Early Literacy and NSW Public Libraries

Dr Emilia Djonov, A/Prof Jane Torr, Dr Maree Stenglin and Natalie Papaellinas

Institute of Early Childhood

MACQUARIE University

STATE LIBRARY® NEW SOUTH WALES

Introduction

Early language and literacy experiences help to provide the building blocks needed to support positive long-term literacy outcomes and life chances (Shoghi, Willersdorf, Braganza & McDonald, 2013).

Children's language and literacy development

Academic success — Professional achievement — National prosperity

The Australian Early Development Index highlights that **22%** of Australian children started school in 2012 developmentally vulnerable in one or more of five domains;

• Physical health and wellbeing
• Social competence
• Emotional maturity
• Language and cognitive skills
• Communication skills and general knowledge

English language difficulties were associated with a higher risk of vulnerability in all 5 domains (Australian Government, 2013).

LIBRARIES / CAREGIVERS / CHILDREN
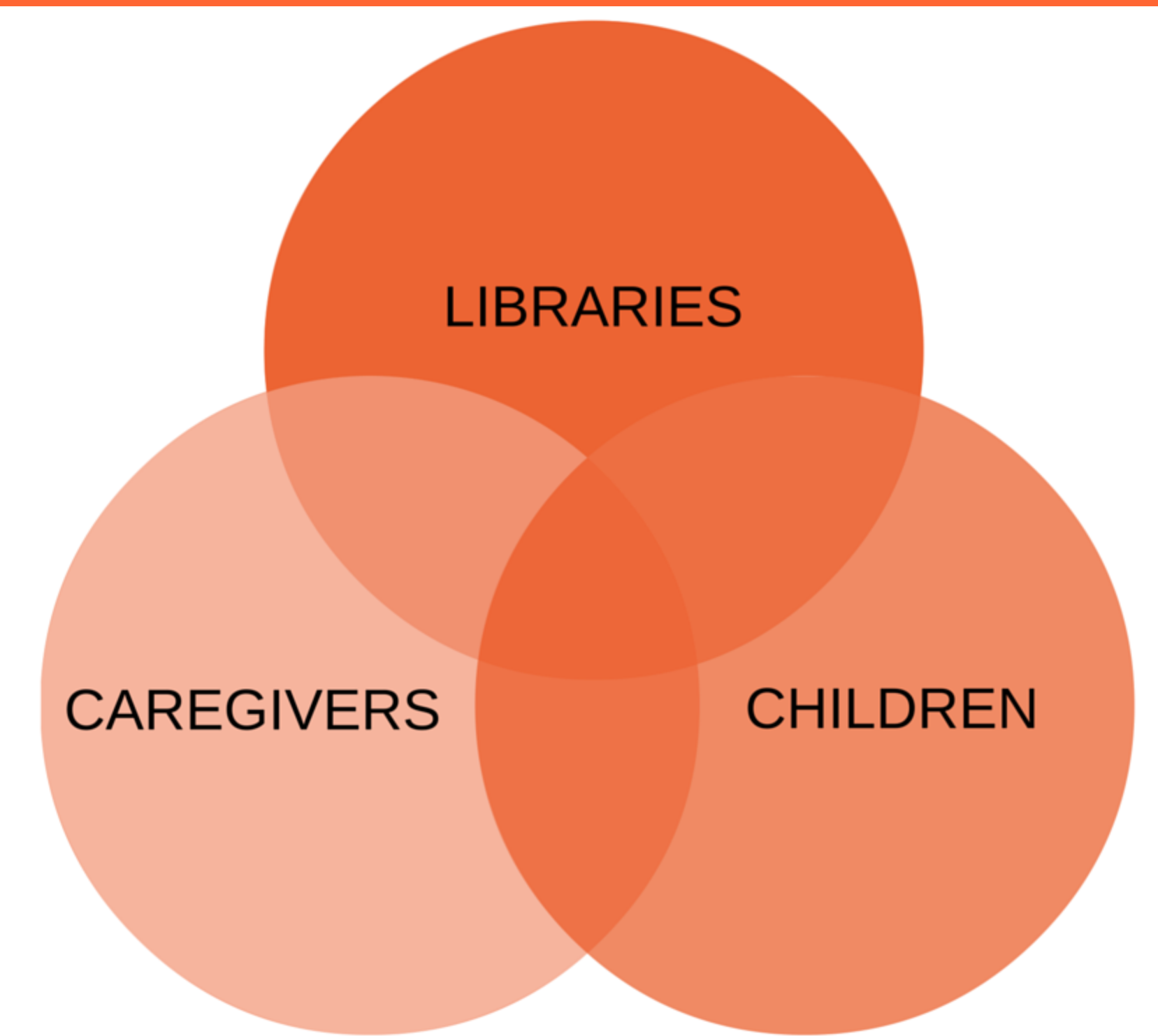
Public libraries appreciate the significant role they play in promoting a focus on early language and literacy learning across diverse communities.

Evaluate / Improve / Promote
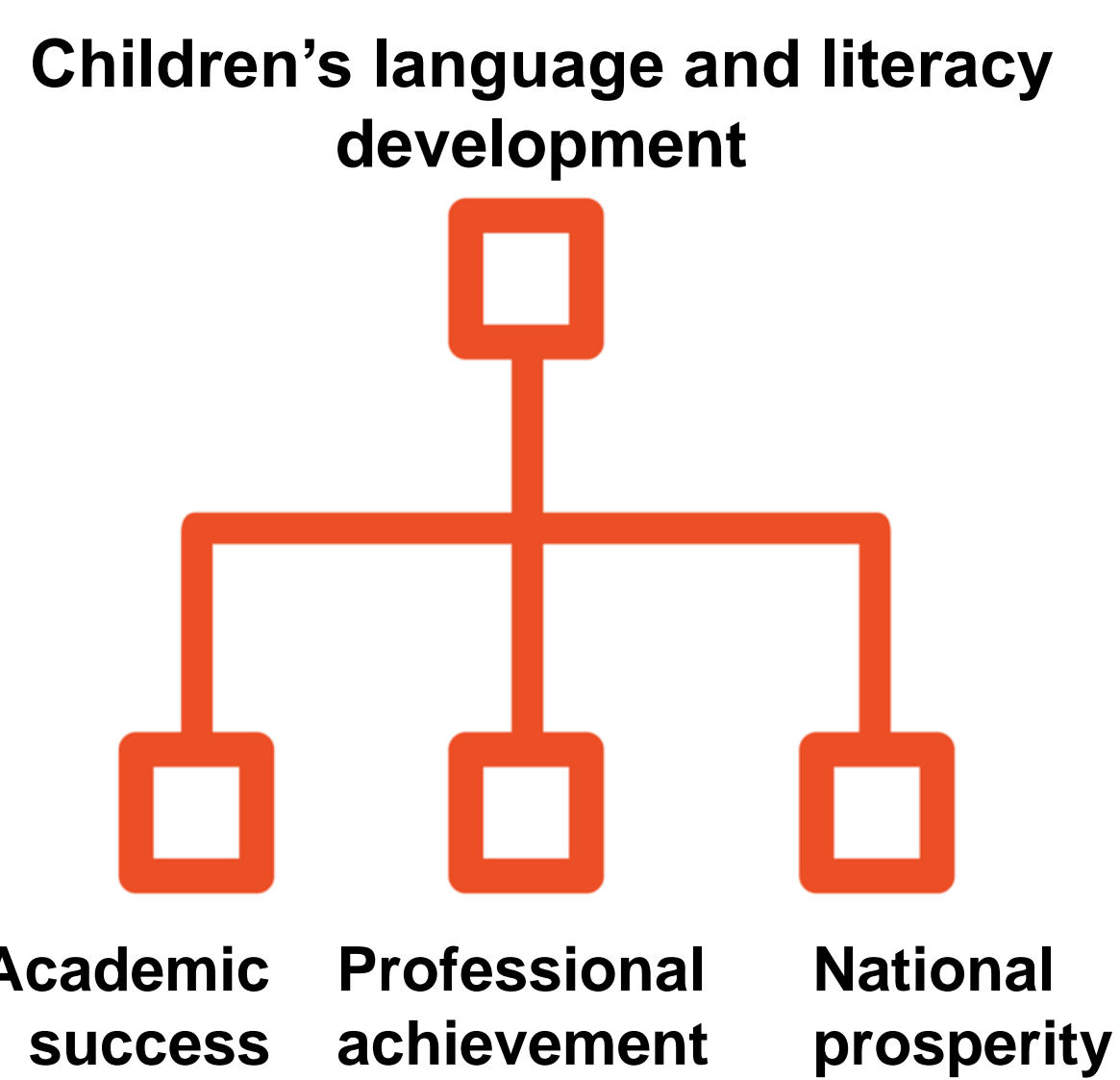
Building on the experience and knowledge of library staff, to deliver a framework that enables them to evaluate, improve and promote their early literacy programs in ways that effectively address the needs of their specific communities.

Stage 1:
• Survey of NSW public libraries about the early literacy programs offered
• Research early literacy competencies and environmental factors that influence long-term academic success
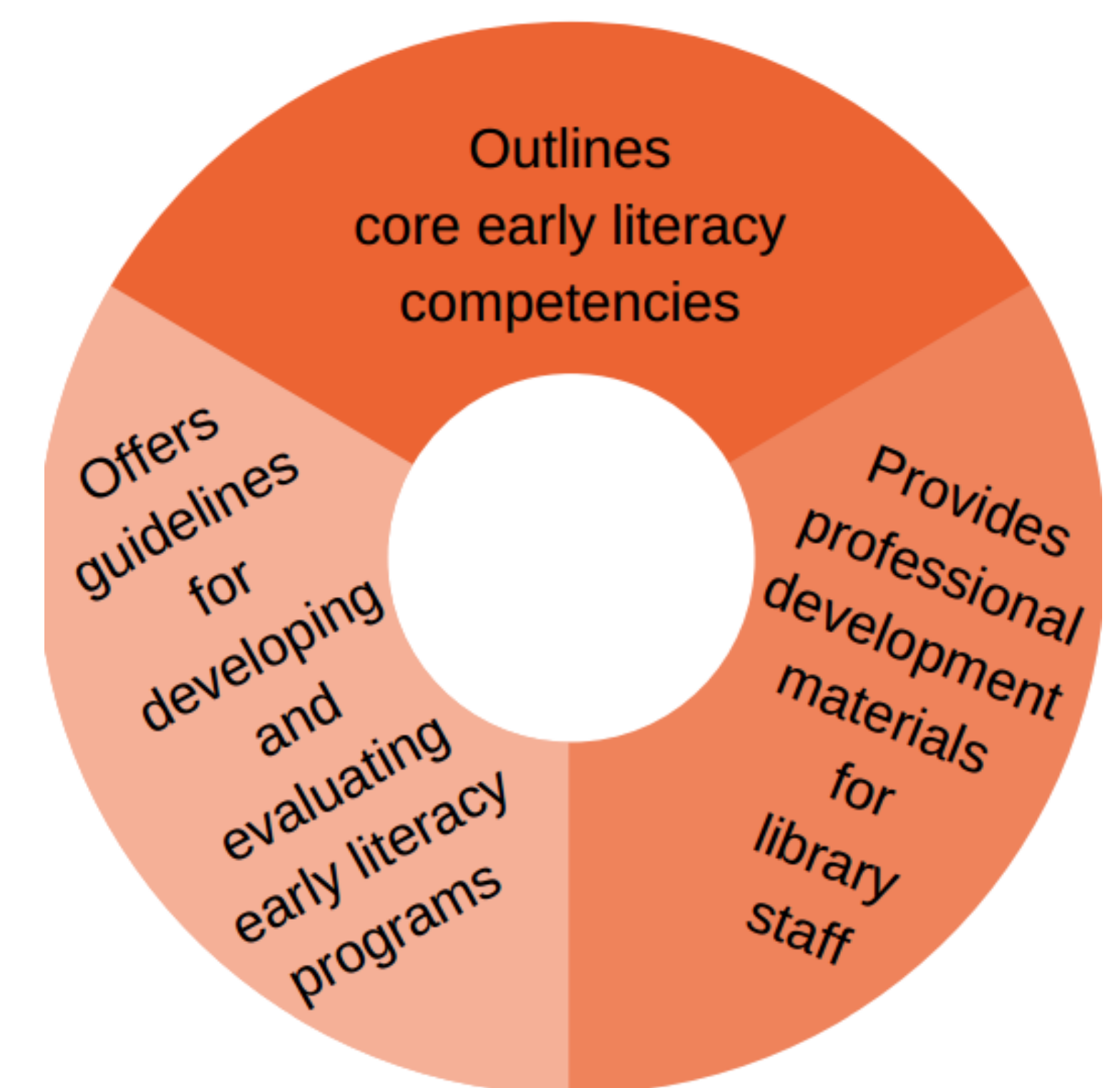
Stage 2
• Collate data from a number of libraries across NSW, using observational and video recordings, surveys, and interviews

WHO?
WHAT?
HOW?
WHY?

Stage 3:

Build a **context-sensitive framework** that:

Outlines core early literacy competencies

Offers guidelines for developing and evaluating early literacy programs

Provides professional development materials for library staff

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Approach

This project is based on the theory, developed by Halliday (1993), that language development involves

• 'Learning language,
• Learning through language, and
• Learning about language.'
(Halliday, 1993).

As children's ability to make meaning grows, they learn to use language and other communication modes in ways that reflect and shape 3 key features of the context of communication.

TENOR:
The relationships between and attitudes of the people involved

FIELD:
The subject matter

MODE:
The channel and means of communication

The project analyses how library staff combine different communication modes in their early literacy programs, including language, gesture, space, the writing and images in picture books, music and song, and various objects such as musical instruments and puppets

(Thumbs up, 2007)

Expected Outcomes/Progress

Supply library staff with tools for evaluating, improving and promoting the early literacy programs that public libraries offer

CORE LITERACY COMPETENCIES

Enhance library staff's existing knowledge of early literacy competencies and practices that can support children in achieving these competencies, the building blocks for future literacy learning and academic success

Obtain a stronger understanding of different library settings and the children and families that participate in their early literacy programs based on surveys completed by caregivers

Caregiver survey
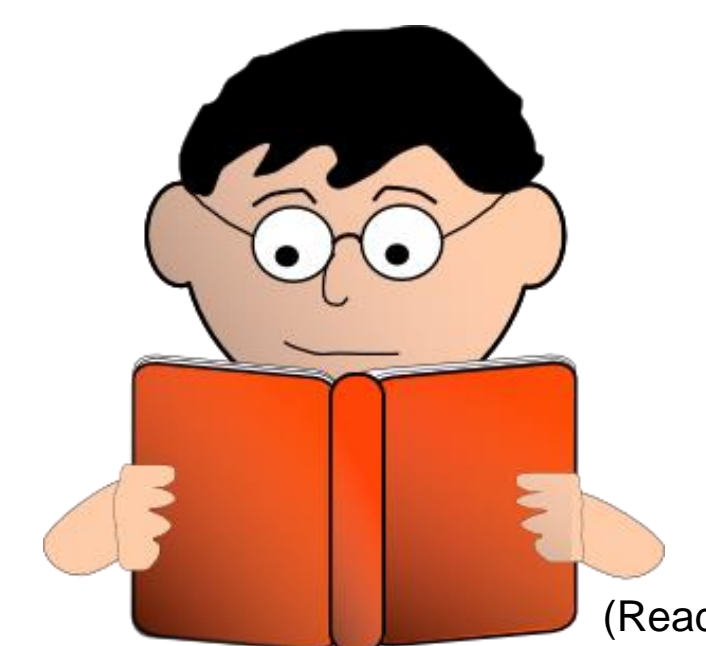
Provide library staff with concepts that they can use to reflect on their own specific contexts in order to make informed decisions about what would work best

(Reading, 2012)

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Chief Investigator **Dr Emilia Djonov:** emilia.djonov@mq.edu.au

NSW State Library Consultant **Mylee Joseph:** mylee.joseph@sl.nsw.gov.au

Research Intern **Natalie Papaellinas:** natalie.papaellinas@students.mq.edu.au

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