

# INQUIRY INTO ENGAGING PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN



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*Education and Science Committee*

Submission by:

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## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for inviting me to make a submission to this Select Committee Inquiry. My submission is informed by key findings from best evidence, and my experience and expertise in education, teacher education, and research and development of educational programmes, within and beyond New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

### Terms of Reference<sup>2</sup>

**Topic 1:** Key research findings relating to effective strategies for engaging parents, families, whānau and aiga in education are summarised in Sections 1 and 2 of this submission.

**Topic 2:** I assume that the Committee invited me to make a submission because of my expertise and experience developing, implementing and supporting the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> and *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programmes. Therefore, in Sections 3, 4 and 5, I have summarised key information about these two programmes as examples of best practice approaches.

**Topic 3:** Information relating to ways of leveraging the strength of communities to lift educational achievement is integrated into Sections 3, 4 and 5 of this document. A detailed consideration of the influences of communities on children's learning is beyond the scope of this submission. Evidence relating to community factors, and forms of community support which enhance the learning of families, is summarised in the Ministry of Education *Families and Communities Best Evidence Synthesis*<sup>3</sup>, particularly Chapters 2 and 3. More recent evidence relating to community influences and programmes is reported in Heath (2010)<sup>4</sup> and Heath (2012)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a brief biography, please see [www.thebiddulphgroup.co.nz/AboutUs](http://www.thebiddulphgroup.co.nz/AboutUs)

<sup>2</sup> The terms of reference for this inquiry:

1. Investigate the elements of an effective strategy for engaging parents, families, whānau, aiga, and communities in education.
2. Identify the best practice examples of approaches, locally and internationally, that support parents and communities to encourage their children's learning.
3. Identify ways to leverage the strength of communities to lift the educational achievement of children and young people in their community.

(Source: [www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/?document=00DBSCH\\_INQ\\_12466\\_1](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/?document=00DBSCH_INQ_12466_1))

<sup>3</sup> Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J. & Biddulph, C. (2003). *The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>4</sup> Heath, S. (2010). Family Literacy or Community Learning? Some Critical Questions on Perspective. In K. Dunsmore, & D. Fisher (Eds.), *Bringing Literacy Home* (pp. 15-41). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

<sup>5</sup> Heath, S. (2012) *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life*. Cambridge University Press.

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*Note: If clarification or additional information is required by the Committee, please email Jeanne Biddulph at [info@thebiddulphgroup.net.nz](mailto:info@thebiddulphgroup.net.nz) and see [www.readingtogether.net.nz](http://www.readingtogether.net.nz) / [www.earlyreadingtogether.net.nz](http://www.earlyreadingtogether.net.nz)*

## SECTION 1: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- ❖ **The home environment powerfully influences what children and young people learn, within and outside school. It is considerably more powerful than parents' income and education in influencing children's learning during their early childhood and schooling years.<sup>6</sup>**
- ❖ **Family processes, and how parents interact with their children, are more significant and influential than parental ethnicity, occupation, income and educational level.<sup>7</sup>**
- ❖ **How parents have cared for and related to their children during early childhood is of major importance for language and cognitive performance, and for reducing antisocial behaviour problems during childhood and delinquency and early police contact in adolescence.<sup>8</sup>**
- ❖ **Parents' meaningful involvement with their children's activities and interests is the most critical factor in their children's development, and the demands of that involvement escalate as children grow older.<sup>9</sup>**
- ❖ **In recent decades, significant changes in childhood and family life, economic pressures, and the dominance of equipment/electronic media for children have had negative impacts on:**
  - **adults' engagement and interactions with children in their families, and**
  - **the language and cognitive development of children and young people.<sup>10</sup>**
- ❖ **About 40 to 65 percent of variance in outcomes is attributable to the influences of family and communities, depending on the outcome of focus, according to a literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Education.<sup>11</sup>**
- ❖ **Uninformed parental involvement can have negative effects on children's learning, but informed parental support can have significant and sustained positive effects on children's learning.<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> Walberg, H. (1999). In G. Cawelti (Ed.). *Handbook of Research on Improving Student Achievement*. Virginia, U.S.: Educational Research Service.

<sup>7</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>8</sup> Farquhar, S. (2005) *Parents as the Amateurs (or not) in their Child's Early Learning*. Keynote Address to the International HIPPY Symposium, Auckland, 22 Sept, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Heath, S. (2012) Op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Heath, S. (2010) Op cit.

<sup>11</sup> Nechyba et al (1999) In A. Alton-Lee, (2004). *Improving Educational Policy and Practice through an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme*. Paper prepared by Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee (NZ Ministry of Education) for OECD-US Seminar, Evidence-based Policy Research. Washington D.C. April 19-20, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Robinson, V., Hohepa, M. & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

## SECTION 2: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING PARENTS, FAMILIES, WHĀNAU, AIGA, AND COMMUNITIES IN FORMAL EDUCATION: A SUMMARY OF SOME KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

*Note: Research evidence relating to children's learning and family influences/engagement is extensive, complex and of varying quality and relevance to New Zealand. For the purposes of this submission, key findings which are most relevant to the partnership programmes described in Sections 3, 4 and 5 have been summarised.*

### 2.1 Literacy learning and diversity

- ❖ The influences of home environments are particularly evident in children's literacy achievement: the literacy experiences and social interactions children have from the time they are born have significant effects on the ways in which they subsequently learn in formal educational contexts.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup>
- ❖ Children from diverse backgrounds whose literacy practices and understandings differ from 'mainstream' children, commonly find the practices in formal educational settings new and difficult to follow. Their diverse language and literacy practices can be unrecognised, marginalised, or viewed as being inadequate or 'deficient' by teachers.<sup>17</sup>
- ❖ The 'ways of taking' from books and other texts which are employed in the school<sup>18</sup> may:
  - build directly on the children's preschool development, or
  - require substantial adaptation on the part of the children, or
  - even run directly counter to aspects of the pattern of the community in which the children were socialised.
- ❖ Some students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who entered higher education lacked the oral-language fluency in ways of talking that they needed to support reading and writing at that level.<sup>19</sup>
  - Their parents had not talked through books with them, questioning, comparing, and commenting on characters, events, motivations, and alternative outcomes or consequences.
  - Academic and language practices (such as sharing knowledge, building ideas, generating experiences and the need to know) had to be firmly established long before students entered higher education.

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<sup>13</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Heath, S.B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society*, 11 (2), 49-76.

<sup>15</sup> Heath, S. (2010). Op cit.

<sup>16</sup> Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>17</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>18</sup> Heath (1982) Op cit.

<sup>19</sup> Heath (2012) Op cit.

## 2.2 Resources

- ❖ The educational resources available to children, rather than their culture or ethnicity, significantly affect their educational progress, but there are significant variations in the availability of resources within families.<sup>20,21,22,23,24</sup>
- ❖ The range of resources which families need to create effective home language/literacy environments<sup>25</sup> include:
  - specific educational resources (e.g. good quality books and other reading resources which are relevant, appealing and appropriate for the particular children and families),
  - knowledge (informed understandings about how to help children learn, especially in reading) and
  - practices (e.g. sound and specific ways of supporting children when they are reading together).
- ❖ Children's literacy learning is significantly enhanced when parents are helped to select and access good quality reading resources (especially from community libraries), and also shown how to use those resources to support their children's reading.<sup>26,27</sup>
  - The availability of reading resources does not, in itself, lift children's achievement because many parents, across all educational and socio-economic groups, lack the depth of understanding and experience required to select and utilise books and other resources in ways which enhance the language/literacy learning of their children.

## 2.3 Impact of parental help

- ❖ Different types of parental involvement can have large, small, or even negative influences on student achievement.<sup>28,29,30</sup>
- ❖ Virtually all parents want their children to succeed educationally, but many parents require guidance on how to help their children at home. Replicating inappropriate teaching approaches which parents experienced as children (which are often all they know) can be unhelpful or even harmful.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Chamberlain, G., Chamberlain, M. & Walker, M. (2001). *Results from New Zealand's participation in the repeat of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study: Trends in Year 9 Students' Mathematics and Science Achievement*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>21</sup> Chapple, S., Jefferies, R., & Walker, R. (1997). *Māori Participation & Performance in Education - A Literature Review & Research Programme: A Report for the Ministry of Education*. Wellington: NZ Institute of Economic Research.

<sup>22</sup> Snow et al (1998) Op cit.

<sup>23</sup> Wylie, C., Thompson, J., & Lythe, C. (1999). *Competent Children at 8: Families, Early Education, and Schools*. Wellington: NZCER.

<sup>24</sup> Wylie, C., Thompson, J. & Lythe, C. (2001). *Competent Children at 10 - Families, Early Education and Schools*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

<sup>25</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>26</sup> Biddulph, J. (1983). *A group programme to train parents of children with reading difficulties to tutor their children at home*. Unpublished MA Research Report, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

<sup>27</sup> Biddulph, J. (2013a). *Reading Together®: Workshop Leader's Handbook*. Hamilton, NZ: Biddulph Group Publishing Limited.

<sup>28</sup> Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson et al (2009) Op cit.

<sup>30</sup> Walburg (1999) Op cit.

<sup>31</sup> Epstein (2001) Op cit.

- ❖ Positive effects are more likely to be associated with programmes that support parents with strategies for effective help: that is, parents are given clear guidance about what to do and how to do it.<sup>32,33,34,35</sup>
- ❖ There is evidence of a long standing negative relationship between uninformed parental help with reading at home and achievement in New Zealand.<sup>36,37,38,39</sup>
- ❖ In New Zealand there is a long history of teachers, especially at junior primary school level, sending books home for the child to read to his/her parent or other family member. Most parents attempt to help their children with reading but, for many parents and children, this can be a frustrating and negative experience. Uninformed parental 'help' can also inadvertently undermine the effectiveness of school literacy programmes.<sup>40,41</sup>
- ❖ Education is a shared responsibility of parents, schools, teachers, and various institutions in the economy and in society, and parental involvement is pivotal for the success of children throughout their school years and beyond. Some forms of parental involvement are more strongly related to cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes than others. These include reading to children when they are young, engaging in discussions that promote critical thinking, and setting a good example. Promoting higher levels of parental involvement may increase students' cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, and high-quality parental involvement may help reduce performance differences across socio-economic groups.<sup>42,43</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Biddulph (1983) Op cit.

<sup>33</sup> Biddulph, J. & Tuck, B. (1983). *Assisting parents to help their children with reading at home*. Paper presented to the Annual New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference, Wellington.

<sup>34</sup> Merttens, R. (1999). Family numeracy. In I. Thompson, (Ed), *Issues in teaching numeracy in primary schools (78-90)*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson et al (2009) Op cit.

<sup>36</sup> Hodgen, E. (2007). *Competent Learners @ 16: Competency levels and development over time - Technical Report*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

<sup>37</sup> Wylie et al (2001) Op cit.

<sup>38</sup> Wylie, C., Thompson, J., Hodgen, E., Ferral, H., Lythe, C, & Fijn, T. (2004). *Competent Children at 12*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

<sup>39</sup> Wylie, C., Ferral, H., Hodgen, E., & Thompson, J. (2006). *Competencies at age 14 and competency development for the Competent Children, Competent Learners study sample*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

<sup>40</sup> Biddulph (1983) Op cit.

<sup>41</sup> Biddulph, J., Biddulph, C. and Biddulph, P. (2009) *Reading Together: Key Features and Related Research Findings 1982-2009*. Commissioned by Group Māori, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

<sup>42</sup> Borgonovi, F. and G. Montt (2012), "Parental Involvement in Selected PISA Countries and Economies", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 73, OECD Publishing.

<sup>43</sup> OECD PISA (2012) *Let's Read Them a Story! The Parent Factor in Education*.

## 2.4 Impact of social, economic and technological changes

*Note: The findings summarised below are drawn from the research of Shirley Brice Heath, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at Stanford University. For a detailed analysis of her comprehensive research, please see 'What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school',<sup>44</sup> 'Family Literacy or Community Learning? Some Critical Questions on Perspective',<sup>45</sup> and 'Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life'<sup>46</sup>.*

- ❖ In recent decades, significant changes in childhood and family life have affected the use of time, space, work and play. Economic pressures require families to constantly rearrange their patterns of work, language, play and learning.
  - Face-to-face talk and the uses of technology within families and communities are affected by these changes, some of which have negative impacts on family practices and the language and cognitive development of children and young people.
  - The length of sustained conversations and exchange of extended narratives between parents and children has decreased.
  - In the USA, many students living in poverty, or in families with limited incomes, went through their full 12 years of public school without having daily extended conversations with adults — their parents or teachers — about abstract ideas, reading materials, or future projects and plans.
    - These students appeared to be unable to sustain a conversation on a single topic for 10 minutes, or to formulate a relatively simple plan e.g. for a project or laboratory experiment.
- ❖ In contrast to the language collected in the 1970s and 1980s, talk during the 1990s began to reflect simplified syntax, a more limited genre range, and reduction in the range of verifiable sources of conversational content.
- ❖ Sustained language interactions with children, and engaging with them with real enjoyment (from their infancy into young adulthood) are central concepts of family literacy.
  - In recent decades, engagement **with** children, which is so critical for their development, has been wiped out for parents across classes because, at every stage, equipment for children (designed for the child's solo exploration) now dominates.
  - Reading together requires the commitment of real time, and its rewards include social intimacy, laughter, fulfillment of curiosity, and contemplation of the wonders of real and imagined worlds. Family literacy cannot be 'fast, easy, or efficient'.
- ❖ The widely discussed achievement gap does not reflect the underachievement of young learners so much as it reveals continuing inequities of economic and educational possibilities and misunderstanding by parents of what must be done to protect their children from electronic media.

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<sup>44</sup> Heath (1982) Op cit.

<sup>45</sup> Heath (2010) Op cit.

<sup>46</sup> Heath (2012) Op cit.

## 2.5 Working in Partnership

- ❖ Partnerships with communities are essential, and high trust educational systems (and therefore the programmes which operate within them) produce higher standards.<sup>47</sup>
- ❖ The quality and nature of partnership programmes are critical. Good quality partnership programmes that address the real needs of parents and children can significantly improve children's achievement<sup>48,49</sup> and longer term well being.<sup>50</sup>
- ❖ Increased achievement is possible even in families with little formal education when educators are non-judgmental, avoid deficit assumptions, value participants, and take into account the realities and needs of diverse families.<sup>51</sup>
- ❖ Teacher leadership plays a major role in the extent to which parents become involved in their children's in-school learning and sustain that involvement. Teachers can take the initiative by 'reaching out' to parents and establishing partnerships with families and their communities, to the children's academic and social benefit.<sup>52</sup>
- ❖ Internal ownership of an innovation (such as a partnership programme) occurs when teachers accept responsibility to sustain it long term in ways that make a difference for children. Deep educational change goes beyond surface structures and procedures, and change is better able to be sustained when there is knowledgeable and supportive school leadership.<sup>53</sup>
- ❖ In the early childhood years, the most effective approach to boost children's later achievement is support for parents to actively engage in children's learning at home. ECE services that directly promote activities for children and parents to do together can enhance children's development.<sup>54,55</sup>
- ❖ An educational partnership model based on collaboration is required to improve learning and enable Māori potential to be realised. The engagement of whānau in the teaching and learning of their children has a powerful influence over their educational achievement.<sup>56</sup>
- ❖ Parents become meaningfully engaged in partnership programmes, and children's learning and social development are significantly enhanced<sup>57</sup> when:
  - the programmes are high impact, evidence-based, implemented as intended, collaborative and fully supported
  - the focus is on learning, rather than more general advice and forms of involvement

<sup>47</sup> Hargreaves, A., Halasz, G. and Pont, B. (2007) *School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland: A case study report for the OECD activity - Improving school leadership*.

<sup>48</sup> Tuck, B., Horgan, L., Franich, C. & Wards, M. (2007). *School leadership in a school-home partnership: Reading Together at St Joseph's School Otahuhu*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>49</sup> Biddulph (2013a) Op cit.

<sup>50</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>51</sup> Epstein (2001) Op cit.

<sup>52</sup> Epstein (2001) Op cit.

<sup>53</sup> Coburn, C. (2003) Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp. 3-12

<sup>54</sup> Farquhar, S. (2012a) *OECD's Latest Report Gives Direction for Improving NZ's ECE Curriculum Te Whāriki*.

<sup>55</sup> Farquhar, S. (2012b) *Engaging with Families and Communities: OECD Recommendations*.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry of Education (2008) *Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012*. Wellington.

<sup>57</sup> Biddulph (2013a) Op cit.

- meaningful, subject-specific support enables parents to enhance their children's learning by interacting more effectively with them.
- ❖ Programmes which are manageable, sustainable, equitable and empowering for all families are effective.<sup>58</sup>
  - Helpful programmes add to family practices (rather than undermining them), and treat families from diverse backgrounds with dignity and respect.
  - Successful programmes acknowledge and build on the strengths and experiences of families, including the unique and specialist knowledge and understandings that parents have of their children, and their commitment to their children's learning and well being.
- ❖ The environments in which participants meet must be comfortable, welcoming, interactive and psychologically supportive (i.e. small groups). Opportunities for one-to-one contact, and especially informal contact, are also important; and parents who have had negative school experiences in the past need additional support and encouragement.<sup>59</sup>
- ❖ Programmes must promote group cohesion, confidence, ongoing communication, and mutual support and caring among participants. Respectful and trusting relationships need to be built among educators, families and community members.<sup>60,61,62</sup>

## 2.6 Benefits of working in partnership

- ❖ Well designed interventions to support parents can have dramatic, positive impacts on students' reading achievement and their enjoyment of literacy. Further, such interventions can counter the adverse effects associated with parent help, negative controlling, and (to an extent) lack of parental involvement. It is possible for schools to invest considerable time, energy and resources in engaging with families and communities in ways that have little - or even negative - impacts on student outcomes.<sup>63</sup>
- ❖ Children can make significant and sustained gains in their literacy learning when teachers and parents work together in informed and collaborative ways e.g. when parents are helped to access appropriate reading resources, and shown how to become more responsive and to interact with their children around books and other texts (including digital texts) in ways that enhance children's language and literacy development.<sup>64</sup>
  - Effective support for families benefits all children, but is particularly important when parents are told that their children are struggling or 'failing', especially in reading.
  - Negative and sometimes punitive interactions, and uninformed counter-productive forms of 'help' with reading at home, escalate when children are struggling and anxious parents do not know how to support them effectively.

<sup>58</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>59</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>60</sup> Allen, J. (2009). *Effective home-school communication*. Harvard Family Research Project, FINE Newsletter, Vol. 1, Issue 1.

<sup>61</sup> Caspe, M. & Lopez, M. (2006). *Lessons from family-strengthening interventions: Learning from evidence-based practice*. Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Education (2008) Op cit.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson et al (2009) Op cit.

<sup>64</sup> Biddulph (2013a) Op cit.

- ❖ The educational and social benefits which effective partnerships provide<sup>65</sup> include:
  - enhanced well-being, behaviour and achievement of children
  - positive effects which persist into their adult lives, including their constructive participation in society
  - raised hopes and expectations for children's futures as learners
  - enhanced confidence and competence of parents, and increased engagement of parents in their children's formal education, in partnership with educators
  - enhanced understanding and effectiveness among the educators and others who initiate partnerships by 'reaching out' to parents, because they (the educators and others):
    - learn more about families, including children's experiences and competencies, and the concerns and uncertainties of the adults
    - develop deeper understandings of the home literacy practices, language, and social structures of children's cultures.
- ❖ The effects of good quality teaching are maximised when teaching is supported by effective school-home partnership practices focused on student learning. School-home partnerships that have shown the most positive impacts on student outcomes have student learning as their focus.<sup>66</sup>
  - *When partnerships between educators and parents are much more directly focused on student learning, the links to learning outcomes are much stronger. One of the strongest and most cost-effective examples of a partnership focused directly on the learning of low achieving students in New Zealand is evident in the dramatic and sustained outcomes in increased reading achievement reported by Biddulph (1983), Biddulph and Tuck (1983) and Biddulph (1993). ... after only three months there were significant ( $p > .001$ ) gains in reading achievement compared with a matched control group of students, some of whom were receiving ongoing specialist in-school assistance. ... the reading gains were sustained over time. Their rate of gain over the year following the intervention was similar to that of the average reader (this occurring independently of any specialist assistance). ... The intervention had a positive effect also on student attitudes to reading and a reportedly positive effect on family relationships.*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Biddulph et al (2003) Op cit.

<sup>66</sup> Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>67</sup> Alton-Lee (2003) Op cit. pp.40-41.



## SECTION 3: THE *READING TOGETHER*® PROGRAMME: A BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE OF AN APPROACH WITHIN NEW ZEALAND THAT ENABLES PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

### 3.1 Introduction

*Reading Together*® is a workshop programme for parents, children, teachers and librarians which I developed, implemented and evaluated as a Masters' degree research project at the University of Canterbury in 1982 - 83. My research originated from my experiences as a primary school teacher, and my recognition that:

- ❖ most parents try to help their children with reading, but many well intentioned parents use approaches which are unhelpful and confusing for children. Parents appreciate support which enables them to help their children 'properly'.
- ❖ **uninformed** 'help' and pressure at home result in children developing negative attitudes and counterproductive reading strategies
- ❖ it is difficult for classroom teachers to provide enough one-to-one support for children, especially when children are struggling with reading
- ❖ when teachers and librarians work in learning partnerships with families, parents are able to provide **informed** help with reading at home. Teachers, parents and librarians can then support children's learning more effectively than any of them can achieve if they are working independently of – and often at odds with – each other.

**Model of Support for Implementation of *Reading Together*®**



**Primary purpose of *Reading Together*®:**  
To help all children, whatever their cultural/language and/or socio-economic backgrounds, to become keen competent readers who have the range of language and literacy abilities they need to function confidently and effectively within their communities and wider society.

Since the early 1980s, the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme has been implemented by interested school leaders, teachers and community librarians throughout New Zealand, who found out about the programme via 'word-of-mouth'. Between 1982 and 2004, my family and I invested considerable time and resources in ongoing research and development, and providing voluntary support for families, teachers and librarians participating in the wider implementation of *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>. In 2004, we began selling the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> resources to help cover costs.<sup>68</sup>

*Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> is consistent with, and grounded in, key understandings drawn from sound research studies. The programme addresses some of the significant issues relating to social change, family literacy and children's achievement and well-being identified by Shirley Brice Heath and other eminent researchers. *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> is cited in an OECD report as a successful parental-involvement programme in New Zealand.<sup>69</sup> It is also cited in the Ministry of Education's Operating Intention '*Lifting educational achievement through Better Public Services*' as an evidence-based programme which the Ministry supports as part of its specific intention to '*Promote strong and powerful connections between education providers, parents, families, whānau, iwi and communities*'.<sup>70</sup> The programme has the potential to contribute to current initiatives to support vulnerable children and their families.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.2 Research

- ❖ *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> enables parents to provide effective support for their children's reading at home: it has been shown to raise children's reading achievement in a significant and sustained manner. The programme also supports children's emotional and social development, improves relationships within families, and enhances relationships between families, schools and community libraries.
- ❖ The effectiveness of the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme has been measured in a number of research studies. Extensive qualitative and quantitative data have been gathered from the implementation of the programme in a wide range of settings throughout the past three decades, and the findings and responses of participants are remarkably consistent over time and across diverse families, educators and librarians.<sup>72</sup>
- ❖ The original 1982-83 *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> study was action-research and experimental. It involved a gold-standard, randomised, controlled trial with children who were struggling with reading. All the children in the 'target' group (i.e. those whose parents attended the workshops) were 9 - 10 year olds who were reading at least 18 months below their chronological age. Statistical analysis revealed that, when measured against the comparison group, the target children made significantly greater gains in reading attainment three months after the workshops began, and these gains were maintained in follow-up testing 12 months later.<sup>73,74,75</sup>

<sup>68</sup> All intellectual property rights in the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme materials and resources are owned by Biddulph Education Trust Limited, and used under licence by companies within The Biddulph Group. All rights are reserved.

<sup>69</sup> OECD PISA (2012) Op cit.

<sup>70</sup> [www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PublicationsAndResources/StatementOfIntent/SOI2013/OperatingIntentions/EducationalAchievement/BPSResultArea5.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PublicationsAndResources/StatementOfIntent/SOI2013/OperatingIntentions/EducationalAchievement/BPSResultArea5.aspx)

<sup>71</sup> [www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/SupportingVulnerableChildrenQs.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/SupportingVulnerableChildrenQs.aspx)

<sup>72</sup> Research reports are available via [www.readingtogether.net.nz](http://www.readingtogether.net.nz)

<sup>73</sup> Biddulph (1983) Op cit.

<sup>74</sup> Biddulph & Tuck (1983) Op cit.

<sup>75</sup> Alton-Lee, A. (2004) Op cit.

**Effect Sizes in 1982-83 Research:**

The effect sizes in the 1982-83 research were 0.44 for gains on a standardised GAP test of reading comprehension, and 2.25 for book-level gains, over and above school programme effects.<sup>76</sup> An effect size of 0.35 is the average effect of a year's teaching in reading in New Zealand.<sup>77</sup>

**Effect Size in 2007 Research:**

In 2007, the Ministry of Education commissioned research into the implementation of *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> at St Joseph's Primary School, Otahuhu, Auckland. The research found significant gains (i.e. an effect size of 0.68) in independent reading skills across high and low achieving children and their siblings aged 6-13 years (measured over a two-year period, compared with a control group), over and above a strong school programme.<sup>78,79,80</sup>

❖ The 1982-83 and 2007 research studies also revealed that:

- children whose parents participated in the workshops
  - read more regularly, and with improved understanding, enjoyment and independence
  - became more interested in reading and used libraries more frequently
  - gained more confidence in themselves as readers and as people.
- parents, including some who had not previously engaged with schools and libraries
  - were keen to be involved in the programme and valued the support it provided
  - gained competence in assisting their children at home and also gained confidence and satisfaction from doing so
  - interacted more positively and effectively with their children, and developed more supportive and positive relationships within their families
  - felt less frustration, anger and anxiety about their children's reading achievement
  - used the programme strategies to help siblings of the target group of children, and showed other family members and other parents how to help their children
  - reported that their own reading had improved (in cases where parents struggled with reading themselves)
  - increased their engagement with the school as participants in learning and teaching
  - showed greater confidence in their exchanges with teachers about their children.

The authors of the Ministry of Education's *Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis*<sup>81</sup> concluded that:

***Reading Together has proven to be a cost-effective intervention to support parents in assisting their children with reading.***

<sup>76</sup> Robinson (2009) Op cit.

<sup>77</sup> Hattie, J. (2009). In A. Alton-Lee, (2012). *The Use of Evidence to Improve Education and Serve the Public Good*. Paper prepared for the New Zealand Ministry of Education and the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Vancouver, Canada.

<sup>78</sup> Tuck et al (2007) Op cit.

<sup>79</sup> Robinson (2009) Op cit.

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Education (2009) *Ngā Haeata Mātauranga - The Annual Report on Māori Education, 2007/08*. Wellington.

<sup>81</sup> Robinson et al (2009) Op cit. p.162.

### 3.3 Overview of Reading Together®

Reading Together:

- ❖ consists of four 1¼ hour workshops (spread over seven weeks) for small groups of parents/whānau (no more than 15)
- ❖ workshops are led by experienced teachers, supported by community librarians, and held in informal settings such as school libraries. Sometimes workshops are also held in community libraries, marae or other appropriate places.
- ❖ is practical, user friendly, enjoyable and manageable for teachers, librarians, parents/whānau and children
- ❖ recognises, values and utilises the commitment, expertise and experience within families, schools and community libraries
- ❖ is implemented by interested teachers and librarians who value the fact that the programme
  - has a sound research base and a 30 year history of voluntary implementation throughout New Zealand
  - is effective, manageable and user friendly for busy teachers, librarians and parents/whānau
  - is relatively low cost for schools and no cost for families.



### 3.4 Focus

Reading Together:

- ❖ has a specific focus on an area of learning (reading) that all parents/families recognise as being important
- ❖ helps parents to foster children's enjoyment of reading, understanding of texts, and their confidence and independence as learners
- ❖ enables parents/whānau to learn sound, specific and effective ways of helping their children with reading at home
  - manageable suggestions for helping are discussed, demonstrated and practised during workshops
  - parents appreciate meaningful support and show others how to help children

*I was watching koro read with our boy and I was thinking; you're doing it all wrong! You're getting angry! So I took Koro outside and had a coffee, a smoke and a chat about how to make reading fun for our boy. It was cool. I didn't want to be a big head about it but I learnt some cool stuff in just the first lesson!  
(Nan with full custody, after Workshop 1)<sup>82</sup>*

<sup>82</sup> Madden, F. & Madden, R. (2013) *Reading Together Project 2012 - Analysis of feedback and of workshop attendance*. Independent report commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and completed in February 2013. p.4.

- ❖ supports all children and parents/whānau i.e.
  - children who are struggling with reading, or reluctant to read, or competent readers
  - children from junior primary to junior secondary school levels
  - children and parents from diverse language/literacy, cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds
- ❖ enables teachers, parents and librarians to work together in informed ways, thereby supporting children's reading more effectively than teachers, parents or librarians can accomplish on their own
- ❖ complements, supports and enhances the work of schools and community libraries.

### 3.5 Engaging and supporting families

- ❖ *Reading Together* engages almost all families, because almost every parent understands how critically important reading is to their child's future and well being. Even parents who do not normally participate in other school activities and partnership programmes will come to the workshops. The parents' positive feedback and gratitude encourage teachers and librarians to sustain the programme in their schools and libraries.
- ❖ The processes required for effectively engaging and supporting families (which are detailed in the *Reading Together®: Workshop Leader's Handbook*) are personal, informal, respectful, non-judgmental and collaborative. The programme is designed to engage and support all families, and it caters for the demands they face in their everyday lives.

*I recommend this programme to everyone. It's a good place for support, and catching up with other parents, finding out what problems they have and a time for sharing, and also fantastic that we could take our children with us. It was a relief to know that other parents were having the same issues that I was.<sup>83</sup>*

### 3.6 Benefits of *Reading Together*®

The benefits of *Reading Together*® have been demonstrated consistently in its wider implementation across diverse families, schools and libraries during the past three decades. The benefits include:

- ❖ Children's reading levels, confidence, engagement and independence in reading are improved, because the programme helps parents to provide sound and constructive support.
  - Informed, effective support, and experiences which are positive and enjoyable for children and adults, replace unsound, counter-productive forms of 'help' and negative and frustrating reading experiences at home.
  - Parents who know that their children are struggling, or who are told that they are 'below national standards', are likely to exert additional, uninformed and unhelpful pressure on their children – pressure which undermines the effectiveness of literacy programmes provided by teachers and schools.

<sup>83</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.18.

- Parents who struggle with reading themselves usually have strong feelings of failure, shame and frustration; feelings which commonly result in parents becoming angry and punitive when they are trying to help their own children, or result in parents withdrawing from engaging with their children's reading – a cycle of inter-generational failure which *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> helps to break.

*If I knew it was this simple I would have done it so different. Sorry my babies. I have a lot to make up for.*<sup>84</sup>

- ❖ More positive and relaxed relationships develop between children and their parents/whānau, and also between families, teachers and community librarians.
- Parents attending the programme report moving from 'anxious' to 'confident', and homes shifting from 'stressful' to 'harmonious'.

*To make our one on one reading time more enjoyable which has the roll on effect and she's going to bed happier and waking happier. It's reduced a lot of stress in our home! Thank You! It just made life easier. Less tension at home, we're better friends.*<sup>85</sup>

- ❖ A sense of community, mutual trust and respect, and networks of support develop among diverse parents/whānau, teachers and community librarians.
- ❖ Effective, non-threatening support and encouragement is provided for adults who struggle with reading; many of whom report that their own reading and confidence improves as a result of their participation in the programme.

*This programme has encouraged me and my husband to read, not only with our son's reading book, but we are starting to like reading.*<sup>86</sup>

- ❖ Schools and libraries are able to engage and support parents/whānau who have not previously engaged with schools and/or libraries, including adults who avoid schools and libraries because they are shy, lacking in confidence, or had negative experiences at school when they were children.
- ❖ Independence and self-reliance are fostered among participants.

<sup>84</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.3.

<sup>85</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.15.

<sup>86</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.19.

- ❖ Educators and librarians develop deeper understandings about the range of diverse language and literacy practices which children experience within the different social and cultural contexts in which they live and learn.
  - Teachers and librarians are prompted to find better ways of building on the varied knowledge and experiences that children and parents bring to more formal educational settings and libraries.
- ❖ The work of educators and librarians is supported and enhanced, because *Reading Together* aligns with the emphasis they place on enjoyment of language and reading, and the construction of meaning from a range of good quality print and screen based texts.
- ❖ Some parents/whānau who participate in the programme volunteer to help other children in their schools.
- ❖ Some adult volunteers from the community also complete the workshops so that they can then provide informed and effective support for children/teenagers in their local schools.
- ❖ Some community leaders (e.g. Iwi and Pacific Island church leaders) encourage and support parents and teachers who are participating in the workshops.
- ❖ Some participating families receive children's books donated by local booksellers or publishers.

*It's really important for fathers to come and to read with their kids at home. It is a good way to build a good relationship with your kids. I think it's important for boys to see their dad's reading and being involved in their reading.<sup>87</sup>*

### 3.7 Critical Success Factors for the effective implementation of *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>

- ❖ The workshops are led by committed, competent teachers within each school who volunteer to become Workshop Leaders, and who:
  - have the required depth of experience, expertise, and understanding of the research and theoretical basis of the programme
  - lead the workshops in culturally sensitive and inclusive ways
  - equally value all participants and their experiences and expert knowledge
  - communicate in ways that are understood and are not laden with jargon
  - provide expert input as required
  - build a climate of good humour, shared effort and a task focus
  - build relationships and trust, and forge partnerships that are mutually respectful, engage all parents/whānau and promote their participation.
- ❖ The implementation is fully supported by informed school leaders, other staff, Boards of Trustees, and also community librarians and their managers (wherever possible).

<sup>87</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.17.

- ❖ Teachers and librarians maintain the integrity (and therefore the effectiveness of) the programme by:
  - following the fully-scripted *Workshop Leader's Handbook* carefully
  - implementing the programme and using all the resources as intended, and
  - adopting the processes required to engage and support parents/whānau effectively.
- ❖ Families have ongoing and easy access to adequate supplies of appropriate, appealing and relevant resources to enjoy reading together in their own homes.
- ❖ Schools and libraries implement the programme because they believe in it, and genuinely wish to use it to support as many children and families in their communities as possible. Their involvement in the programme should be built into their core responsibilities and not be treated as an 'add on', which is dependent on goodwill and unsustainable additional effort.
- ❖ Schools and libraries feel that the agencies who control and manage them value and support the work they are doing to implement the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme.

For more information about *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>, please see [www.readingtogether.net.nz](http://www.readingtogether.net.nz)

*Dr Laurie Thew, Principal of Manurewa Central School, Auckland describes Reading Together<sup>®</sup> as "the closest thing to a silver bullet we've ever seen".<sup>88</sup>*

<sup>88</sup> Source: <http://manukaucourier.realviewdigital.com/?iid=64698&startpage=page0000001#folio=1> and <http://booksellers.co.nz/book-news/no-silver-bullets-education-%E2%80%93-reading-together-close>



## SECTION 4: THE *EARLY READING TOGETHER*® PROGRAMME: A BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE OF AN APPROACH WITHIN NEW ZEALAND THAT ENABLES PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

### 4.1 Introduction

*Early Reading Together*® is a workshop programme for parents of young children, early childhood educators, junior school teachers and librarians. The programme helps parents/whānau to enhance the language and literacy development of their children.

I developed the *Early Reading Together*® programme in 1983 because:

- ❖ I knew that parents need and appreciate guidance which helps them to support the language and literacy learning of their children.
- ❖ Teachers and librarians asked me to develop an 'early childhood/new entrant' version of the *Reading Together*® programme which they could use to support families at ECE and junior school levels.

Since 1983, the *Early Reading Together*® programme has been implemented by interested school leaders, teachers and community librarians throughout New Zealand. Between 1983 and 2009, my family and I invested considerable time and resources in ongoing research and development, and providing voluntary support for families, teachers and librarians participating in the wider implementation of the programme. In 2009, we began selling the *Early Reading Together*® resources to help cover costs.<sup>89</sup>

*Early Reading Together*® is consistent with, and grounded in, key understandings drawn from sound research studies, and it addresses some of the significant challenges identified by Shirley Brice Heath and other eminent researchers. It is cited in an OECD report as a successful New Zealand parental-involvement programme which addresses the need for early childhood educators to help parents provide quality home learning environments.<sup>90</sup> *Early Reading Together*® has the potential to contribute to current initiatives to support vulnerable children and their families, and to help educators and librarians engage non-participating families in the range of educational opportunities in their communities.<sup>91</sup>

#### **Primary purpose of *Early Reading Together*®:**

To help parents of young children to support their children's language and literacy learning more effectively.

#### **Overall and longer term goal of *Early Reading Together*®:**

To help all children develop a love of language and reading and the range of language and literacy abilities they will need to function confidently and effectively within their communities and wider society.

<sup>89</sup> All intellectual property rights in the *Early Reading Together*® programme materials and resources are owned by Biddulph Education Trust Limited, and used under licence by companies within The Biddulph Group. All rights are reserved.

<sup>90</sup> Taguma, M, Litjens, I & Makowiecki, K. (2012) *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: United Kingdom (England)*. OECD.

<sup>91</sup> [www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/SupportingVulnerableChildrenQs.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/SupportingVulnerableChildrenQs.aspx) and [www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/MoreChildrenInECE.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/MoreChildrenInECE.aspx)

Qualitative data gathered since 1983 have confirmed that there is a range of educational, affective and social benefits for families participating in the programme, as well as benefits for educators and librarians implementing the workshops.

## 4.2 Overview of *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>

- ❖ The programme consists of three 1¼ hour workshops (spread over three weeks) for small groups of parents/whānau (no more than 15)
- ❖ Workshops are led by experienced teachers, supported by community librarians, and held in settings such as school libraries, ECE centres and community libraries
- ❖ The programme is practical, user friendly, enjoyable and manageable for teachers, librarians and parents/whānau
- ❖ *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> recognises, values and utilises the commitment, expertise and experience within families, ECE services, schools and community libraries
- ❖ The programme is relatively low cost for ECE services and schools, and no cost for families.



## 4.3 Focus

*Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>:

- ❖ has a specific focus on an area of learning (language and reading) that all parents/families recognise as being important
- ❖ helps parents of young children (babies to 5 and 6 year-olds who are reading at emergent levels) to:
  - provide informed support for their children's language and literacy development
  - foster young children's enjoyment and understanding of language and reading
  - develop children's confidence and independence as young learners
  - select and access good quality resources which will enhance their children's language and literacy learning
- ❖ enables parents/whānau to learn sound, specific and effective ways of helping their children with reading at home.
  - manageable suggestions for helping are discussed and demonstrated during workshops.
- ❖ supports all children and parents/whānau from diverse language/literacy, cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds
- ❖ enables teachers, parents and librarians to work together in informed ways to support children's learning more effectively than teachers, parents or librarians can accomplish on their own
- ❖ is a cost effective programme which complements, supports and enhances the work of ECE services, schools and community libraries.

## 4.4 Engaging and supporting families

- ❖ *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> engages almost all families, because almost every parent understands how critically important reading is to their child's future and well being. Even parents who do not normally participate in other ECE/school activities and partnership programmes will come to the workshops. The positive responses and gratitude of parents encourage teachers and librarians to sustain the programme.
- ❖ The processes required for effectively engaging and supporting families (which are detailed in the *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>: *Workshop Leader's Handbook*) are personal, informal, respectful, non-judgemental and collaborative. The programme is designed to engage and support all families, and it caters for the demands they face in their everyday lives.

## 4.5 Benefits of *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>

The benefits of *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> have been demonstrated consistently in its wider implementation across diverse families, schools, ECE services and libraries during the past three decades. The benefits include:

- ❖ Children benefit from closer involvement with, and more frequent and effective support from parents/whānau. They also benefit from a wider variety of enjoyable language/literacy activities and experiences at home.
- ❖ Parents from a wide range of language/literacy, cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds learn sound, specific and enjoyable ways of supporting the language and reading development of their young children.
- ❖ Parents gain deeper understandings about ways in which talking with, and reading to, young children (from the time they are babies) help children's language and literacy development.
- ❖ More positive and relaxed relationships develop between children and their parents/whānau, and also between families, educators and community librarians.
- ❖ Parents who struggle with reading become more confident, engaged and competent readers, because they gain access to, and begin to enjoy reading easy, predictable and appealing books with their children, in the non-threatening privacy of their own homes.
- ❖ A sense of community, mutual trust and respect, and networks of support develop among diverse parents/whānau, teachers and community librarians.
- ❖ Independence and self-reliance are fostered among participants.
- ❖ Community librarians provide effective support for ECE services, schools and families, and reach families who have not previously used libraries.
  - Families are helped to access friendly support from librarians, and to borrow relevant and appealing books and other resources from libraries.
  - Community libraries are encouraged to provide suitable resources and also to strengthen their collections for Māori and Pasifika content and languages.
- ❖ Some participating families receive children's books donated by local booksellers or publishers.

- ❖ *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> serves as an effective 'bridge' between homes, ECE services and schools, and also homes and libraries. Participation in the programme helps transitions between ECE and school, and also helps less confident and less engaged families to develop the confidence, awareness, and relationships they (the families) need to take advantage of the educational provisions and libraries in their communities.
- ❖ Educators and librarians develop deeper understandings about the range of diverse language and literacy practices which young children experience within the different social and cultural contexts in which they live and learn.
  - These deeper understandings prompt teachers and librarians to find better ways of building on the varied knowledge and experiences that children bring to more formal educational settings and libraries.
- ❖ The work of educators and librarians is supported and enhanced, because *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> aligns with the emphasis they place on enjoyment of language and reading, and the construction of meaning from a range of good quality print and screen based texts.

#### 4.6 Critical Success Factors for the effective implementation of *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>

The effective implementation of *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> is dependent on the same Critical Success Factors as those required for the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme, as detailed in Section 3.7.

For more information about *Early Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>, please see [www.earlyreadingtogether.net.nz](http://www.earlyreadingtogether.net.nz)

***International Endorsement of NZ's 'Early Reading Together' ECE Resource***  
***Quoting from the OECD's 2012 report on 'Quality Matters in ECE and Care: UK (England)', early childhood services can assist parents to provide positive home learning environments and one way to do this is to support parents to be involved in their child's language and literacy development:***<sup>92</sup>

***"In New Zealand, the Early Reading Together initiative has been implemented. It is a programme which helps parents of young children (infants to six-year-olds) to support their children's language and literacy development at home ... Its results include increased competence of parents in assisting their children at home with reading."***<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Source: [www.childforum.com/weekly-early-childhood-update/762-being-informed-for-the-week-of-13th-august-2012.html](http://www.childforum.com/weekly-early-childhood-update/762-being-informed-for-the-week-of-13th-august-2012.html)

<sup>93</sup> Taguma et al (2012) Op cit. p.71.

## SECTION 5: THE READING TOGETHER PROJECT: A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY LIBRARIES AND THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

### 5.1 Overview

The New Zealand Ministry of Education 'Reading Together Project'<sup>94</sup>, which is being implemented from July 2011 to June 2015, was sponsored in 2011 by Associate Minister of Education, The Hon Pita Sharples, supported by the then Minister of Education, The Hon Anne Tolley. The Ministry of Education leads the project, which is supporting 600-700 New Zealand schools to implement and sustain the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme effectively. The target schools are mainstream schools with students in any of years 1-8 and spread across the country in lower socio-economic areas. Decile 1-3 schools are the priority target group.



The Reading Together Project establishes a partnership between the Ministry of Education and the participant schools. Schools implementing *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> then establish partnerships with their families and their community library. Significant numbers of local libraries are actively supporting the participant schools, often hosting one of the workshops. In addition, the National Library service, which supports schools with targeted book supply and with professional advice and guidance, has been actively involved in the project in 2013.<sup>95</sup>

The *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme helps schools to meet two important goals:

1. It supports schools in meeting targets in Reading and therefore has a place in the school's overall literacy programme, and
2. It helps build the learning partnership between the school and the full range of parents/whānau and therefore has a place in the school's Home/School Partnership priorities.

Until the Reading Together Project, the *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup> programme had been adopted by schools making an independent choice to access and implement the programme. Participation by all target schools is now being incentivised through the Ministry of Education's rollout of the programme.

The Reading Together Project has taken a system wide approach to scaling up *Reading Together*<sup>®</sup>, recognising that the programme:

- ❖ is high impact and addresses current priority goals for New Zealand schools
- ❖ creates strong partnerships between parents/whānau, children, schools, teachers and librarians
- ❖ has proven outcomes which are significant in that they include valued outcomes beyond the valued outcome of achievement gains for students – there is evidence of both valued educational outcomes and valued social outcomes.

<sup>94</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/School-initiated-supports/Reading-Together>

<sup>95</sup> <http://schools.natlib.govt.nz/creating-readers/community-readers/reading-together-programme>

*Patience! Now understand how frustrated my child was (and reading at home was frustrating for us too). Now as a whanau we really enjoy reading at home. I wish I had known these techniques earlier. Love that some of the strategies can extend beyond reading and into life skills / maths and other aspects of life.<sup>96</sup>*

## 5.2 Independent Report on the Project

An independent analysis has been completed of the feedback from the parents/whānau participating in the 2012 Reading Together Project schools along with early analysis of the impact on student reading performance.<sup>97</sup> The parent/whānau feedback replicates the previous research findings and the early analysis of the impact on student reading performance is positive.

*The Reading Together programme has had a profound effect, not just in improving reading levels for a particular child but in involving entire whanau in implementing better ways of relating to their tamariki and facilitating their learning. The positive results of the programme in providing learning strategies, the provision of empathy and support for the learner, and the beneficial outcomes for the learner, whanau and community are discussed in depth in the body of this report. Such changes are remarkable for a four workshop programme.<sup>98</sup>*

<sup>96</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.4.

<sup>97</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit.

<sup>98</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. p.5.

## SECTION 6: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The evidence from decades of research and best practice within and beyond New Zealand is compelling.

- ❖ Processes within families have more powerful effects on children’s learning than parents’ income, occupation, education, or ethnicity. The ways in which parents care for, interact with, and relate to their children are critically important for children’s language, cognitive, emotional and social development.
- ❖ Different types of parental involvement can have large, small, or even negative influences on children’s learning within and beyond formal educational settings.
- ❖ When educational leaders, teachers, librarians and other community members work in evidence-based and learning-focused partnerships with parents and families, there are significant and sustained gains in the achievement of children and young people, and their emotional and social well-being is also enhanced significantly.

Many committed New Zealand school leaders, teachers and community librarians provide support for parents who are seeking to help their children. However, there are considerable variations in the quality, effectiveness and reach of that support. The challenge is to ensure that **all** children, parents/whānau, educators, librarians and others in **all** communities benefit from informed and effective partnerships. Schools, ECE services, libraries and other agencies are more able to meet this challenge when they are helped to focus on and implement a manageable, coherent, sound and sustainable set of strategies and cost effective programmes which empower parents to engage in the education of their children in informed ways.

And finally, the voices of two parents working in partnership with teachers and community librarians:

*I like this because it helped me understand better on how to read with my child. If I did not come to the workshop my relationship with my daughter while reading would still be very uncomfortable and was always an angry time for us.*

*I loved coming to these workshops. It was fun and I think every parent should do them. I found it hard to come in the door but it has given me the confidence to enrol on a course to better myself. I wouldn't have believed I could have done this and joining this group was enough to make me realise that I could learn.*

and a child benefitting from this partnership:<sup>99</sup>

*When you are reading together with you mum it safe, happy, very good.*

<sup>99</sup> Madden & Madden (2013) Op cit. pp 5, 14 and 24.

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