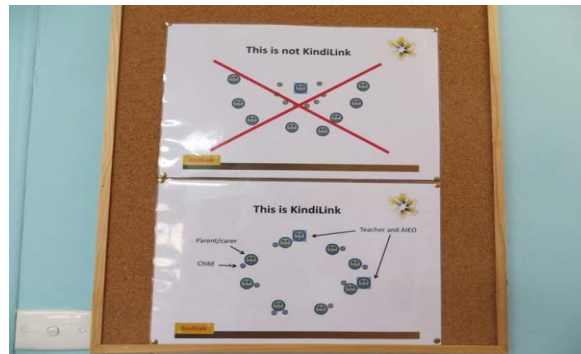


Image 4.5: Pictorial cue of KindiLink pedagogy

4.3.4 Feedback from families

Feedback from families was an important part of the process for this KindiLink site. The principal said that formal feedback was sought at the end of the first year, and based on the parents' suggestions they had changed the days and times of the sessions. From this review of likes and dislikes also came an understanding that parents wanted time to talk to each other and some space at outdoor time to do this.

At the beginning of 2017, parents were asked for their ideas for activities and these were subsequently incorporated into the playgroup. Both the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO disclosed that it had taken a little while for the parents to feel confident about making suggestions. One parent suggested a cooking activity because her child liked to cook, and this was incorporated. She said, *"I was listened to, absolutely listened to."* All the parents/carers said they felt comfortable to make suggestions, but did not have many to make because they really liked the program as it was. Most parents talked about not needing to make suggestions, because: *"I have liked everything being done"* or *"[the KindiLink teacher] has really good ideas anyway"*. One of the fathers said he would not make any suggestions because he did not *"feel I need to and I wouldn't know"*. The KindiLink teacher said her constant conversations with the parents allows her to gauge what they like to do with their children and she then changes the program accordingly.

After the program began in 2016, the KindiLink parents were asked to complete a survey that included a question about what they would like to see. The principal highlighted the importance of this question for consulting with many of the young parents who did not know what was available. In 2017, all the feedback about the KindiLink initiative was positive and none of the participants wanted to change anything. Most pointed out that KindiLink worked for them because of the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO. One parent said: *"Brilliant teachers and parents, makes a huge difference,"* while another said: *"[the KindiLink teacher] communicates very well with the kids and the adults. The children respond very well to her. We miss her when she is not here"*.

4.4 Supporting Children's Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

The principal stated that until she had data she would not know how effective KindiLink has been for improving the children's developmental domains. However, the families' regular attendance and engagement had led her to believe that *"there's a real feel of confidence and harmony there... that's*

necessary for learning to take place". Furthermore, her observations provided evidence of increased engagement in learning for some children and steady growth in their confidence.

The teacher and AIEO both believed KindiLink made a difference in the learning and development of the children who attended. The KindiLink teacher thought the program assisted children's development in all domains. Language was one area where she had seen a *"definite burst,"* and that handling the books during reading time increased as children became *"much more interested in books"*. Socially, children grew more interested in one another and their interactions increased as the year went on. The 3-year-olds were observed interacting socially during outdoor play; three children created a fantasy story about travelling, using language to negotiate their roles and the story line, and kept the play going for 15 minutes without any assistance.



Image 4.6: *Children playing collaboratively in fantasy play*

The parents/carers also reported growth in their children's development and learning as a result of coming to KindiLink and participating in the activities. They observed growth in their children's:

- Confidence
- Attention span
- Language
- Sharing
- Understanding appropriate behaviour
- Understanding how to join a group
- Using scissors
- Listening to others
- Participating in routines
- Social skills

The principal described one of the unintended benefits of KindiLink as *"early identification of children with additional needs ... that is one area that we've been able to pick up on"*. She had previously been concerned about one of the KindiLink teacher's students who had an overall developmental delay. The KindiLink teacher

subsequently sought advice and, according to the principal, she now “has the parent on-board”. She said: “So I think that’s been another pick up”.



Image 4.7: Indoor learning activities

4.4.1 Engagement in activities

The structure of the session had changed over the year and parents and children were observed busily engaged in all the activities on offer. The session commenced with children and parents being welcomed in the door and invited to play with the toys and table activities. The process was informal as families arrived at different times and were greeted warmly by the staff. After ten to fifteen minutes, the KindiLink teacher signalled it was book-reading time, and each child selected a book and took it to their accompanying adult to read or point to the pictures that they described.



Image 4.8: Shared reading

After the reading time, the activities were shown to all the families and they were invited to participate. The children selected the activities and their accompanying adult worked with them on a variety of table activities, the home corner or other learning centres. During this time, all were engaged; parents and children were talking to one another and those around them. The adults who were interviewed claimed the children enjoyed the following indoor activities:

- Sensory activities like finger painting
- Playdough
- Painting
- Cooking

- Computer
- Home corner
- Craft activities
- Singing
- Stories

All the families said the children really enjoyed coming to KindiLink and participating in the activities. They mentioned the convenience of the session times and found it relaxing to watch their children play and work. One mother said her child enjoyed it all so much “*that it was easier to come than not to come*”. For many families, the social aspect of getting out of the home and connecting with other parents was important. One mother said she dreaded coming at first, but it had turned out better than she expected and she now had a group of friends with whom she hoped to move through school. Another mother spoke of suffering from post-natal depression and how helpful it had been for her to get out of the house and socialise with other parents and service providers.



Image 4.9: Child and parent engagement in indoor activities



Image 4.10: Indoor learning activities

After some time inside, the children packed away their activities, washed their hands and had morning tea on the mat on the outside verandah. Adults were also invited to have morning tea, and children and adults exchanged conversations.



Image 4.11: Morning tea outside on the mat

After morning tea, a number of outdoor activities were set up for the children and adults. According to the parents/carers, the children really enjoyed the bikes and playing with their friends outdoors. All the families appeared to be comfortable with one another; at times they watched on as their children played, and at times they played with their own children and/or others. The children had the large playground to themselves as the kindergarten and pre-primary classes were inside. Towards the end of outdoor time, the kindergarten class came to play outside. Some of the parents talked to the kindergarten teacher as she watched over her class at play.



Image 4.12: Children and adults engaged in outdoor activities

At the conclusion of outdoor time, the children washed their hands and assembled on the mat. The AIEO read a story while the children finished the leftover fruit and the parents helped clean up or listened to the story being read. After singing a few simple songs, the children said their good-byes.



Image 4.13: Whole-group story time at the end of the session

The following section identifies some of the learning that was observed during the visits to KindiLink. Some activities are captured in photographs and the photographs are described. The photographs and descriptions are followed by evidence of learning and development. The evidence of learning and development is linked to the learning outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009). The EYLF is used in the KindiLink sites as a basis for making judgments about children’s learning and development. The Western Australian Kindergarten Guidelines, Learning Development Areas (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2016) have also been used as a means of identifying broad learning areas. Descriptions of the Learning Development Areas were used as a guideline and adapted where necessary, rather than applied rigidly. The intention is to indicate the learning that was evidenced through the observations. It is not an analysis of individual children. It is important to stress that there was considerable overlap in the children’s learning across the activities, but only the main aspects were identified for the purpose of this report, in order to avoid repetition. In addition, the level of attainment for each child varied as they engaged with activities at their own level and pace.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Communicating
<p align="center">Book sharing and craft</p>	<p align="center">Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p align="center">Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Parent talking to children about the book they are sharing. Pointing to, naming and reading the words and making a connection between the word and the illustrations.</p> <p>Photos 2, 3 & 4: Parents talking to their children and other parents and children as they complete activities. Parents were naming colours and shapes and asking questions about position.</p>	<p>Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world</p> <p>2.1 Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for community participation.</p> <p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity</p> <p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.1 Children interact verbally and non- verbally with others for a range of purposes.</p> <p>5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.</p> <p>5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen to others and share own ideas ● Sustain conversations ● Use speech that can be understood by others ● Use simple sentences when speaking ● Use turn-taking in conversations ● Use simple non-verbal ways of communicating through gesture and signs ● Share a range of texts for enjoyment ● Identify key ideas from simple texts ● Use books/texts appropriately – turns pages ● Increase use of vocabulary by exploring meanings of new words and talk about language (metalinguage) ● Verbalise ideas and simple concepts and ask questions to clarify concepts ● Engage in discussion about narratives and informational texts ● Explore common language patterns in narratives ● Describe how the illustrations connect to the text



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Learning and thinking
<p>Access to technology, making music, sharing books and baking</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Computer station for children to familiarise themselves with the keyboard and mouse. Possibility of recognising letters and numerals and playing games.</p> <p>Photo 2: Musical instruments available for free experimentation. An adult is present to play, answer questions, name the instruments and facilitate discussions.</p> <p>Photo 3: Parents and children share books. Familiarity with book handling grew while discussing the pictures and print.</p> <p>Photo 4: Adults and children make play dough together discussing ingredients and method.</p>	<p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning, such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.</p> <p>4.2 Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.</p> <p>4.4 Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.</p> <p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.5. Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Manipulate objects • Use simple tools to create • Ask questions about people, events, objects and the environment • Create own improvisations in play (connects to The Arts Curriculum) • Engage in music-making and create simple compositions. • Use skills of prediction, hypothesising, testing, experimenting and evaluating in play experiences (connects to the Science Curriculum) • Share observations with others as they explore their immediate world using their five senses (connects to the Science Curriculum) • Express curiosity and wonder about experiences • Follow and extend their own interests with enthusiasm, energy and concentration



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted)
<p>Indoor and outdoor physical activities with other children and parents</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities Identity and Wellbeing</p>
<p>Photo 1: Children chose their own activities outside. Some engaged in solitary play and some chose to talk with others while they played.</p> <p>Photo 2: Children participated in a whole-group story session with an adult. They looked at the book, listened to the adult and joined in discussions.</p> <p>Photo 3: Children played alongside others while they played with manipulative materials.</p> <p>Photo 4: One child felt comfortable enough in the surroundings to approach an adult to ask her questions about her baby.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>1.1 Children feel safe, secure, and supported.</p> <p>1.2 Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency</p> <p>1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect</p> <p>Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world</p> <p>2.1 Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation</p> <p>Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</p> <p>3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form stable relationships within KindiLink environment • Initiate and join in play with enjoyment and satisfaction • Join in group activities such as singing and dancing to songs • Approach new situations with a positive attitude • Make new discoveries and celebrate their own efforts and achievements and those of others • Demonstrate an increasing capacity for self-regulation • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Show some confidence in their abilities • Show curiosity and engagement • Participate appropriately in a social context • Initiate interactions and conversations with peers, teachers and other adults in a range of contexts • Manage and participate in setting routines and processes • Build positive relationships in their peer group and social circles • Show respect for others, their views and property • Negotiate friendships and build and maintain respectful, trusting relationships with other children and teachers • Develop capacity to self-regulate • Make choices and accept challenges • Move around environment safely • Develop hand/eye/hand coordination • Move to tempo of music and develop motor movements to the rhythm of music • Move around the environment safely demonstrating spatial awareness • Demonstrate a willingness to participate in energetic physical activity including dance, drama, movement and games

4.5 Building the Capacity and Confidence of Parents as their Child's First Teacher

The principal believed KindiLink had succeeded in building the capacity and confidence of parents as their child's first teacher. She described the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO as good role models for the children in the centre and *"so... that will be of benefit to the children"*. To further illustrate, six KindiLink parents had initiated a project to paint a mural on the side of the KindiLink building to enhance the school surroundings.

The KindiLink teacher and the AIEO introduced the LearningGames® as a means of assisting parents to work with their children at home. The KindiLink teacher said many families did not have *"stuff at home and taking LearningGames® home makes a difference"*. She added they had dismissed some games because they were *"too wordy to try and explain to parents"* and had modified others. The AIEO had made up packs of the games used in the initiative for the parents to take home and use with their children. The KindiLink teacher believed the program was successfully *"building capacity of parents,"* and, in her view, participating in the activities throughout the year had made the parents *"feel a bit more capable"*.



Image 4.14: A LearningGame®

Many parents said they did some craft at home with their children but mainly read stories and sang songs they had learned at KindiLink. They described replicating some of the craft activities at home – one mother described buying a laminator so they could put the finished products up on the wall. Only one family took LearningGames® home. All the parents claimed the KindiLink initiative had increased their confidence as their child's first teacher or reaffirmed what they knew. For one parent, coming to KindiLink had made her aware of developmental markers and *"given her new things to try"*. A father said that coming to KindiLink had *"reaffirmed, so that we are confident in what we are doing the right things"*. Many parents mentioned being able to talk to other parents about issues they had in common. Such discussions contributed to their growing confidence as they found they were not alone, could ask questions and obtain useful information from guest speakers.

4.6 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, School and Community

Family and school links were positively supported and empowered by the KindiLink initiative. The principal said that when she started the school did not have *“a positive profile in the community”* and she thought KindiLink had assisted in building the school’s profile positively. She said *“word of mouth is very positive about KindiLink so that then portrays the school in a more positive light...”* It was the principal’s firm belief that if a parent felt *“confident and comfortable with their child being at school, and being able to talk to staff, then that will also affect the child’s learning”*. In her opinion KindiLink had been successful in forging positive links between families and the school. Being able to go in and out when the program was running, greeting family members warmly and conversing with them all contributed positively. The mural project she thought showed the parent’s air of confidence in the school that KindiLink attendance had built. This confidence was apparent when they did an end-of-year review in 2016 and parents were *“open and honest”* in giving their opinions.

KindiLink assists in building community links. The principal spoke of Ngala and the parenting specialist, who had visited to talk to families about toileting, managing behaviour and other aspects of parenting. The talks were informal – *“a morning tea chat”* – where everyone sat together. The principal described a visit by the Ngala specialist who spoke about fine motor skills, followed by the families and children playing together with activities that had been set up outside.

The school employs a speech pathologist who had spoken to the KindiLink parents about the children’s speech development, articulation and milestones. Parents also contact the community health nurse directly to talk about their child’s health and development. All the parents/carers interviewed said they had learnt about the support services available to them in the community from KindiLink. The principal said: *“[the KindiLink teacher] has done a really good job of making links with various communities”* and the parents echoed this sentiment. The KindiLink teacher listened to parents’ queries and conversations, and organised guest visits around her perception of their needs. They had been visited by:

- Dental clinic
- Speech pathologist
- Occupational therapist
- Community health nurse
- Ngala – parent support and parenting advice

The following examples (Table 4.1) relate to the National Quality Standard (ACECQA 2011, p. 11). Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 4.1: Boronia School - examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community

Examples of productive relationships	NQS National Quality Area 6
The KindiLink staff regard their most important skill as the ability to ensure that parents feel welcome and comfortable. The staff work in partnership with parents and invite community consultation on how to attract Aboriginal families and eliminate obstacles to their participation.	6.1 Respectful, supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.
Parents are offered assistance to register their children. All family members are welcomed to KindiLink. Assistance is also offered for kindergarten enrolment at the end of the year.	6.1.1 There is an effective registration and orientation process for families.
Families are invited to recommend improvements to the service and this has resulted in the installation of a path for pram access and a baby-changing area. The session times were changed due to parent requests. The program allows younger siblings and non-Aboriginal families to be included as a result of parents' requests.	6.1.2 Families have the opportunity to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.
The KindiLink service is advertised in other school newsletters and every time a child is enrolled at the school the family is asked if they have younger siblings. There is also a KindiLink Facebook page. All families believe they are kept informed by the teacher.	6.1.3 Current information about the service is available to families.
The staff respect parents as co-educators of their children and provide parenting workshops. Families are provided with skills and games to use at home.	6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.
KindiLink staff work to build capacity and confidence of parents as their child's first teacher. Parents attend with their children and the staff model how to complete activities. Parent's skills are utilised; for example, a group of six will be designing and painting a mural on the wall of the centre. All activities suggested by the parents are <i>"always incorporated into the plan"</i> .	6.2.1 The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.
KindiLink staff arrange informal agency visits over a cup of tea, and have included visits by Ngala, the Child Health Nurse, speech pathologist, occupational therapist and dentist. These were very well received.	6.2.2 Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.
The school KindiLink initiative liaises with other community services used by the school.	6.3 The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children's learning and wellbeing.
KindiLink maintains close relationships with the local Child Health Nurse, dentist, speech and other specialists.	6.3.1 Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
KindiLink parents are introduced to the kindergarten teacher at the end of the year and there is continuity of some staff from KindiLink to Kindergarten. The transition of children to Kindergarten has been seamless and the children adopted the routines and displayed expected behaviours.	6.3.2 Continuity of learning and transitioning each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
KindiLink staff help with early identification of students with developmental delays.	6.3.3 Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
Families are introduced to local community members and services through incursions and excursions.	6.3.4 The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.

4.7 Improving Attendance among Participating Children during their Schooling

4.7.1 Transition to Kindergarten

Three children had moved from the 2016 KindiLink initiative to Kindergarten; one of them had since moved out of town. Others had gone to the local Catholic or another primary school, or had left town. There were no data on these children and their transition to school. The KindiLink teacher also worked in the Kindergarten 1 day per week and had seen first-hand the smoother transition of children from KindiLink. She described their transition as seamless; it was apparent to her that they had some knowledge of routines and expected behaviours compared to children who had no preschool experience. The AIEO cited an example of one child who did not speak in the first few months of KindiLink and then gradually engaged in activities with others. Upon his transition to Kindergarten, she said: *“He just walked straight in, he knew the bell, he knew everything, and gets in and plays...”* The KindiLink teacher and the AIEO reported that this child attends Kindergarten regularly.

The kindergarten teacher acknowledged that the three children who came from KindiLink had experience of *“how to cut, how to sit down, that we’d have shared fruit, where your bags go. They seemed to understand that, you know, you’re listening to a teacher...”* She said their confidence had been boosted and they had acquired the knowledge and skills to transition confidently into the Kindergarten program. She was of the view that the growth in these children’s confidence had also been observed in the Aboriginal parents who *“felt more comfortable coming in because they knew a little bit about the school, they knew some school expectations, they knew some teachers at the school”*. The kindergarten teacher believed by having been introduced to the parents at KindiLink *“they felt that I was a trusted person”*. She highlighted the importance of parents and teachers connecting, because if the children *“see that there’s a connection, and the teachers get along, and if the parents get along, they tend to feel comfortable to learn”*.

The principal said *“[the KindiLink teacher] works a day a week in kindy to create flow, transition flow, and I think that has been really useful, and has made a difference as far as making the children feel comfortable, and it’s also ensured that the rest of the staff are aware of KindiLink”*. At the 2017 kindergarten orientation for the 2016 KindiLink cohort, the administration team had admission packs available and assisted families with filling out the form. More formal plans for including KindiLink in the whole-school transition were planned for this year. The principal elaborated: *“We did not do that last year. But this year, when our kindy, pre-primaries, and year ones all start their transitioning for next year, we’re actually going to start transitioning the KindiLink kids this year for next year”*. She said one of the issues had been high staff turnover and not being able to place teachers in year levels before the end of the year. The principal had recently confirmed the staff that were continuing, so was confident about being able to introduce the kindergarten teacher to the KindiLink parents at the end of the year: *“...so the parents will get to meet her early, the kids will get to meet her early, so all that transitioning stuff, hopefully, will be helpful, so when they start school next year, they’ll already be on top of things, and they’ll know where they’re going, who the person is, and feel more comfortable”*.

The kindergarten teacher described regularly talking to many of the KindiLink families and children since they share the same outdoor area. Parents sometimes ask questions and everyone is happy to answer and contribute to the community spirit. She said: *“They can see what’s here, they can ask questions and everyone in the pre-primary and kindy are pretty happy to answer and try to make them feel welcome, because it could be their first time coming. Just trying to get that community spirit”*. In the kindergarten teacher’s words, meeting during KindiLink time was the reason the children were: *“Quite happy to start day 1”*.

The kindergarten and KindiLink teachers get together at an allocated planning time to talk about the programs. The kindergarten teacher said: *“I talk to her most Wednesday mornings, and she gives me some information about the parents, and if the parents want to ask me any questions for kindy next year, sometimes she invites me over to talk to them, so I talk to her weekly about both the DOTT and KindiLink”*. In their planning for the children’s transition from KindiLink, the kindergarten teacher and the KindiLink teacher consider the best group placements for the children. The kindergarten teacher also described assisting parents with the children’s learning at home, as parents can come along in the mornings from 8.30–9.00 and again at the end of the day. She believed building on the KindiLink initiative is important *“to build up that relationship so they (parents) can ask any questions”*.

The kindergarten teacher talked about the children in her class this year who came from KindiLink and the attachment they still had to KindiLink. She said: *“the kids are quite happy that they can go and see their old KindiLink teacher, that they can play with the same toys helps them transition. And knowing that their parents know me and also the KindiLink teacher, they see that the parents also get along with the teacher, and that they are friends, so then they find me as a friend as well”*.

The parents/carers also firmly believe that KindiLink assists with the transition to Kindergarten. They discussed this in terms of the children being prepared, knowing what to expect and following the same routine. Many mentioned the importance of the children knowing others who would be in Kindergarten with them. One mother dreaded the transition after her experience with an older sibling, but was now confident that: *“it will be more gentle than the first drop off with Charlie which was horrific, now no drama.”* Another mother, after seeing her child make friends, was less anxious about the transition.

4.8 Overall Reflections

The KindiLink initiative effectively built the confidence of parents/carers as their child’s first educator, and built effective relationships between families and the school community. Parents/carers felt respected and listened to, and described a smoother transition process for their children now, knowing what happens at school. All stakeholders believed the children’s learning and development had improved across all domains by attending KindiLink.

The principal commented on the importance of the person who manages KindiLink, indicative of the many comments made by parents/carers. She said: *“The person who runs it is really important. I think if you have the right person and you run the program as it’s supposed to be run, that the engagement of parents will increase, and it will make a big difference to the students’ education”*. She added: *“It needs to be a person that is confident, that you know can build relationships with staff, that has initiative, and can go and find good links, external agencies, and can build relationships with, particularly, Aboriginal people. And you need a good AIEO, too, again, who’s confident, who brings in all the family stuff, to the Aboriginal side of things, and knows who’s got babies and who’s got toddlers, and all those things”*.

A number of factors contributed to the success of the KindiLink initiative:

- A designated space for the program with its own funding and resources on school grounds, and a shared playground with Kindergarten and pre-primary;
- The combination of staff skills, personalities and knowledge. The KindiLink teacher had a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and found her early childhood knowledge invaluable in speaking to

parents and planning the program collaboratively. The AIEO was well known and well respected in the community. Both had a calm and respectful manner in dealing with children and families;

- Clear goals and mission about the intent of the program;
- Assistance from the Early Childhood Branch in assisting with games, professional learning and pedagogical practices;
- Collaborative planning time for the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO, also planning time for the AIEO and the kindergarten teacher. Working in the Kindergarten program 1 day per week allows the AIEO to reconnect with KindiLink families and the children in Kindergarten; and
- Support, trust and value for the project from the school principal and administration.

4.8.1 Challenges

While this KindiLink initiative was running effectively, there were a number of ongoing challenges, such as registrations, staffing and maintaining a good reputation. Registering more Aboriginal families with children of KindiLink age is a constant focus. The staff used many different methods to attract families, and the program enjoyed a good “*word-of-mouth*” reputation; however, only three children identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and only one was of the eligible age to attend Kindergarten the following year. Finding the right staff was initially a challenge, but worked out well. The principal talked about the difficulty of replacing the KindiLink teacher in a country town, who was returning to full-time work at the school with a different age group. All stakeholders described the staff as a crucial component of the program. The principal had found someone for the position who was early-childhood trained, but was an unknown quantity with regard to building new relationships. The KindiLink teacher recognised that it would take the new teacher some time to find her feet, and she hoped the families would continue to attend while this occurred. It was apparent that some families were inclined to wait to hear what KindiLink was like before they signed on, and this was likely to be the case the following year.

4.8.2 Insights

Observing the KindiLink initiative over a number of days showed evidence of productive, respectful relationships between staff, families and children. All participants attended regularly and moved about comfortably, engaging in congenial, familiar conversations. The children moved around easily between the staff and parents/carers and, together with their accompanying adult, engaged in all the activities on offer. At times adults assisted other children and there was a general sense of calm and relaxation. Parents/carers related well to the staff and were also observed talking to staff from other education levels in the shared outdoor area. All stakeholders believed KindiLink was a worthwhile initiative, was achieving its goals and should be extended to other schools.

The ambience and structure of the program had changed over time as the KindiLink teacher had worked to change her pedagogy. The KindiLink teacher and the AIEO had taken 18 months to get the program structure to a place where they thought it worked well. The time periods and the program had been negotiated with parents so that trust and respect for perspectives grew. The KindiLink teacher took the advice given to her by the Early Childhood Branch, but suggested that this could have been given earlier in the process, especially when family commitments stopped staff from attending the Professional Learning days held in the city. She said that she did not know what an educator-led playgroup should look like and some examples of practice, timetables and plans would have been helpful.

The games that had been made by the teacher and assistant on the advice of the Department of Education had not been well utilised by families outside the centre. The KindiLink teacher had to modify several, as they were not at the right level for families and subsequently only one family had regularly borrowed the games. Families appeared to prefer replicating and taking home activity ideas that were not game-oriented.

KindiLink was firmly established and discussed by all stakeholders as a transition program that assisted children with their move to Kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher said: *“It seems to be a good stepping stone so they can see what their child’s going to do, and for that attachment, to let them go to kindy. And I think it’s word of mouth as well, people say, ‘Oh, this is a really good service. You know, you get to play with your kid, you get to learn with your child,’ and then in that culture, they’ll let all the other families know”*.

4.9 Summary

The Boronia KindiLink initiative had an established cohort of families and children that regularly attended. The principal consulted with Aboriginal families in the school community who wanted the program opened to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. In this school community, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families had vulnerabilities associated with a low SES area, and their connection to this program has assisted in growing parental confidence in being their child’s first teacher. The KindiLink families also described connections to the school and other community services that came about as a result of attending KindiLink. For some, their reasons for attending revolved around adult and child health and wellbeing as well as social connection. Parents/carers talked about their new knowledge and skills gained from visiting the community health nurse, the occupational therapist and other associated service staff.

The children who transitioned to Kindergarten in 2017 had reportedly made observable developmental gains in cognitive, language and social development and learning. They were described as being more confident because they understood simple routines and had already established friendships with other children. The kindergarten teacher knew many of the parents and children, which garnered their trust, and all staff recognised this as an important factor for the engagement of children and families with the school.

At this school, the KindiLink initiative was situated in a purpose-built kindergarten classroom, and used the kindergarten and pre-primary outdoor learning area. It was well resourced, and once the footpath was built, it was easily accessible to the families. The choice of staff and support from school administration also facilitated successful implementation of the KindiLink initiative. The parents/carers described the teacher and the Aboriginal assistant as the most important element in developing and maintaining trusting relationships between all stakeholders.

KindiLink at Boronia has contributed to the reputation of the school within the community as it has a *“good name,”* fuelled by *“word of mouth”*. It was evident that parents/carers and their children enjoyed coming to KindiLink and had built a comfortable network of relationships with other adults, children and staff. In this environment, the staff were able to build the confidence and capacity of parents as their child’s first teacher and support the children’s learning, development and wellbeing. At the same time, a smooth transition process was being streamlined for progression to Kindergarten, and parents were more confident to engage with the school environment.

5. Eucalypt

5.1 Community and School Context

5.1.1 Demographics

Eucalypt is located in the Perth metropolitan area and in 2011 the catchment area for the school was classified as disadvantaged (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) and had a ranking in the third decile (31). The principal said the school was classified in the lowest decile (decile 1) within the education system. The school had a multicultural student population with approximately 30% of ATSI heritage and 25% children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, some of whom were humanitarian refugees. The main CALD cultures included Filipino, Southeast Asian, Vietnamese and Indian families.

5.1.2 Registrations

In 2016, there were 14 families registered for KindiLink. Of these 14 families, nine identified as Aboriginal with five families identifying as non-Aboriginal.

In 2017, 17 families and 18 children were registered with KindiLink. By Term 3, eight families were attending regularly. Two lived outside the catchment area. The families enrolled had 27 siblings, most of whom were older. Three had younger siblings and three were singletons.

5.2 Case Study Participants

5.2.1 School staff

The KindiLink teacher had worked at the school for 4 years and was also one of the kindergarten teachers. During this time, as well as working as a kindergarten teacher, she taught older children in the school as the science specialist teacher. The second kindergarten teacher was on extended sick leave and was not involved in the study. The Aboriginal Indigenous Education Officer (AIEO) had been in her role for 3 weeks and lived in the local area. The previous AIEO had been transferred into the role and was not from the local area. The current AIEO had children and grandchildren in the school. Both the principal and the KindiLink teacher felt that it would have been better if the school had been able to fill the AIEO position with a local person from the inception of the program. The AIEO had previously been involved in the delivery of the local Aboriginal Association Best Start Kindergarten for 3-year-olds, but this had closed during 2016. The recent appointment of the AIEO to the KindiLink initiative had gone some way to reducing tensions felt after the Best Start program closed.

5.2.2 Family members

Eight families attended KindiLink during the case study collection period, and eight mothers were interviewed. The initiative was initially opened only to Aboriginal families, but after the first term the principal made a decision to open the program to other families with similar needs. Of the eight families who attended regularly, in Term 3, two families were ATSI, one was Maori, two had English as their second language and three were non-Aboriginal English first language speakers. During the case study, all the children were brought by their mothers, although one father came in briefly to collect one of the children. The AIEO was the grandmother of one child. Most of the families attended without bringing younger children, either because the siblings were older, or because the children were only children. There were three boys

and five girls attending during the case study period. Six of the children were 3 years old, and two children were under 3 years and not within KindiLink eligibility parameters. Of the children attending during the case study period only one parent brought a much younger child. Of the families that attended, six had older siblings at the school, and two had no siblings. On the days KindiLink was observed there was only one younger child. All families said they came as often as they could and when they did not attend it was because of sickness, appointments, or personal problems. Four children had attended other playgroups before attending KindiLink.

5.2.3 Community members

The principal valued community partnerships and the school had developed several partnerships with community organisations. There was a Breakfast Club, which KindiLink families were welcome to attend. On the research team observation days some parents said they had attended the Breakfast Club before KindiLink. There was collaboration with several non-government organisations, including CLAN [area name], United Way, The Smith Family and The Song Room, which is a philanthropic organisation that helps with performing arts. The FAST program (Families and Schools Together) is operated in collaboration with CLAN and United Way and aims to build connection between schools and families and also build engagement and mutual support between families. It operates with twelve families at a time, plus teachers. This group meets regularly and shares meals and discussions about family issues over a period of several weeks. The Smith Family has a program that offers financial rewards to selected families if school attendance is maintained at over 90%. This program has been effective at improving school attendance, which is now at 93%. For one pre-primary child, this program improved his attendance from 68% to 93%. Although the school had many community collaboration arrangements, no Aboriginal community organisations were directly involved with the KindiLink initiative.

5.3 Implementing KindiLink

The school had a permanent space dedicated to KindiLink. The space was purpose built for pre-school education and other community playgroups used this space at times when the KindiLink initiative was not operating. Agreements had been made to share the equipment between the programs, and each program contributed to both larger items and consumables. The KindiLink staff viewed this arrangement as being mutually beneficial. The KindiLink initiative operates 2 days per week for 3 hours on Mondays and Tuesdays. The KindiLink initiative was staffed by an early childhood teacher and an AIEO. The decision was made to offer the program 2 days per week for 3 hours rather than 3 days per week for 2 hours after discussions between the principal and the KindiLink teacher. Conversations with parents indicated they supported this decision. The rationale for offering KindiLink on 2 days for 3 hours rather than on 3 days for 2 hours was due to many parents not having transport. A lack of transport was considered an issue that would affect attendance.

The principal believed that KindiLink would benefit children with similar needs. According to the principal, programs that target Aboriginal students but are not open to other students in similar situations can cause some resentment from other families. After Aboriginal recruitment had been slow, he decided to open KindiLink up to other families, whom he perceived as having similar needs. *“Originally as we were told by the Department, that it was a 3-year-old KindiLink initiative for Aboriginal students. And we advertised it as such. And then, we got some queries from some parents, you know, non-Aboriginal parents, and we said, look, we’ll see how it goes, and if there’s room, we’ll open it up to others. And so, I think for the first six months we were fairly limited to Aboriginal students. But the take up wasn’t as high as we were hoping for”*.

The principal made the decision to open KindiLink to non-Aboriginal parents, with priority maintained for Aboriginal families, and an Aboriginal-centred curriculum. He said: *“So, we said, as long as you’re 3 years of age and you want to come to our KindiLink, you can come. And first preference is given to Aboriginal students ... So, slowly, slowly, we opened it up to some of the others and I think the program is now seen as a 3-year-old program. So, I think over a period of time that will be a strength of the school, to say that there’s a 3-year-old kindy program”*.

One of the parents interviewed, for whom English was not her first language, said her own education had only gone to Year 5. She said that prior to attending KindiLink her child did not speak any English although they understood English. Since attending KindiLink, the child now speaks in English. The principal explained: *“Disadvantage is not just amongst Aboriginal students, we’ve got a number of migrants, so [place name] is an area for emergency housing and stuff like that. So we understand those contexts and we understand that, like I say, it’s not just Aboriginal students who are disadvantaged. So in going back to our philosophy is, whatever we can offer, we tend to offer to all of our students, rather than just one targeted group”*.

5.3.1 Recruitment

Families came from the local intake area but also from surrounding areas where no KindiLink was offered. According to the principal, families were originally recruited through the school newsletter, posters and flyers and by word of mouth. The KindiLink teacher added they had also promoted KindiLink through community fairs and Facebook. When parents were interviewed, many confirmed they had found out about the program through their older children in the school, so recruitment through the school had been quite successful. The KindiLink teacher identified that it was more difficult to make contact with younger parents who did not have older children in school. She explained how she attempted to mitigate this difficulty by using her contacts with the child community health nurse to help publicise KindiLink. *“It’s trying to find those ones that have younger children ... the health nurse was one that we ... targeted to ... give the flyers to her”*.

The KindiLink teacher elaborated on their recruitment strategies and how they had attempted to recruit families through contacts with other agencies and services that parents might use. When planning how to publicise KindiLink the strategy was based upon looking at where Aboriginal families might be found: *“Before it started, we went to our community areas ... where Aboriginal people might be coming in contact”*. She used networks with other community organisations to try to make contact with Aboriginal parents who did not already have children in the school. Also, she publicised KindiLink through libraries and through shopping centres, and by making contact with families living in areas where there was state housing.

The parents had heard about KindiLink through a number of different channels. These included through other family members who attended, sibling/s in the school when KindiLink started, information from community members (e.g., the AIEO) and ongoing relationships with the kindergarten, the school, local day care and the Aboriginal Association. One parent was upset that the Aboriginal Association playgroup had closed but she supported KindiLink and felt there was room for both. The parents decided to register at KindiLink because they felt this was a good opportunity to support their child’s learning and development, make new friends and prepare their child for school.

5.3.2 Attendance

Most of the children at KindiLink were brought by their mothers; however, other caregivers occasionally attended, including three fathers and one grandmother. In the previous year, one grandmother attended regularly. Fathers mostly attended either when the mother was unavailable because another child was sick

or, as in one case, the father was a FIFO worker and attended when he was home. One of the grandmothers was an Indigenous foster carer for the Department of Child Protection (DCP) who had care of three children under the age of 18 months. She had attended in the early part of the year with her daughter and 3-year-old granddaughter. She stopped coming when DCP started paying for childcare for the younger children. Her daughter and granddaughter stopped coming at the same time. To sustain attendance KindiLink used several means to communicate with families, including posters and newsletters, Facebook, phone and home visits. The favoured method described by parents was phone, including texts.

The KindiLink teacher examined how families could be attracted and retained through programmatic changes. She felt in particular that excursions were popular and had noticed that some families had attended more regularly when excursions were a regular part of the program. She said: *“I think we found too, having an excursion brought a few back that hadn’t been for a while ... letting everybody know weeks in advance that we’re going to be going, then those parents came again”*.

The KindiLink teacher described finding it easier to do home visits with the AIEO, especially now that a local person was in the position. The original AIEO had been appointed through a Department of Education transfer. Whilst she was well liked by the staff and parents she did not have networks within the local community. When she decided to leave, a local woman was appointed to the position. She had only been employed for 3 weeks at the time of the researcher’s visit.

5.3.3 Planning

The teacher and AIEO collaborated on planning with the KindiLink teacher taking the lead in planning sessions, partly because the AIEO had only been in the post for 3 weeks. The planning had a theme for the term (this term it was ‘air’) but was also responsive to what was happening in the *“here and now”*. She explained that in her planning process she chose the over-arching theme in consultation with parents, but also incorporated other activities relating to other events, such as Father’s Day. She said: *“In the planning, we tend to, each term, go over at the end of the term, what would our parents like? ... Last term, we had the ocean. So the kids had had an ocean picture up that they made and did the collage. So each week we just looked at ideas that we could do and bring in, as well as asking the children what they wanted to make ... And tomorrow, we’ll be actually making a card for Father’s Day”*.

The daily sessions had a regular structure, so that children became used to the routine. Within this structure, activities varied to meet various educational and social learning goals. The format of each session was the same each time.



Image 5.1: The KindiLink timetable

Begin with play: The session formally starts at 9 am, but the KindiLink teacher unlocks the door and puts the sign out as soon as she arrives (usually at 8.30) and parents are welcome to come in before 9 am if they wanted. This is particularly important if parents were bringing older children to school. The teacher described the beginning of her day: *“As soon as I’m here the door is unlocked. I put the board out, lights on and heater on, so even if I’m not in the room, they know that they can just push on the door and if it’s open, they can come in ... The parents come in and start the day themselves, if I’m not in the room”.*

The session begins with play where a number of play learning centres are available. There was always playdough, puzzles, and fantasy play. A table with toy animals and easels for painting was observed and these activities continued whilst families arrived.



Image 5.2: Indoor learning activities

Indoor activity (Learning Game): Play is followed by an indoor activity, often based on the LearningGames® resource. Two indoor activities were observed: a craft activity for Father’s Day and a cooking activity.



Image 5.3: Families and children learning together

Story time: The indoor activity is followed by story time. The KindiLink teacher modelled how to use a book as a prop to storytelling, by discussing the pictures and asking children to discuss what is happening and what will happen next. After doing this a few times, some parents felt confident enough to lead the story time. After the parents had done this a few times, one of the children wanted to lead the story and the teacher supported him to do this. This process illustrates how the informal teaching skills are being passed on to parents (and also children – this particular child has a younger sibling). On the first day of observation, the story took place outside and the KindiLink teacher told the story with one of the children. The second day was wet and the story took place indoors.



Image 5.4: Morning tea

Morning tea: After story time, the children and families prepare and eat morning tea. Morning tea consists of fruit and usually some other food. The school receives donated bread from a local supermarket. If food has been cooked as part of the activity, this is also eaten. Tongs are used to serve the food, which aids hygiene and also promotes manual dexterity and fine motor skills. The children cut up the fruit with the help of their parents. The teacher encourages children to do this partly as a means to use everyday activities to build the children's skills and partly as a means of involving all parents through their children. In the first year she did not do this and only some parents became involved, so this is a conscious parental involvement strategy and also a learning strategy for the children. Morning tea is eaten outside when the weather is fine.



Image 5.5: Outdoor play

Outdoor play: Morning tea is followed by outdoor play, weather permitting. Children were observed on the first day playing outside. There was a variety of large play equipment as well as balls and smaller equipment, and a sandpit. Children were free to move between different outdoor activities and parents were encouraged to engage with their children during this playtime. Parents were observed playing with their children and talking to the children as they played. At the end of the outdoor play session, children and parents collaborated to pack the equipment away. On the second day, it was too wet to play outside and the children played inside with small games such as puzzles, books, table games and toys. Some parents read books with their children while others did puzzles or collaborated in fantasy play.



Image 5.6: Becoming independent

Tidying and cleaning: The packing up and cleaning process was child-led, and KindiLink had purchased some small hand-held vacuum cleaners. Children asked to take turns to vacuum the floor, and were encouraged to do this in collaboration with parents. Once again this was a conscious strategy encouraging children to learn from everyday activities, and using children’s enthusiasm to engage parents. Children and parents worked together to return all the equipment to the correct places.

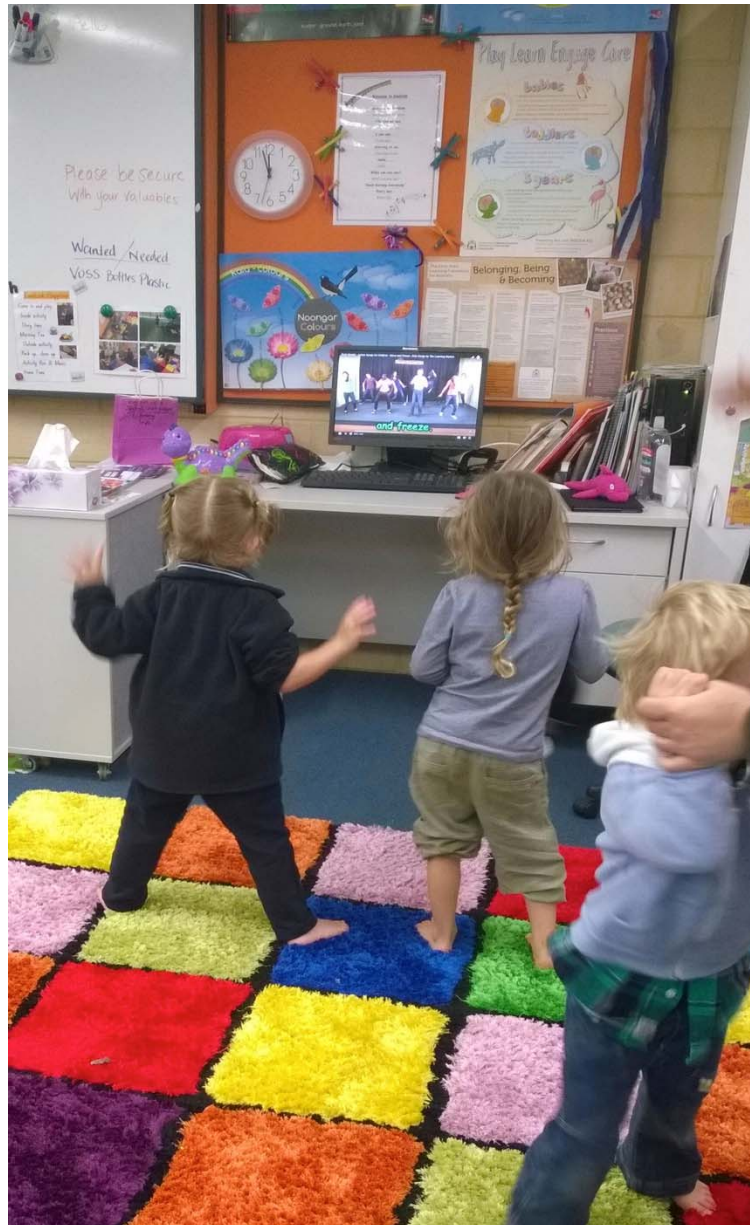


Image 5.7: Joining in music, song and dance

Music, song and dance (Activity Box): After the clearing up and cleaning is finished there is a short music or music and dance session. On one research visit, children were observed taking part in a “shake and freeze” – a song with actions and naming body parts. After that, it was time to go home. Children who wanted to were encouraged to take a book to read at home. One child took three books home. The books were swapped each session. As the books were all second-hand, the teacher was not particularly concerned about whether they all came back and took the view that if some did not, they were probably needed at home. On one of

the observation days one child was taken home early by his parent because he was getting very tired and had begun to get irritable.



Image 5.8: Classroom displays

5.3.4 Feedback from families

Parents engaged with their children in all the activities observed and parents seemed supportive of each other during the research visit. They were observed offering to make each other drinks and to help each other especially where the parents were friends or if the mother had a younger child that needed attention. Most of the time parents engaged with their own child but sometimes a parent might engage with other children if families socialised outside of KindiLink. Several mothers said that KindiLink had helped them to extend their own social networks, for example: *“I met new people”* and *“we get together and do things with the kids”*. Most, but not all, said they had previously attended other playgroups and what they appreciated about KindiLink was the structure and the input from the teacher. The parents said they found the KindiLink teacher supportive and some mentioned that she had provided them with information about other services relevant to their child’s needs (for example speech and language services). The principal confirmed that the KindiLink teacher tried hard to link parents to other services and to the broader activities in the school. During the observation, an ear clinic was visiting the school and the KindiLink teacher provided parents with information about these services. She also described examples of how she had supported parents to access health services for their children, especially speech and language services. Her approach was to listen to the parents’ concerns and respond to parents’ questions about milestones. The KindiLink teacher felt it was important to do this whilst the health nurses were still involved with families, so they could get an early referral: *“Because the children are in that time where they’ve got the health nurse visit, that’s their 3-year-old visit where they’ll talk about speech and can be referred at that early stage”*.

During the sessions the KindiLink teacher was observed moving between different parents and children so she spent time with each family during the session. She said that when she was absent and a relief teacher was covering, some of the parents had led the singing and dance session at the end of the program.

5.4 Supporting Children’s Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

The school had a strong commitment to building connections with families and community organisations that provide parental support and enrichment activities for children. The principal’s main concern was to increase and extend children’s language exposure before they started at school. This informed the approach used by the KindiLink teacher as she planned her program. The principal identified family support needs as important because many families did not have informal family support networks who were able to assist in times of crisis. In addition, not all families were aware of health and family support services available to them, and he saw it as part of the role of the school to ensure that families were aware of support services they might find useful. The principal said: *“Many of our children come to us with multiple deficits in their development, usually speech and other health issues. And like I said the other day, that our children come to school with having heard 13 million words compared to average suburbs of 45 million words, that’s from research. Many of our parents have challenges in their own lives, many are single parents”*.

For the principal, the KindiLink initiative was especially important because it could begin to address language development and support social, emotional and cognitive capabilities before children arrived at Kindergarten. In addition, KindiLink was intended to encourage more children to attend Kindergarten (which is not compulsory). Only two children from the 2016 KindiLink cohort continued into Kindergarten at the school in 2017.

The environment was set up to facilitate various types of imaginative play, with dolls, model animals and dress-ups. These activities were used to build caring and empathy and to help children explore identities and situations beyond their everyday experience. This supported the social and emotional development of the children. When commenting on her perception of social and emotional outcomes the KindiLink teacher felt that the gains for children had been in a more extensive use of expressive language to talk about their feelings. Referring to changes she had witnessed in the children the year, the KindiLink teacher commented on the increase in complexity of children’s language, when talking amongst themselves: *“I found for the children, they’re getting more expressive in how to say things to each other”*.

When commenting on the children’s confidence and cognitive gains, the teacher felt that the children had become more confident in the school environment as a result of KindiLink, and the children who had started KindiLink the previous year had been helped by their attendance at KindiLink. This had supported their capacity to participate more fully when they commenced Kindergarten. She said: *“Both the children that went there, that are in our school, I think, they’re still were quite shy and quite quiet kids, but I think it did not take as long. And I would say that they would have been more disadvantaged had they not come ... so, having done KindiLink, gave them that”*.

5.4.1 Engagement in activities

The following section identifies some of the learning that was observed during the visits to KindiLink. Some activities are captured in photographs and the photographs are described. The photographs and descriptions are followed by evidence of learning and development. The evidence of learning and development is linked to the learning outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009). The EYLF is used in the KindiLink sites as a basis for making judgments about children’s learning and development. The Western Australian Kindergarten Guidelines, Learning Development Areas (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2016) have also been used as a means of identifying broad learning areas. Descriptions of the Learning Development Areas were used as a guideline and adapted where necessary, rather than applied

rigidly. The intention is to indicate the learning that was evidenced through the observations. It is not an analysis of individual children. It is important to stress that there was considerable overlap in the children's learning across the activities, but only the main aspects were identified for the purpose of this report, in order to avoid repetition. In addition, the level of attainment for each child varied as they engaged with activities at their own level and pace.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines (adapted) Wellbeing
<p>Children participate in indoor and outdoor physical activities</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from children & adults engaged in activities</p>
<p>Photo 1: Trying something new: child tries the balance board encouraged by parents.</p> <p>Photo 2: Children’s self-chosen outdoor activities, independently using bicycles and scooters during outdoor play, participating in energetic physical activity developing movement skills.</p> <p>Photo 3: Parents and children working together to create a Father’s Day card, using skills such as cutting, sticking, using fine motor skills and choosing pictures using language and creativity.</p> <p>Photo 4: Energetic dance and movement responding to music and copying movement from a laptop computer screen.</p>	<p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</p> <p>4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning, such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity</p> <p>4.4 Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build knowledge and positive attitudes to physical movement • Move to the tempo of the music and develop motor movements to the rhythm of the music • Demonstrate correct fundamental movement skills (running, jumping, balancing) • Move around environment safely demonstrating spatial awareness • Develop hand/eye, hand/foot coordination • Demonstrate a willingness to participate in energetic physical activity including dance, movement and games. • Respond through movement to contemporary music



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines Connecting and contributing
<p>Activities promoting empathy, caring and exploration of identity</p>	<p>Building children’s capabilities</p>	<p>Evidence from children’s engagement with free choice activities</p>
<p>Photos 1 & 2: Playing at being adult: Children’s collaborative fantasy play with dolls in home corner.</p> <p>Photo 3: Exploring identity by taking the role of another: child’s solo fantasy play, dressing up, watched by parent.</p> <p>Photo 4: Reflection and concentration as child decorates Father’s Day card with photo of self.</p> <p>Item 3: Observation of respectful conflict resolution (no photo). When a child takes a doll that another child is playing with, the AIEO and parents collaborate to first suggest an alternative doll, and when that is not successful, to distract the child who took the doll away from another child and get her involved in another activity (no photo).</p>	<p>Outcome 1 Children have a strong sense of identity</p> <p>1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect</p> <p>Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</p> <p>3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional well being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop skills for working with others • Cooperate with others and negotiate roles and relationships in play and group experiences • Contribute to fair decision making about matters that affect them • Interact positively to form relationships and friendships • Negotiate friendships and build and maintain respectful, trusting relationships with other children and teachers • Recognise simple emotions and build self-regulation • Demonstrate moments of solitude and reflection



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines Learning and thinking
Children sharing activities with parents	Building children's capabilities	Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities
<p>Photo 1: Child choosing whilst doing craft activity, sticking and glueing.</p> <p>Photo 2: Mother reading book with child.</p> <p>Photo 3: Teacher telling a story from a book and showing pictures asking children about what is happening.</p> <p>Photo 4: Parent doing construction activity with child and discussing colours.</p> <p>Photo 5: Group of parents and children using playdough to make models.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity 1.1 Children feel safe, secure, and supported.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing 3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional well-being</p> <p>Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners 4.1 Children develop dispositions for learning, such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity. 4.2 Children develop a range of skills and processes, such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.</p>	<p>Children and adults were observed being able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express curiosity and wonder about experiences • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Respond to ideas and suggestions from others • Manipulate objects • Actively engage in learning experiences, conversations and play experiences • Persist even when task is difficult, and experience the satisfaction of achievement • Explore and experiment with form, shape and colour • Use simple tools to create • Combine singing and dancing • Display reading/writing/viewing like behaviours in play and experiences • View and listen to simple printed, visual and multimedia texts and experiment with elements of texture colour, shape, space and form in two or three dimensions.



Description	Learning outcome (EYLF)	WA Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines Communicating
Children and parents using language	Building children's capabilities	Evidence from children and adults engaged in activities
<p>Photo 1: Parents and child talking about the task whilst packing away equipment.</p> <p>Photo 2: Parents and child communicating through dance (non-verbal communication)</p> <p>Photo 3: Parent and child talking whilst completing doing a puzzle together</p> <p>Photo 4: Two parent child dyads talking about the craft activity they are completing together, parents encouraging children to make choices.</p>	<p>Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</p> <p>5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes</p> <p>5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts</p> <p>5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work</p>	<p>Children and adults were observed being able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain conversations • Use speech that can be understood by others • Listen to others • Use simple sentences when speaking • Use turn-taking in conversations • Use simple non-verbal ways of communicating through gesture and signs • Share a range of texts for enjoyment • Identify key ideas from simple texts • Use books/texts appropriately – turns pages • View and listen to simple printed, visual and multimedia texts and music

5.4.2 Transition to Kindergarten

The catchment area for the KindiLink initiative was more extensive than the school catchment area. This meant that in the first year, only two children from KindiLink transitioned into the school's Kindergarten program. The other children went to their local school. The KindiLink teacher was the kindergarten teacher for both children who had attended KindiLink in 2016. She commented that the main gain was in independence and in familiarity with the routines. *"The ones who have come through KindiLink have a few of the little routines a bit easier, like going to the toilet and using the toilets, because they are a little bit different from the home toilets ... to taking them across to where they know that their parents are going to go take them to drop them off, there has been a little bit where they had the issue with separating from their parents"*.

The teacher also felt that KindiLink was useful in supporting the transition to kindergarten because it enabled parents to meet the KindiLink AIEO. This enabled parents to get to know the school AIEO. This was useful to building parents' trust, so that if parents had concerns they might find embarrassing to discuss, they would feel able to discuss these with the AIEO. The issue of birth certificates was mentioned. Some families do not have a birth certificate for their children, and this causes difficulties when children enrol in school. According to the teacher, the KindiLink AIEO plays a valuable role in linking parents to the school AIEO. The school AIEO helps parents with practical issues and cultural concerns, and has been able to assist both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents to resolve difficulties with documentation. She said: *"That's not necessarily just Indigenous [families], we've had a couple of other parents ... having ... the person they can go to should they need help with any of the documents"*.

In addition, the teacher felt that children registered in KindiLink had regular attendance at Kindergarten. She commented: *"I've noticed ... they're regular attenders ... In their families' history, there had been issues of being not regular attenders ... whereas, because they'd been to KindiLink, and it was ... Monday, Tuesday, these children are actually going to the same day, but to kindy. So, they now have that Monday, Tuesday, so the week's Wednesday is just their extra day"*.

Interviews with parents from the second year of the program indicated that seven out of eight families intended to enrol their child into the Kindergarten program at the school, including one family that lived outside the school zone. The parents said they valued the relationship they had built with the KindiLink teacher and AIEO, as well as access to resources such as books they could borrow and some of the LearningGames®. The KindiLink teacher, who was also a kindergarten teacher, felt that this was a useful way to support continuity of relationships with families. She felt that it was useful to have the same teacher for KindiLink and Kindergarten. The KindiLink teacher and the parents thought it might be useful to build transition activities into the program for KindiLink towards the end of the year. The purpose was to accustom children to the idea that at Kindergarten they would be at school without their parents being present. There was a proposal for parents to leave the room for periods of time during the final KindiLink sessions.

5.5 Building the Capacity and Confidence of Parents as their Child's First Teacher

The KindiLink teacher felt that the initiative had worked well in building the capacity of parents as the child's first educator. She mentioned in particular the value of incorporating enjoyment of books and reading into the child's daily routine at home. This was supported in the KindiLink initiative in several ways, including the regular daily story session and in availability of books for families to borrow. She said: *"The fact of taking a*

book home, that the children enjoy taking it home, it's part of the children's routine that they've taken it. Ours are books that are second-hand, so if they haven't come back, we haven't warranted worrying about it".

Observations of parents interacting with children were congruent with the teacher's perceptions. Children observed *"using everyday activities"* such as packing away and cleaning provided another example of how the teacher modelled a process by which everyday activities could be used to support the child's learning. In addition, the KindiLink teacher deliberately chose some activities that used the kinds of items that would be readily available at home. She maintained an activity box that contained everyday household items such as Allen keys, and measuring cups and spoons of various sizes. These items were used in activities to demonstrate that interesting and developmentally useful play activities do not require specialised equipment. This builds a bridge between activities at KindiLink and play activities children could do at home. She said: *"That activity is... something you would actually do from home, in the same way so I think that side of it's been a really good way to be able to build that bridge..."*

On the other hand, everyday play activities were supplemented with other activities that required specialist equipment that would not be found around the house, for example, some of the large play equipment. This provided an opportunity to enrich children's play and learning experience. The KindiLink teacher felt that both were valuable and that the program should maintain a balance of the two types of activity. The teacher said: *"I found it a very valuable program in that, because we can resource things that some of our parents might not necessarily have access at home, but at the same time, trying to make some of our activities show that we can still do things at home, as what we've got here. So, like our home corner stuff, is just stuff that would be out of your kitchen."*

When asked about what they thought was going well, the KindiLink teacher felt that routine was very important, although this had to be balanced with some flexibility. Parents also mentioned they valued the routine and structure of the KindiLink timetable. One issue the KindiLink teacher raised was how the structure helped to maintain parents and children's involvement in tidying up after each activity. The fear that children may make a mess can deter some parents from allowing children to do some kinds of activities at home. The KindiLink teacher addressed this concern by modelling an approach that emphasised continually tidying up after activities, and encouraging children to see this as part of the activity. She actively engaged children in tidying up and used the children's involvement to engage the parents in this process, so that the environment never became too disordered, and the tidying process was never too daunting. She said: *"They know when we're going to go outside that we have to tidy inside, and then when we're outside, if we want to go from there... each area, they will help tidy it up before they can go to the next. So, when it comes time to come back inside, the room's already tidy to be able to do other activities so, it's not a big thing that they have to do."*

The routine was an important part of this process, and was used to develop communication and conflict resolution between children and between parents and children. The KindiLink teacher modelled how to support children's communication and how to respond to non-verbal cues. During the activity of tidying, conflicts were likely to occur. She used this as an opportunity to model alternative conflict resolution strategies, and to make school behaviour norms explicit. She said: *"Learning how to do the communication with each other, because they're still little, their words aren't always formed, that, how to talk to each other and with their parents and me modelling with them, you know, that if there's an issue... we've had a few children have been so little that they might hit each other and learn that we can't do it at school and that, you need to say sorry and those sorts of things"*.

The KindiLink teacher felt that her modelling interactions and styles of communication was an important aspect of the success of the program. However, she also emphasised that it was important to know when to step back and provide space for parents to take the lead. She said this was one of the hardest aspects of the role, stepping back from teaching and taking a parent-support role, to facilitate parents becoming their child's first teacher, in their role as parents. This process she thought could be complicated at times. The KindiLink teacher embodied the 'KindiLink rules' for interactions with other children and for how the space was used (for example, 'sharing', of 'not hitting'). Through this, she provided a means for the parents to change the norms of the child's behaviour at school and potentially at home, by appealing to the behaviour rules and norms of KindiLink. She said: *"The parents have found it useful because they know they need to do that, but their children don't always listen to them. And then I can come on and, well, this is our room and you're here at KindiLink so, this is how we have to do that in the room and then their parents can use me as the backup. Mrs [teacher's name] said that when we're here, we have to do this, or we have to share and, so it allows me to be able to step back, but allows the parents to use those little things to do."*

Several parents confirmed that they preferred the more structured approach of KindiLink compared to their experiences at playgroups. The instructions for the craft activity were written on a card and the parents did the activity with their child. This approach enabled parents to feel confident in working on the activity with their child; it meant that the parent could work with the child independently of the teacher. This approach also modelled to the child the value of written instruction. The indoor activity was chosen from the resources made available to KindiLink. The LearningGames® manual was left in the room and parents were encouraged to look through the manual, both for activities they might want to try at home and also so that they could make suggestions about activities to do at KindiLink.



Image 5.9: LearningGames®

The KindiLink teacher emphasised the use of everyday materials that families had at home (such as junk mail and kitchen equipment) rather than preparing games packs (unless parents asked to take games home). Some parents said they had adapted games used at KindiLink and played this at home using particular songs or stories.

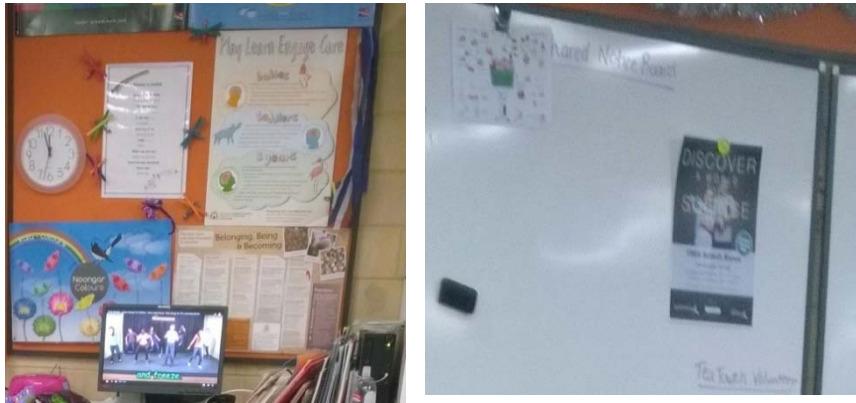


Image 5.10: Information for parents

There were information displays for parents both inside and outside the classroom. Some provided practical information on health services such as the ear clinic, or the visit times by the school dentist. Other materials aimed at parents provided information about Aboriginal culture; for example, the six Nyoongar seasons and Nyoongar animal names. Some notices provided information about special events that might be of interest to families; for example, a science event. Some families mentioned that the KindiLink teacher had provided them with information about other services relevant to their child’s needs (for example, speech and language services). One parent mentioned asking the teacher for advice about whether they should worry about their child’s reluctance to speak, or whether this was within the bounds of what was normal for their age: *“Is this normal or should I be worried?”*

5.6 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, School and Community

The parents had an easy relationship with both the KindiLink teacher and the AIEO. The AIEO was observed spending time with younger Aboriginal mothers participating in the activities, offering support and listening to them. The AIEO described her perception of the value of her role in the following way: *“I think just having a presence, an Aboriginal worker present... if they can see a familiar face, then they’re going to fit in and they’re going to be okay. Because they’re going to know that someone’s there in my corner if I, you know, sort of need any help or assistance or anything”*.

The KindiLink teacher discussed the value for Aboriginal children of their mother being with them during their initial engagement with school, as a bridge between the values and norms of home and the values and norms of school. Through KindiLink, parents are able to support their child to ‘code switch’. Children who initially appear ‘shy’ or ‘clingy’ when engaging in activities are waiting for cues from parents about how to respond to an unfamiliar situation. The KindiLink teacher described the initial situation by saying, *“So, that when we’re doing an activity, quite often our Aboriginal children come in quite shy and a little bit clingy to the parents, just because it’s new”*. The children watch how their parents respond and how the parents bridge between home and school, how they ‘code switch’ in their language/dialect and social norms. This provides the child with cues about how to do the same. The KindiLink teacher said: *“Learning to code switch a little bit earlier, has helped when their parents are there. But by having their parent here at KindiLink, I can see the benefit of them being here to be able to be there as that buffer, to help them progress”*.

The KindiLink teacher believed that by attending KindiLink the mothers had become less anxious in the school environment, and the way the initiative had managed to establish supportive relationships between mothers. Reflecting upon the experience of the previous year, she said that one mother in particular had benefitted from the relationship she formed with another parent who attended KindiLink. *“From last year’s group, one of our mums was very anxious, and very quiet... she’s created that bond between her and another parent that allows her to have somebody that she can go to and talk to outside of school”*.

According to the principal, before the KindiLink initiative started there had been various other pre-kindergarten initiatives. There was a playgroup that was run in conjunction with Playgroup WA, and this playgroup continues and uses the KindiLink space on Thursdays. Previously there had also been an Aboriginal Yarning Group that ran a playgroup and this no longer operates. On Wednesday mornings there was also a playgroup run by Ngala that used the KindiLink space, which still operates. The main differences between the playgroups and the KindiLink initiative was that KindiLink had a teacher and was more structured. Some parents in their interviews commented upon this and said they appreciated it.

In the first year the KindiLink initiative operated there had been some tensions because when KindiLink started there were other pre-kindergarten programs in the area including the Aboriginal-run Best Start program, which lost its funding nine months after KindiLink commenced. The KindiLink teacher described the situation in the following way: *“Best Start pretty much was still going when we first started. And we were probably three-quarters of the way through the year when it was no longer funded. And there was that bit where we were still going and they weren’t, there was that bit of like, treading lightly on eggshells going, well, you can still come here as well. But it’s taken a little while, it took probably the end of that year for people to sort of just dissipate and then a couple of them started coming the following year”*. She felt that the tensions were now resolved and this had been helped by the recent appointment of the AIEO from the Best Start program to the KindiLink initiative.

The following examples (Table 5.1) relate to the National Quality Standard (2017, p.11), Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Table 5.1: Eucalypt School - examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community

Examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community	NQS National Quality Area 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher maintains positive relationships with culturally diverse KindiLink families • Families appreciated the KindiLink initiative • Families felt accepted in the school environment • Families felt comfortable to discuss personal issues with the teacher • Families sought advice about services to support children’s health 	<p>6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families with older siblings recruited mostly through the school • Outreach by local AIEO to contact younger parents who do not have children in school • Parents were encouraged to bring younger siblings so they are also familiar with KindiLink • School administrative staff support the registration process for KindiLink and Kindergarten. 	<p>6.1.1 There is an effective registration and orientation process for families.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families share information about their children • Families contribute to program decisions • Teacher discusses themes with parents and also shares the Learning Resources • Families take activities and ideas home. 	<p>6.1.2 Families have the opportunity to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families access information about KindiLink through many channels e.g., community events, home visits, word of mouth, school newsletter and texts. 	<p>6.1.3 Current information about the service is available to families.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KindiLink supported parents as their child’s first teacher, providing resources • Support parents’ confidence and capacity by involving in program delivery • Teacher discussed situations where beliefs differed from each other, and how she had responded respectfully. 	<p>6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal culture informed the program planning and methods of the KindiLink initiative. • The environment included materials that demonstrated this respect. 	<p>6.2.1 The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child’s learning and wellbeing.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information is available to families about service providers on posters • Teacher and AIEO help families individually access appropriate services when needed. 	<p>6.2.2 Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.</p>

Examples of productive relationships between the family, school and community	NQS National Quality Area 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has networks with various community organisations that support or enrich educational children’s experiences. • The Breakfast club includes KindiLink parents and children. 	6.3 The service collaborates with other organisations and service providers to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local AIEO is strengthening informal links with Aboriginal families in the locality • The School maintains a network of community links. 	6.3.1 Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KindiLink teacher is one of the kindergarten teachers at the school • Families are familiar with the teacher, the routines and environment and feel more confident discussing matters that may affect their child. 	6.3.2 Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school and the KindiLink teacher provide information about inclusion and support e.g., • referral information for medical and disability support and multicultural resources • Supportive and non-judgmental attitudes towards families. 	6.3.3 Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excursions, for example to the library, a visit to a school farm, participation in community fairs, NAIDOC, and a community picnic. 	6.3.4 The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.

5.7 Improving Attendance during Schooling

It is not yet possible to ascertain the long-term impact of KindiLink on the school attendance of the KindiLink children. Attendance at Kindergarten was described as regular for families that attended KindiLink the previous year; however, the number was small. Another positive indicator is the school attendance of siblings. The KindiLink teacher believed that regular engagement with KindiLink was already improving the attendance of older siblings because parents dropped the other children off before they came to KindiLink. *“I’ve found those that are coming regularly here, their children are at school because they’ve dropped them off and then they come to KindiLink”*.

5.8 Overall Reflections

Overall, the principal, KindiLink teacher, AIEO and families were very positive about the KindiLink initiative. According to both the principal and the teacher, the KindiLink initiative fitted well into the philosophy of the school because it prepared children for an easier transition, as they would be more confident in the kindergarten learning environment. The principal considered that the KindiLink initiative was essential to the later success of children for several reasons. Firstly, it aligned with the school’s philosophy of building strong connections with families. Secondly, it prepared children for Kindergarten and provided opportunities for early linguistic enrichment. Thirdly, it contributed to building bridges with parents who may have been disconnected with education in their own childhood, but who have aspirations for a better future for their child. He said: *“We feel that many of our parents were disconnected from their own schooling. And I think they wanted something better for their own child. And so, I’m hoping and quite a believer that they want to do better for their child. And so, programs like KindiLink can maybe assist with that”*.

The KindiLink initiative complemented the school philosophy of building strong links with families. The principal said: *“I think it has a critical role to play in a school, especially a school like this. And I think that’s why we’re one of those schools chosen, because of our demographics and our SEIFA and all those sorts of reasons”*.

5.8.1 Challenges

When discussing strategies for improving the KindiLink initiative both the principal and the KindiLink teacher identified that attracting and retaining Aboriginal parents had been a big challenge. Especially in the first year, the take up for KindiLink had been less than anticipated. This had been partly because of the tensions between the KindiLink initiative and the Best Start program, and partly because the AIEO for the first 18 months was not a local person. Both the principal and the KindiLink teacher were of the view that the school should have been able to appoint a local person as the AIEO, rather than having to accept someone transferred into the position.

Another point of discussion had been about whether KindiLink would attract more Aboriginal children if parents did not have to attend. In one instance this year a carer who fostered three children under 2 years old as well as a 3-year-old had stopped coming when she received free childcare for the children on the days of the KindiLink initiative. The KindiLink teacher and the principal had discussed whether the program ought to be accepting some children without their parents as a means to get 3-year-olds involved in school earlier. From a perspective of language development, this would allow the children to be exposed to more vocabulary and other language and socialisation gains before they commenced school. There were a number of losses if parents did not attend; in particular, the loss of the parent support role that is an integral part of the KindiLink initiative. The KindiLink teacher also pointed out they did not have the staffing to run this kind

of program without the parents being there. As the principal said: *“Now, the concept of the parent being in there with them is something we’d like to promote and support... So, as a school, we’re trying to find better ways of just finding out what the parents want out of the program, and what better ways that we can get both parent and child to the program”*.

Another strategy the KindiLink teacher, AIEO and principal had discussed was providing transport for parents and children. The principal felt that a bus would boost attendance. They all considered this would be useful because many parents did not have transport, and attendance was often adversely affected if the weather was bad. Only one of the parents who attended on the days the researchers observed mentioned lack of transport as being a reason why they sometimes did not attend. However, it is possible that other families needing transport might not have been present on the days the researchers attended because they could not get there.

The principal also felt that the program had been hampered in the first year because the AIEO had been redeployed by the Early Childhood Branch and was not a local person.

5.8.2 Insights

The KindiLink teacher felt she brought a number of strengths to the program, including being caring, being conscious of cultural diversity, having previous experience as a kindergarten teacher, and her knowledge of other services that parents might find useful. She said, *“I think being caring and conscious of our diversity, of our families and the parents and the children. I think in having my kindergarten background as well”*. The biggest adjustment for the KindiLink teacher was learning to step back and not intervening in what were parental responsibilities. This was not always easy and it was sometimes more difficult to judge when to intervene.

The KindiLink teacher believed she had learnt during the first year especially about following up on parents not attending. She said it was important to follow up if parents do not attend and to be explicit with parents and children about the expectations and norms within the KindiLink initiative. As the teacher said, both she and the AIEO felt they had missed the opportunity to retrieve the situation with one parent who stopped attending. She said, *“We also felt bad that we hadn’t contacted earlier, because if we’d spoken to her earlier, we probably could have sort of smoothed it over... so that was probably our biggest learning curve... we need to talk openly with parents and children of other expectations like that”*.

The KindiLink teacher described strategies she had developed during the previous year and had implemented this year. In particular she mentioned how from the beginning of this year she had consciously used children to involve parents in activities. An early frustration had been that in the first year parents did not understand the expectations of the KindiLink initiative about their role. In the first year parents were less actively involved in running the program and had to be continually encouraged to engage with their children’s activities or to help with packing away or washing dishes after food. The KindiLink teacher did not feel she could directly tell parents what to do because they might take offence. In the second year she decided to involve children in all these activities and to use the children to encourage their parents’ engagement in activities and tidying up. She said: *“We... use the child to say, ‘oh, you might need to get your mummy to help you with that’. And the next thing you know, they’re getting their parent up... I struggle with having to tell a parent to do something that I wouldn’t want to put them offside, but by gently doing it the other way round, getting our children to use their language. ...The children are involving their own parents to show them and see what they’re doing. It might be as simple as ‘Go show mummy your drawing’ or whatever, and next thing you*

know... or 'Come and see what I've done' and then, without making anyone feel uncomfortable, we've figured out how to do those between what we learnt from last year to this year."

As this quotation illustrates, the teacher and AIEO saw their roles as managing the whole environment, including parents and child–parent relationships, as well as using KindiLink to find opportunities to model ways of using games and everyday activities to promote their child’s learning and social development. When asked about advice for other KindiLink initiatives, the teacher felt that first and foremost, the program should seek to empower and support parents. This aligned with the philosophy of the school that most parents want the best for their children, but do not always have the support or knowledge about how they can best provide this. The teacher said: *“My key advice would be to look at being as empowering as possible to our parents... so I think that’s the most important thing to keep that encouragement for our families...”*

5.9 Summary

The Eucalypt KindiLink commenced in 2016 and serves a culturally mixed, low socio-economic community in suburban Perth. The KindiLink initiative was highly valued by staff and families who attended, who said they felt supported by the program and felt it benefitted their children. The principal believed this program was integral to his long-term school plan to improve the educational attainment of children enrolled in the school, and to building stronger links between parents and the school.

The KindiLink teacher established an environment that was welcoming and supportive of parents and used a friendly and collaborative style in her interactions with parents. She clearly differentiated her role as KindiLink teacher, where her role was working with parents to facilitate their child’s learning, from her role as kindergarten teacher, where her focus was on direct work with children. She used the program to informally transmit knowledge and skills and self-belief that would help parents feel more confident and more capable in their role as their child’s first educator. To this end, parents had opportunities to participate in the design and leadership of the KindiLink initiative, including choosing activities, and this was seen as important to the success of the program. When the KindiLink teacher worked directly with children, she consciously modelled interactions that parents might find useful. She felt that the KindiLink initiative had contributed to parents’ confidence in their role and to their knowledge about how to use everyday activities to contribute positively to the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. Staff adapted their communications to suit families and used multiple strategies to communicate with families and potential families including written media, phone calls, home visits, Facebook and information stalls at community events. The KindiLink initiative had enabled the staff to link families better to the school, to each other and to other services in a supportive way.

Families appreciated the supportive environment and liked the structure provided by the KindiLink initiative compared with other playgroups. Interviews with parents confirmed that parents borrowed books from KindiLink to read at home and used some of the ideas from the LearningGames® resources at home, especially the ones that did not require any special equipment.

Recruitment of Aboriginal families had been the biggest difficulty in the first year of operation. The KindiLink teacher and principal felt that they were hampered by not having control of staffing for the AIEO position, especially in the first year. Initially in the first year they restricted the program to Aboriginal families only, but when they were not able to recruit sufficient numbers, they opened the program to other parents. In the second year, they gave priority to Aboriginal families, made the program Aboriginal centred and Aboriginal focused, but opened up spare places to other families. The rationale was that in some multicultural areas like

this school other families have a similar level of disadvantage to Aboriginal families and our conversations with parents during this visit confirmed this judgement.

6. Key Findings

There were a number of key findings generated from the four case studies. Each of these was found to influence the KindiLink initiative and outcomes for children and families. They are discussed below.

6.1 KindiLink Sites

The four case study sites were selected as a means of identifying similarities and differences related to geographic location and context. Interestingly, despite these differences there were more similarities than differences in the implementation and outcomes of KindiLink across the four sites.

6.2 Recruiting Families for KindiLink

Across the four sites, three schools made the decision to incorporate non-Aboriginal families in the KindiLink initiative. One of the three schools only made the decision to invite non-Aboriginal families as a means of increasing numbers and responding to families in the community who felt they had been excluded. Principals reported that the decision to include non-Aboriginal families had been undertaken in consultation with Aboriginal families and on the basis that there were other families with similar social disadvantage and marginalisation that would benefit from the initiative. The potential lack of space for new Aboriginal families in the community informed the decision in one site to invite only Aboriginal families.

In all four sites, multiple methods of recruitment of Aboriginal families for the KindiLink initiative had been used. All participants described 'word of mouth' as the most successful method. Most of the KindiLink teachers described the parents who attended as their best advocates and their endorsement was valuable in propelling the 'word of mouth' message. Initially to advertise the initiative, all schools utilised existing partnerships as well as exhibiting posters in shop windows in shopping centres or along main streets. They distributed flyers at community events and at services such as the local Library, Community Health Clinic and/or associated family and community services. Teachers and AIEOs identified local family networks and visited families, relatives and grandmothers where they described the aims of the KindiLink initiative. Schools sent out newsletters with older children and emails to other schools and child care centres in the district. Some schools contacted Aboriginal Associations and local Child and Parent Centres to advertise KindiLink. All schools utilised social media such as Facebook and sent photos of KindiLink events and activities that could be shared.

6.3 Purpose-Built KindiLink Environments

All four KindiLink sites had a dedicated building for the KindiLink initiative. The principals believed that resources were needed to show the importance of the initiative and made available to the staff and families to implement it effectively. The dedicated space gave a sense of identity to the staff, children and families and was a physical space in which they felt 'safe' and 'at ease' with each other. In one site the families had made plans to paint a mural on the side of the KindiLink building wall not only to beautify it but also to mark it as a KindiLink space.

6.4 Selecting the KindiLink Staff

The selection of the KindiLink staff was crucial to the success of the initiative. Teachers with an early childhood degree and/ or experience were not easy to source in regional and remote communities. All the

teachers had been or continued to be early childhood trained kindergarten teachers within the school. AIEOs with community or familial connections were essential to the establishment and longer-term sustainability of KindiLink because of their connection to Aboriginal families. The AIEOs were particularly helpful to the teachers in negotiating culturally respectful ways of connecting with families, communicating and establishing relationships. Families spoke about the importance of the staff in making the KindiLink initiative successful. In one site the families had remarked that it was not the same when the teacher was absent and a relief teacher had led the daily program.

6.5 Support and Drive of the Principal

All of the four principals described how the KindiLink initiative supported their vision for the school and complemented existing priorities and programs. The principals described the advantages of supporting home environments and connecting families to the school community. Additionally, they understood the importance of supporting parents/carers as their child's first teacher and that positive learning and developmental outcomes from KindiLink would flow into children's ease of transition to Kindergarten. All spoke positively of their KindiLink staff and assisted in the infrastructure and resources for the KindiLink initiative.

6.6 Re-conceptualising the Pedagogy of Educator-led Playgroups

The KindiLink teachers spoke about the changes in their pedagogy that leading a supported playgroup necessitated. An educator-led playgroup was different to how they had previously worked and required them to demonstrate how to be a co-constructor of activities with adults rather than children. They found if they engaged with the children in an activity or Learning Game some of the parents/carers would sit back and not join in or engage. One teacher described talking to parents/carers in a one-to-one situation, rather than to a group, as she felt this enabled her to meet individual needs and talk 'with' rather than 'at' parents/carers. By doing this, the parents/carers became familiar with the activities and could engage in them without assistance. For some teachers, it was also challenging working with younger siblings and preparing activities in which children of all ages could participate. At one site, the teacher had a pedagogical reminder on the wall so that she did not become "*a kindergarten teacher*". All teachers talked about developing a routine over time that made adults and children comfortable rather than adhering to a rigid schedule.

Teachers and AIEOs used a variety of resources to develop educational programs, such as the Remote Early Years Learning Framework and the Abecedarian LearningGames®. All sites had made up packs of LearningGames® for families to take home but this had been met with varying degrees of success. The teachers and AIEOs were given collaborative planning time and all teachers described asking for AIEO input. Parents were also invited to make suggestions for activities, incursions, excursions or events. Most sites had moved to a structure of 3 days a week for 2 hours and in these times teachers had developed similar routines and timetables. All timetables had a regular structure encompassing simple activities and routines that gave an air of predictability. For example: story reading, indoor activities and learning centres, music movement, tidying up, bathroom routines, fruit time or snack time and outdoor with whole group time at the end of the session.

The Early Childhood Branch assisted in professional learning at different intervals during the year and emphasised the different pedagogical approach of the KindiLink initiative to the early years of school. They

also visited each site to talk with principals, teachers and AEOs and gave support and advice as necessary. Staff indicated that this was very much appreciated.

6.7 Developing Positive Transitions and Continuity to Kindergarten

While not all children registered at KindiLink would go on to attend the same school there was strong anecdotal evidence from attendance registers and kindergarten teacher observations that KindiLink assisted children in a positive transition to Kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers (some of whom were the KindiLink teachers) observed the difference between the children who had attended a preschool program and those children who had not. They said that the KindiLink children entered the Kindergarten more confidently and knew the simple routines. They were able to participate in routines and group activities, and showed initiative and confidence when playing with their peers they knew from KindiLink. The families also spoke of the confidence their children would have on entering Kindergarten as they had met the teacher, knew the school site and many had been or would be part of transition programs at the end of the year. Parent/carers on most sites described their confidence that the transition would be smoother because they knew the teachers, the AEOs and the environment into which their children would be entering.

Another support for the transition and continuity between KindiLink and Kindergarten was that the teacher in some cases shared the role or was given planning time to work with the kindergarten teacher. Furthermore, in some sites the KindiLink children used the outdoor area of the Kindergarten and met the teachers and played with children attending Kindergarten and the early years of school. As their parents/carers were present they also met and talked to teachers and this assisted children's confidence in becoming familiar with the larger school environment.

6.8 Supporting Children's Social, Emotional, Language and Cognitive Capabilities

Data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)⁴ show that all four case study sites are drawing from communities where a significant proportion of children have been identified as vulnerable and therefore likely to require additional support for the growth and development of one or more domains. The KindiLink initiative positively assisted children's learning and development. All KindiLink and kindergarten teachers spoke of children's gains particularly in oral language and social and emotional development. They described children's confidence in playing and learning with others and operating independently in the school environment and playgrounds. As children grew in the KindiLink environment they were observed making their own choices, showing initiative and regulating their emotions. The children moved confidently between the adults that regularly attended KindiLink, and adults conversed not only with their own children but also with others. Additionally, teachers reported children's attention span increasing, so they spent more time at activities and engaging in whole-group times. Analysis of the observations using the Early Years Learning Framework and the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines supports these findings and demonstrates children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Some of the teachers and parents described children who spoke a language other than English or an English dialect at home, speaking more English as the year progressed. It was observed at one site that children learned how to 'code switch' by observing their parents/carers in the KindiLink and school environment. In

⁴ Community level AEDC data is available at: <https://www.aedc.gov.au/data>

another site the KindiLink teacher (who was Aboriginal but not from the region) used the local language in her teaching and as a means of making connections with families.

6.9 Building the Capacity and Confidence of Parents as their Child's First Teacher

An overarching aim of the KindiLink initiative was to build the capacity and confidence of parents as their child's first teacher and this was successful for those parents/carers who regularly attended. The KindiLink teachers at all four sites described how parents were learning skills that were modelled by the teacher and AIEO. Over time they had observed these skills used by parents with their children in the LearningGames® and activities that included strategies to assist children with language, cognitive and physical skill development and appropriate behaviour. Many families shared information about the activities undertaken at home that mirrored those at KindiLink or told the staff when children demonstrated a new skill or knowledge acquisition. Examples of the transference of skills learnt (for both parents/carers and children) at KindiLink into the home learning environment were given across the four sites from a number of stakeholders.

KindiLink gave parents/carers the opportunity to link to each other and community services. Parental confidence was shown to grow when they were connected to other parents who were experiencing similar issues. At two of the four sites, mothers spoke about their battles with post-natal depression and how KindiLink assisted in getting them out of the home and strengthened their parenting skills. Other parents in the four sites described the connection to other families as being a main reason for attendance and the connection to community services. Informal conversations with Occupational and Speech Therapists, the Community Health Nurse and other medical and community services empowered parents to reach out for support in the community.

It was apparent that parents'/carers' confidence had grown over time and was strengthened in the KindiLink environment. Parents/carers were forthcoming in giving program and activity suggestions and in one site parents developed a mural art project, which the principal took as a sign of parental confidence. Engagement by parents/carers in KindiLink activities increased as they became more confident of what was expected and felt that no judgements were being made about them as parents. At most sites, the LearningGames®, while played, but were not a focus, as children and their families enjoyed more sensory and gross motor activities and craft activities. In the four case study sites only one or two families took the LearningGames® home. Teachers commented that they had to modify games, as they would not connect with parents'/carers' current skills or levels of English.

6.10 Building Productive Relationships between the Family, School and Community

Across all sites, a focus on building respectful reciprocal relationships was seen as key to engaging and connecting children and families to the KindiLink initiative and to the school community. KindiLink teachers and the AIEOs worked to build trust between themselves and families and parents/carers began to feel comfortable in asking for advice or making suggestions about KindiLink. In part, this was built through shared communication between the KindiLink initiative, the school and families. Families were fully informed of KindiLink, school and community events and KindiLink staff were informed of family events, experiences and children's development and learning at home. The diversity of communication techniques assisted in the

continual flow of information and for some sites home visits also supported the development of trusting relationships.

In all four sites, the school principals and staff highlighted the importance of the KindiLink initiative in connecting families to the school. All staff and parents/carers spoke of the increased school engagement of the KindiLink families. KindiLink was held on the school site and enabled families to become familiar with the school environment. The KindiLink families described the positive experiences in connecting to the school and to each other as a group. Some of the families described a hesitant start to this engagement but all families believed their engagement would continue as the KindiLink families moved through the school together. The families viewed the school as a positive environment and connections to other staff, such as the kindergarten teacher and the AIEOs, assisted in moving beyond the KindiLink environment. Data from all four sites analysed against the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2017) in Quality Area 6 demonstrates evidence of collaborative partnerships with families.

It was evident that the four principals viewed family partnerships as important and believed that supporting the home learning environment and connecting families to the school would assist children in future school attendance. In each case study site, the KindiLink initiative was enacted slightly differently as the staff took into account different cultural and contextual considerations. Interwoven with this was the importance of ensuring culturally competent relationships with all families and recognising cultural similarities as well as differences. In one site a grandmother commented that trust was built as the teacher used the local Aboriginal language in her teaching as she saw this as a sign of respect. In two sites connection with Aboriginal agencies was strong and in all sites the familial connections between families provided mutual support and engagement in KindiLink.

6.11 Improving Attendance among Participating Children during their Schooling

It is too early in the implementation to assess whether children's attendance at school has increased due to KindiLink participation. However, it would appear that the children who have transitioned to Kindergarten are in the main attending.

Attendance at KindiLink was regular for a core group of families at each site, while for some families it was intermittent. All families described the benefits of KindiLink to their children's learning, development and transition to school and this is the main reason they attended. Parents/carers and children commented that they enjoyed coming to KindiLink and they felt welcomed. To sustain attendance, a number of techniques were employed; however, all stakeholders firmly believed that respectful, reciprocal relationships between the families and the KindiLink staff were vital to foster regular attendance. Staff developed welcoming techniques that in some cases may be seen as low key but honoured Aboriginal ways of being, especially in more regional and remote areas. Constant communication on social media highlighting upcoming events and photos of activities kept families motivated to return. Sites used incursions of guest speakers from community service organisations and excursions out into the community to encourage attendance. One teacher described giving positive feedback to families about their engagement with their children in activities or the growth and development of their child at KindiLink. Another teacher said that she sustained attendance by making sure parents/carers knew their ideas were incorporated into the weekly program. Parents/carers also being able to bring other family members and younger siblings also assisted attendance at KindiLink. Across all four sites adults talked and played with other children's younger siblings, or nursed other people's babies so that parents/carers could assist their children with activities.

For some families, social, economic and health issues across all sites restricted their attendance. All AIEOs described that ill health of the children and other family members kept some families from attending. Additionally, conflicting medical appointments, rent inspections, cultural reasons or other activities such as swimming lessons were causes given for not attending. Transport issues were also relevant to attendance and particularly amplified in winter months when the weather kept families indoors. Other reasons for preventing families from attending were feeling “*shame*” as children did behave appropriately or did not have shoes or warm clothing in bad weather. When families did not attend, each site used home visits, phone calls or contact with other family members as ways to support returning to KindiLink.

7. Overall Reflections

It is evident that the KindiLink initiative has been successful in developing a pre-kindergarten educator-led playgroup on school sites that is regularly attended by a core group of families. Evidence suggests that KindiLink has helped to develop children's capabilities, supported parents'/carers' confidence and capacity as their child's first teachers, assisted in connecting families to school, and promoted a smoother transition to Kindergarten. However, registration and attendance was an ongoing challenge for all sites. The discussion to invite/not invite non-Aboriginal families was undertaken in consultation with the community and often seen as a dilemma by the KindiLink school staff and the families. Each site used multiple ways of advertising and encouraging families to attend, however 'word of mouth' was the most successful technique. The KindiLink staff were vital in sustaining the attendance and engagement of families, and the recruitment of the AIEO from the community was central to creating trusting and mutually respectful relationships. Although early childhood trained, the KindiLink teachers and AIEOs indicated that additional professional learning would assist them in working in a different early childhood context, where adult learning is also supported. All staff and families regarded KindiLink as an important asset to school and family partnerships, and mutually beneficial. Families engaged in KindiLink activities at home and schools became more aware of Aboriginal perspectives. All participants indicated that they hoped KindiLink would continue, giving it time to grow, evolve and become embedded in the community. KindiLink was seen as a means of supporting Aboriginal children and their families to access and thrive in school, as well as enabling schools to embrace Aboriginal perspectives on learning and development.

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