



MAKING EDUCATION WORK FOR MANUKAU

Family and Community Engagement in Education

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Introduction

Why is family and community engagement in education important? The reasons include:

- significant educational and social benefits flow from engagement in quality early childhood education, compulsory and tertiary education
- research indicates that family and community influences can account for 40-65% of children's learning/development, depending on the aspect of learning¹
- quality teaching effects are enhanced when there are effective school-home partnership practices which are focused on student learning²

¹ A literature review commissioned by the Ministry of Education indicated that about 40-65% of variance in outcomes is attributable to the influences of family and communities, depending on the outcome of focus.

Nechyba et al (1999) cited in Alton-Lee, A. (2004). *Improving Educational Policy and Practice through an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme*. Paper presented to OECD-US Seminar: Evidence-based Policy Research, Washington D.C.

² Alton-Lee, A. (2003). *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

The nurturing of children's learning by families/whanau is one of three key priorities in the *Schooling Strategy 2005-2010*.³

Engaging families and communities across the various education sectors requires good quality education *and* effective and meaningful ways of working in partnership. This paper will therefore firstly outline in brief some findings about family and community influences on children's achievement, secondly identify some key principles for working in partnership with families/communities and thirdly, summarise features of some partnership programmes which engage families/communities in different ways in education in the Manukau area. It will conclude with some key questions.

Family and Community Influences on Children's Achievement

Family factors play a critical role in children's learning and development. New Zealand and international research reviewed in *The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children's Achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence*

³ Ministry of Education. (2005). *Making a Bigger Difference for all Students: Schooling Strategy 2005-2010*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

*Synthesis*⁴ shows that families/whanau who provide effective support for their children's learning generally:⁵

- have a stable and caring home environment
- take steps to ensure that the children keep good health
- regularly provide a range of quality interactions, experiences and resources for them
- provide resources, library visits, study facilities and computers
- value learning
- provide for wider educational experiences via whanau and community networks
- ensure that their children's television viewing is not excessive (i.e. > 4 hours a day), and discuss with their children the content of socially/educationally useful programmes that they are watching.

While factors such as low socio-economic status, low levels of parental education, English as a second language, and being of a particular ethnic group have been linked to children's lower achievement, children from these backgrounds **can and do** learn successfully.

Regardless of their circumstances, families can be assisted to invest time and resources into supporting their children's learning and development. Research shows that almost all parents want their children to succeed educationally, want to support their children in their learning and are willing to work in partnership

⁴ 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.

⁵ For information on other family and community factors and children's achievement please see <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/goto/BES>

with educators to learn appropriate strategies to help them.⁶

Partnership programmes

Families and communities are important resources in the educational process. Principles that form the basis of successful partnerships with them include:⁷

- being genuinely non-judgmental about families and their circumstances and respecting parents and children
- realising that parents' initial responses are likely to be determined by their own schooling experiences and cultural backgrounds
- recognising parents' competencies, values, beliefs and expectations about learning/teaching/education as well as their home circumstances. Support should enhance these, not undermine them
- working with families in a manner that understands and builds on their experiences and strengths and enables them to add alternative ideas and practices to their repertoire over time
- providing ongoing opportunities for informal, non-threatening contacts between parents, educators, and other facilitators
- encouraging parent-to-parent communication within communities, so that awareness, interest and confidence grow in multiple ways
- implementing new initiatives on a small-scale initially and informing these with ongoing research

Programmes which help families to support their children effectively, do so by helping them to increase their knowledge

⁶ Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J. & Biddulph, C. (2003). See above note 4.

⁷ Summarised from Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J. & Biddulph, C. (2003). See above note 4.

of how to help their children, providing resources and/or helping them to increase their knowledge, ability and confidence in accessing resources. Partnership programmes currently operating effectively in South Auckland which reflect these principles and are supported by sound evaluation/ research data include (but are not limited to) HIPPY, Manukau Family Literacy Programme and Reading Together. The key features of each of these programmes are summarised below.

HIPPY (Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters)

HIPPY is a home-based programme for the educational enrichment of children aged four and five and for the fostering of their parents' skills as educators. It was introduced to New Zealand, by Great Potentials (formerly Pacific Foundation), in one site in 1992, and is now operating in 21 sites around New Zealand.

Key features of the programme

- HIPPY is a two-generation programme, working with parent and child, providing both early childhood education, and parenting education support.
- Children begin HIPPY between three and a half, and four and a half years of age, and participate in the programme for two years. HIPPY thus assists with the transition into school.
- HIPPY trains women and men from communities at risk of educational disadvantage to work as paraprofessional tutors with parents, who then work with their children on enjoyable activity packs for 15 minutes a day, for 30 weeks of the year, for two years.
- The programme is delivered to the parent through roleplay and the parent then roleplays with the child. Thus parents with a low level of

literacy, or where English is a second language, can participate.

- Tutors visit parents in their homes on a fortnightly basis. On alternate weeks, parents, tutors and coordinator come together for a group meeting, to prepare for the week ahead and to participate in enrichment activities.
- The tutors are trained by a professional HIPPY coordinator, who is responsible for the programme and for all the families participating.

Families on HIPPY are encouraged to enrol their children in early childhood centres, with HIPPY working in a complementary fashion. Currently, HIPPY children are attending a range of early childhood centres, including Kohanga Reo, Pacific Island language nests, Kindergarten and Play Centre. Research on HIPPY in New Zealand indicates that the programme is effective in terms of improving children's reading ability, school readiness and school behaviour.⁸

The programme also has significant flow-on social benefits, for example, in terms of improved family relationships and pathways to study and employment for parents/caregivers involved in the programme.⁹

For more information please see www.greatpotentials.org.nz

Manukau Family Literacy Programme (MFLP)

The Manukau Family Literacy Programme (MFLP) was introduced in Manukau by COMET (City of Manukau Education Trust) in 2003 at two sites and this year is

⁸ BarHava-Monteith, G., Harre, N. & Field, J. (2003). 'A Promising Start: An Evaluation of the HIPPY Program in New Zealand'. In Westheimer, M. (Ed). *Parents Making A Difference*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, pp 103-115.

⁹ Younger, S. (2003). *We talk in our family now: The stories of twelve HIPPY tutors*. Report prepared for the Pacific Foundation. Auckland: Pacific Foundation.

operating at six sites with more than 80 families taking part. It is a partnership between parents/caregivers, children, a tertiary institution, a school and an early childhood education centre. The MFLP uses a model integrating four components, each of equal importance, as outlined in the table below.

The programme is offered for a minimum of 20 hours per week over an academic year and provides the adult learners in the programme with a free introductory level tertiary qualification (since 2005 this is the AUT Certificate in Introduction to Early Childhood Education). Regular attendance

is expected, and supported by pastoral care systems.

The curriculum reflects the principles and goals of intergenerational family learning. It therefore includes a focus on parenting and child development, academic literacy, numeracy, computer skills, and career pathways. The children in the early childhood centre are immersed in Te Whaariki and those at school learn from the National Curriculum. Integration is achieved when partners (from early childhood, school and tertiary education sectors) know about, and respect each other's curriculum, and work together to ensure cohesive learning for both adult and child.

| Component | | Desired Outcomes |
|---|---|--|
| ADULT EDUCATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided by a tertiary institution. • Programme receives government funding. • The programme is an existing NZQA-accredited adult learning programme at Level 3 or 4. • The programme is delivered at the school or early childhood site • The lecturer is employed by the tertiary provider. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult literacy • Qualifications • Employment • Cultural awareness / self-confidence |
| PARENT EDUCATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided by a tertiary lecturer/s alongside the early childhood and school teachers, as part of, or in addition to, the accredited programme. • This component feeds into the PACTT activities, and feedback from PACTT sessions is incorporated into programme design. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deeper understanding of child development • Enhanced family relationships • Improved family health • Understanding of the education system • Improved parenting skills |
| CHILD EDUCATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided by the school (using the National Curriculum) or by the early childhood centre (using Te Whaariki). • The child's learning is based on existing curriculum. • Normal assessment frameworks in the school or centre are used for assessing the child's needs or progress. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and numeracy achievement at age-appropriate levels • Social and cultural development • Improved attendance and participation in daily programmes |
| PARENT AND CHILD TIME TOGETHER (PACTT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by the tertiary lecturer, developed and managed by teachers working with a management team. • Parents spend time most days in the classroom or the centre with their nominated child. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved family relationships • Greater engagement with school/ece centre • Personal empowerment • Cultural well-being • Greater exposure to community experiences |

Research on the programme indicates a high retention rate (79%) and that 67% of the adults in the programme to date have gone on to further tertiary study.¹⁰ Many of the participants in the programme have taken up paid employment¹¹ and the average net income of the families has increased by \$200 per week.¹² Improved family relationships are also evident over time.

For more information please see www.familyliteracy.org.nz

Reading Together: A programme which enables parents to help their children with reading at home¹³

Reading Together is a research-based workshop programme which helps parents to support their children's reading at home. It has two decades of research and development in New Zealand and has been implemented on a voluntary basis in various parts of New Zealand since 1982. It has involved principals, teachers, Resource Teachers of Literacy and other literacy educators, Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, librarians, Reading Associations and other professional associations.

The programme was originally designed to provide additional help for children with reading difficulties (thereby supporting the work of teachers and schools) but the suggestions and helping strategies are also

useful for parents of competent readers. The strategies have been found to be effective with children aged 5 to 15, when the workshops are implemented as developed.

Key features of the programme

- *Reading Together* has a sound research design (randomised controlled trial) and incorporated a range of relevant quantitative and qualitative research strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. It has been shown to be effective in raising children's reading achievement and providing support for parents, children and teachers.¹⁴ Due to its sound research base, *Reading Together* is cited in the *Quality Teaching Best Evidence Synthesis*¹⁵, *Families and Communities Best Evidence Synthesis*¹⁶ and the *Schooling Strategy 2005-2010*¹⁷ as an example of an effective partnership programme.
- The theoretical understandings about literacy and literacy education on which *Reading Together* is based (which are detailed in *Reading Together: Workshop Leader's Handbook*¹⁸) are consistent with those explicated in a range of research-

¹⁰ These graduates are currently enrolled in degree programmes for teaching and social work; diploma courses in education, social work, sport and recreation, hospitality, and management.

¹¹ Graduates have been recorded as being in full and part-time employment as teacher aides, childcare workers, a chef, car automotive and maintenance workers and managers.

¹² PriceWaterhouseCoopers. (2006). *Manukau Family Literacy Programme – Outcomes Valuation Project*. Report prepared for City of Manukau Education Trust, Auckland. www.comet.org.nz

¹³ Summarised from

Biddulph, J. & Allott, J. (2006). 'Reading Together: a programme which enables parents to help their children with reading at home', *Reading Forum*, 21(3), pp 20-27. Also available at www.readingtogether.net.nz

¹⁴ Biddulph, J. (1983). *A group programme to train parents of children with reading difficulties to tutor their children at home*. Unpublished MA research report, Education Department, University of Canterbury.

Biddulph, J. (1993). *Teacher-parent partnership to support children's reading development*. Paper presented to the New Zealand Reading Association Annual Conference, Christchurch. www.readingtogether.net.nz

Biddulph, J. & Tuck, B. (1983). *Assisting parents to help their children with reading at home*. Paper presented to the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Wellington. www.readingtogether.net.nz

¹⁵ Alton-Lee, A. (2003). See above note 2.

¹⁶ Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J. & Biddulph, C. (2003). See above note 4.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education. (2005). See above note 3, p 32.

¹⁸ Biddulph, J. (2004). *Reading Together: Workshop Leader's Handbook*. Hamilton, NZ: The Biddulph Group.

based literacy education publications.¹⁹

- *Reading Together* is a practical, manageable programme which meets a real need felt by parents and teachers to support children's reading, especially children who are struggling.
- The workshops are non-threatening, enjoyable, practical and activity-based.
- The programme works across a range of:²⁰
 - socio-economic and ethnic groups (including Maori and Pacific families, and parents for whom English is a second language)
 - child and parental literacy levels
 - ages (5-15 year olds)
 - contexts (e.g. parents/whanau helping at home; teacher aides, adult/senior-student volunteers helping at school).
 - Implementation is low cost for schools to run, and incurs no cost for parents.
- The time commitment required is relatively low:
 - for parents: 1hr 15mins per workshop, 4 workshops over 7 weeks
 - for workshop leaders: some time is required initially but less time is needed once a workshop leader is familiar with the programme.

As well as parents/caregivers gaining competence and confidence in assisting their children with reading, other flow-on benefits include their use of the programme strategies to help siblings of the children involved in the programme and some also show other parents/friends how to help their children. Improved family relationships are an additional benefit of this programme, with parents

reporting feeling less frustration, anger and anxiety about their children's reading achievement, and developing more supportive and positive relationships with their children (e.g. some report that they have stopped smacking and yelling at their children as a result of attending the workshops). Some parents have also reported that they thought that their own reading had improved (in cases where parents lacked confidence in their own reading ability).

Broader community involvement, for example, the involvement of librarians, is integral to the programme. Local librarians have found that the parents, many of whom had never before used library services, begin to visit libraries with their children, and to seek help to find suitable books to read together at home. The librarians also realised that many of these parents were themselves not confident or competent readers.

For more information, including some comments from those who have been involved with the programme over the years (children, parents, teachers, senior secondary student volunteers and librarians), please see www.readingtogether.net.nz

Key questions

- ***How can more widespread use of effective partnership programmes across the sectors in Manukau be achieved?***
- ***How could opportunities for further education be provided for adults with low qualifications, and what are the most effective ways of engaging them in the education of their children?***

¹⁹ For details of these, please see Biddulph, J. & Allott, J. (2006). See above note 13.

²⁰ For details please see:

Biddulph, J. (1993). See above note 14.

Biddulph, J. (2004). See above note 18.