Messages about Reading

What do parents and teachers hear, share, do, and need when engaging in literacy partnerships?

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from a study conducted in 2003 on the strategies adopted at three schools to enhance home-school communication in the area of literacy, and in particular, reading. The study focused on the channels of communication operating at different levels of the school, and on teacher and parent experiences in sharing information about children's development as readers. This study considered the ways in which parents of New Entrant, Year 2, and Year 4 children perceived their roles, and the roles of the teachers in their children's reading development. It also focused on the practices and experiences of New Entrant, Year 2, and Year 4 students and their parents when engaging in school-like literacy activities at home.

The study involved nine New Entrant, Year 2, and Year 4 teachers, and five school literacy leaders from three primary schools in the greater Wellington area. It also involved 54 New Entrant, Year 2, and Year 4 children, and one of their parents.

The main method used for gathering information in this study was semi-structured interviews with literacy leaders, teachers, parents, and children. Information on children's gender, ethnicity, and reading performance was also gathered from the schools, as well as school literacy documents published for parents.

Teacher and parent views of their own and each others' roles

The findings from this study suggest that most parents:

- saw themselves working in partnership with school staff;
- shared similar goals for their child as school staff;
- considered both their own role, and the role of the teacher in their child's literacy development to be essential; and
- had high levels of confidence in both their own ability and in the ability of their child's, teacher to support their child's literacy development.

Teachers and literacy leaders:

- saw the role of parents in their child's literacy development to be essential;
- believed partnerships with parents were important, but varied in the degree of partnership they had established with parents;
- described literacy activities they hoped parents would engage in with their child which were similar to school practices; and

- varied in their confidence that parents' engaged in these in school-like literacy activities with their child at home.

School approaches to building literacy partnerships

Both teachers and parents considered the most effective way of sharing literacy information was through face-to-face contact. Teachers made use of a wide range of strategies for building and maintaining partnerships at class level, and most of the parents in this study were involved in class level sharing of literacy information.

Smaller numbers of parents accessed school- or syndicate-wide information, and the teachers in this study were actively working towards better meeting parents' needs, when designing literacy information sharing events. There were a number of features common to school-based literacy meetings school staff considered successful in terms of involving parents. These included events which involved children as well as parents, and events at which there were opportunities for relationship building between teachers and parents, and among the parents themselves through including social activities, as well as information.

While there were similarities in the school- and syndicate-wide approaches adopted at all three schools for sharing pedagogical literacy information with parents, the nature of the information provided differed. Teacher experiences of parent involvement in school events and the literacy levels the children in their classes came equipped with influenced the amount of information they shared with parents. The findings of this study demonstrate that where home and school literacy practices are similar, parental confidence and knowledge about school literacy practices is reinforced and enhanced through greater engagement. The challenge faced by all teachers was how to initiate a partnership that facilitated increasing engagement and information sharing around literacy practices with the harder to reach parents in their communities.

The information shared between school staff and parents tended to centre on the ways in which parents could assist their child with reading at home. Less emphasis was placed on sharing information about how children are taught to read at school, or on gaining knowledge about the literacy activities parents and children engaged in at home. When this did occur, both teachers and parents provided evidence of the positive impact this had had for home and school practices, and the children concerned.

The findings from this study highlight some principles of good practice used by teachers in building literacy partnerships with parents, which are supported by the research literature. The use of these principles differed somewhat across schools and teachers, and included:

- taking a deliberate and planned approach to developing literacy partnerships with parents;
- having an ongoing commitment to improving literacy partnerships by modifying school approaches in response to the perceived needs of parents;
- making literacy pedagogy explicit;

- sharing pedagogical information in a range of formats and settings;
- providing parents with active roles;
- providing opportunities for building relationships between teachers and parents, and among parents;
- including children in literacy partnerships;
- valuing information about children's home literacy practices and promoting opportunities for parents and children to share this information; and
- using information about children's home literacy practices in classroom activities.

Future developments the schools in this study could focus on include:

- taking a more systematic, and deliberate approach to learning about children's home literacy practices from parents;
- collecting evidence on the effectiveness of school and teacher approaches to building literacy partnerships and sharing literacy pedagogy;
- using this evidence to create a medium-to long term plan for further improving literacy partnerships; and
- continuing to explore and create opportunities to engage with the harder to reach parents in their communities.

Differences in parents' literacy involvement by year level

The parents of New Entrant and Year 2 children were more likely to initiate contact with their child's teacher and participate in class literacy activities than those of Year 4 children. Literacy leaders observed that school emphasis on sharing literacy information with parents also tended to be greatest in the junior classes. The decrease in parent involvement with the school after Year 2 may have resulted in some parents missing out on the opportunity to share with teachers information about their child's transition to independent reading, and about reading comprehension. The findings from this study indicate that although the parents of Year 4 children placed as much value on a range of school-like literacy activities as those of New Entrant and Year 2 children, they:

- listened to their child read less frequently;
- read to their child less frequently; and
- felt less confident about choosing books for their child to read independently.

Parents' information needs

Most of the parents used literacy information from both school, and non-school sources.

Responses from parents about further information they would like or would have liked in the past, and from parents and students about the school-like literacy activities they engaged in at home, highlight a number of areas that could be focused on in the future. These include information sharing about:

- their child's performance relative to their cohort or curriculum levels;
- how children are taught to read at school, and the "bigger picture" of reading instruction;
- the nature of comprehension, and about how children can be helped to understand what they read; and
- the value of continuing to read to children, and of talking about text once children have "learnt to read".

1. Introduction

This study describes the home-school communication strategies established at three schools and highlights some of the issues surrounding home-school communication about reading. It includes parents of New Entrants, Year 2, and Year 4 students and describes their experiences in supporting their children's reading at home and their communication with the school about reading. The study explores the extent to which the information and support provided by schools to parents change at different levels of the school, and the ways in which parents view their roles when their children are at different stages in their reading development.

Reading cannot be considered in isolation from listening, speaking, writing, and viewing. This study focuses on reading because reading is the area, especially in the early years of school, through which communication between home and school is particularly visible, due in part to the movement of reading books between these two locations. Reading is an area of the curriculum which parents of junior school students seem to be particularly attuned to. As one of the teachers in our study said, "If there's one thing that gets parents on the go, it is reading!"

The research context

School-home communication

In *The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children's Achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence Synthesis,* Biddulph, Biddulph, and Biddulph (2003) conclude that:

> …a key message emerging from the New Zealand and international research is that effective centre/school-home partnerships can strengthen supports for children's learning in both home and centre/school settings (p. 143).

A number of New Zealand studies have included information about the communication between homes and schools, parents' roles in children's learning, information sharing about reading (McNaughton, Parr, Timperley, & Robinson, 1992; Wylie & Smith, 1995) and on home-school partnerships surrounding the transition to school (Turoa, Wolfgramm, Tanielu, & McNaughton, 2002). Earlier studies have focused on specific interventions aimed at utilising the skills of parents as home tutors (Biddulph, 1983; Biddulph & Tuck, 1983; Glynn & McNaughton, 1985; Glynn, McNaughton, Robinson, & Quinn, 1979).

The findings of some of these earlier studies suggest a paucity of information sharing between schools and homes. Wylie and Smith (1995) followed 30 children from 10 schools through their first 3 years at school focusing on their reading, mathematics, and writing progress from the perspective of parents, teachers, and children. They found that few attempts had been made by teachers to explain their approach to the curriculum to parents and that most parents did not know what happened at their child's school, or how their child was assessed. The teachers in this study did not provide parents with normative data on their children and did not encourage the use of reading book levels as a way of measuring progress. This seemed to leave an information vacuum for some parents. Wylie (1994) concluded that:

> The shift in teaching to diagnostic rather than summary assessment means that 'results' often need knowledge of the curriculum to be fully understood or appreciated. They need more translation for parents, especially those raised themselves on 'fixed' standards (p. 3).

Parents' most regular source of information about their child's learning was found to be "what comes home in the schoolbag" and one-quarter gauged their child's progress using their own experiences of schooling or through comparisons with their child's siblings or peers. Parent-teacher interviews were the most often cited useful source of information about their child's progress, while the end-of-year school report had a relatively low profile, leading the authors to question its usefulness. The study found that while most parents had visited their child's classroom at some time during their first three years at school, such visits tended to be irregular and brief, and grew less frequent as the child grew older.

Similar findings emerged from a study on the sending home of school readers in 19 primary schools. McNaughton et al. (1992) found that while teachers considered they had informed parents about hearing their child read at home, parents did not usually cite the school as a source of information they used. They most frequently mentioned their prior knowledge as the source of their practice when hearing children read. Half indicated that they would like more help with supporting their children as readers at home.

Misconceptions and misinformation

The findings from a number of these earlier studies highlight a number of misconceptions resulting from a lack of communication between homes and schools. One is that teachers may mistake a lack of parent visibility as a lack of interest in their child's learning. Glynn, Fairweather, and Donald (1992) describe how the teachers in two of the early Home and School project studies considered parents lacked interest in their children's school learning but that there was little evidence they had any contact with these children's homes. The researchers found that the parents were extremely interested in their children's reading difficulties and highly motivated to be involved in their learning. Similarly, Wylie and Smith (1995) found that teachers gauged parents' interest in their child's learning by their visibility. That is, parents were seen to have an interest in their children's learning if they visited the classroom, looked at their work, signed off

reading books heard at home, attended parent-teacher interviews, and kept the school informed of matters directly relating to their child.

Findings in the research literature suggest that a lack of communication and information sharing can result in situations in which strategies used by parents and teachers do not work in a complementary way. McNaughton et al. (1992) observed that in the absence of information from the school about what to do when hearing a child read, some parents developed theories and made use of strategies counter to those used at school.

The construction of the role of the parent

The lack of information flow between teachers and parents found in these studies may be understood by considering teachers' perceptions of parents' roles. McNaughton et al. (1992) observed that the majority of the parents and teachers in a study on the sending home of school readers considered the role of parents to be to support their child's learning at school, but not to engage in any active teaching. Such support might, for example, involve ensuring children did their reading at home. Similarly, the roles constructed for parents by the teachers in Wylie and Smith's (1995) study involved supporting the teaching done at school such as checking spelling and hearing children read. Wylie and Smith (1995) found that teachers worried that the home literacy practices of parents would undermine their teaching, have adverse effects on student motivation, or encroach on children's free time.

McNaughton et al. (1992) note that this construction of the parent as *supporter* can be found in New Zealand Government publications of the time such as *Reading in Junior Classes* (Department of Education, 1985). They argue that this does not accurately describe what parents do, that it places teachers in a position of power, and reduces opportunities for parents and teachers to learn from each other. One of their main recommendations was that the role of parents be "reconstructed" by educational authorities.

Change in emphasis in government publications

The reconstruction of the role of parents and teachers initially recommended by McNaughton et al. (1992) can be observed to have begun in the policy documents and governmental publications of the last five years. New literacy initiatives and programmes to support partnerships between parents and schools have been introduced. The *Report of the Literacy Taskforce* (Ministry of Education, 1999) emphasises the importance of schools both providing literacy information to parents, and seeking information about home literacy practices. While it acknowledges the challenges of involving parents in school activities, especially those who have not experienced success in reading and writing themselves, parent involvement is seen as a priority. The Literacy Taskforce emphasises the importance of helping parents gain confidence in their own abilities to support their children's literacy. The role constructed for parents in *Effective Literacy Practice in*

Years 1 to 4 (Ministry of Education, 2003a) is that of a partner in children's learning and is quite different from the role of "supporter" of the classroom programme constructed in *Reading in Junior Classes*. Effective partnerships are described as those in which all partners have shared expectations, knowledge about the learner, knowledge about literacy teaching and learning, and shared knowledge of the learner's background of experience. The findings of some of the earlier studies addressing home-school communication provide useful baseline information for considering where things are now in the light of these changes.

Principles of effective partnerships

The importance of establishing effective partnerships between schools and homes is supported by international and New Zealand-based research literature (Berryman, Walker, Reweti, O'Brien, & Weiss 2002; Biddulph et al., 2003; Epstein, 1995; Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997; Glynn et al., 1992; McNaughton, 2002; Rawlinson, McNaughton, & Limbrick, 1987). Common to many of these studies is an emphasis on creating continuity across home and school settings to support students' progress. The key principles underlying effective partnerships found in many of these studies are summarised below:

- Effective partnerships are planned and dynamic.
- They are based on shared knowledge of the learner and shared expectations and goals.
- The contributions of all partners are valued and all partners learn from the partnership.
- All partners have active roles.
- Knowledge about the learner's home literacy experiences is shared.
- Teachers use knowledge of children's home literacy experiences when planning and teaching to draw on the strengths of home settings.
- Explicit knowledge about literacy teaching and learning is shared.
- Explicit information about the child's progress is shared.
- There is accountability between the partners.
- Parent-to-parent communication is encouraged to support the growth of confidence and interest in the community.
- New initiatives are based on evidence of the effectiveness of existing partnerships.

Literacy developments to support partnerships

A number of literacy initiatives and resources have been developed in recent years to assist schools in the forming of home-school partnerships, such as *The Home-School Partnership Programme* (Ministry of Education, 2003b). The aim of this programme is to raise student achievement through training lead teachers and lead parents from the school's main ethnic groups to facilitate workshops for parents in the school community, where possible in their first language. The aim of these workshops is to help parents feel part of the school community and to gain

further understanding of the culture of the school, and for teachers to learn about their students' cultural backgrounds.

Other Ministry of Education initiatives have focused on providing parents with professional information in the areas of literacy and numeracy such the Feed the Mind campaign initiated in 1999. This campaign targeted Mäori and Pasifika families and households in the communities around low-decile schools. It encouraged parents to help their children to learn to read, write, and do maths. Information was provided to parents in the form of pamphlets and television advertisements. The impact of the campaign was monitored from its inception by Research Solutions. Of the 600 caregivers interviewed in 2001, more than half were found to be helping children more than they did in 1999 and more than three-quarters felt able to easily find out how to help their children learn. Fewer parents were found to worry that they might do the wrong thing, believe it to be too hard, or believe it cost too much for them to help children learn. The reasons cited by those parents who still felt unconfident about helping their children learn to read or count better included: feeling unsure of the right teaching method, feeling unconfident about their own levels of education, or having English as a second language (*Education Gazette*, 2002).

The Books in Homes scheme, which began outside the government and now receives some government support, is also aimed at supporting the active role of parents in their children's development as readers. This is a literacy programme aimed at breaking the cycle of "bookless" children in decile 1–3 schools. Schools that join the Books in Homes scheme are provided with a sponsor who funds half the costs involved in providing all of the children in the school with four books per year to take home and keep. The Books in Homes programme also includes school-based events and awards to promote reading in the wider community. A recent evaluation of the Books in Homes scheme (Croft & Dunn, 2002) found that principals and teachers considered that this programme had a positive impact on home reading.

Funding from the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool has also been made available for literacy schemes involving parent and community tutors working with students making slow progress at school. These include Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka (HPP) which targets students in Years 1–4 with a reading age of below 7 years and Pause, Prompt, and Praise (PPP) which targets older students making slow progress in reading.

Some schools have used or adapted one or more of these tools or programmes to help them develop home-school partnerships in the area of literacy while others have developed approaches of their own.

The rationale for this study is to document current examples of effective practice in the context of the policy documents and governmental publications of the last five years relating to the shifting conceptions of the role of parents. Of particular interest is the way in which schools have responded to these messages and the impact of the changes that may have occurred over time in parent and teacher conceptions of their roles.

The aims of this study

This study focuses on the experiences of literacy leaders, teachers, parents, and students from three schools, each of which had developed a combination of approaches to sharing messages about reading. One of the main aims of this study is to describe the strategies used in these three schools to build literacy partnerships with parents in the context of changing conceptions of parents' and teachers' roles found in recent policy documents, governmental publications, professional development, and support materials.

A particular focus of this study is to explore the changing nature of information sharing that occurs with parents at different levels of the school, particularly as children make the transitions to becoming newly independent and independent readers. The term "newly independent" is usually used to describe the 7–9 reading age. The newly independent stage is considered a "vital step in the progression towards fluency" (Gallagher, 1996, p.48), and the need for research into the "transition from direct reading instruction to child-directed reading" has been noted (Hancock, 1999, p.52). The implications of this transition occurring for many children around the time they move out of the junior school is a further consideration of this study.

As well as considering the differing forms of information sharing that occur with parents of students at different reading levels, this study considers the differing ways in which parents perceive their roles, and participate in a range of text-related activities with their children at home. Of particular interest are activities such as reading to children, hearing children read, and supporting their independent reading.

This study will provide information to the participating schools on parents' experiences of school literacy initiatives, particularly those aimed at establishing partnerships with parents and other community members. It will also provide them with information about the range of skills, knowledge, and experiences parents share with their children. The findings from this study will also be of use to other schools wanting to build or strengthen the partnerships they have established with their parents and communities.

Research questions

The research questions for this study were:

- What information do schools provide to parents about their children's reading development, and the ways in which they can help their children with reading at home, and in what forms do they provide this information?
- What are the experiences of teachers in communicating with parents about reading?
- What are the experiences of parents in communicating with school staff about reading?

- How do parents of emergent, early to fluent, and independent readers perceive, interpret, and implement school messages about reading?
- How do these parents support their children's reading at home?
- What are students' home reading experiences?

Research design

Methodology

A case study design was used for this research. Yin (1994) identifies the multiple case study as a useful mechanism through which variability and innovation in a school setting can be described. The case studies included interviews with school staff, parents, and students, and information from school documents.

Because of the similarity across schools in the experiences of parents and students, parent and student data are grouped in this report rather than being reported by school. School descriptions which give details about the information sharing strategies at each school are provided. These give a context for the parent and student experiences.

The sample

School sample

Because this study focuses on exploring good practice in school information sharing we used a purposive sampling approach to select three information-rich sites (Patton, 2002). Literacy leaders were consulted to find three schools in the greater Wellington region that were known to have a particular interest or strength in communicating with parents in the area of literacy. To provide a range of contexts we selected one decile 10, one mid-decile (5), and one decile 1 school. In this report these schools are called by the pseudonyms Totara School, Rimu School, and Kowhai School.

The three schools were all mid-sized primary or contributing schools with rolls ranging from approximately 250 to 400.

Totara School is a decile 10 school with approximately three-quarters of its students identifying as Päkehä/New Zealand European, approximately one-eighth as Asian, and a small number from other groups.

Rimu School is a decile 5 school with approximately three-quarters of its students identifying as Päkehä/New Zealand European, approximately one-eighth as Mäori, and a small number from other ethnic groups.

Kowhai School is a decile 1 school with approximately half its students identifying as Mäori. One-quarter of the students were Päkehä/New Zealand European, one sixth, Pasifika, and a small number of students were from other ethnic groups.

School staff sample

From each school a New Entrant, a Year 2, and a Year 4 teacher and one or two school literacy leaders were invited to be part of the study. The teachers were chosen with the assistance of the school literacy leader, on the basis of their interest in literacy.

Student sample

We sampled students from the class of each teacher we interviewed. Table 1 shows the number of students at each year level by school.

Table 1 **The number of students at each year level by school**

	Year level			
	New Entrant Number of students	**Year 2 Number of students**	**Year 4 Number of students**	**Total**
Totara School	7	6	5	18
Rimu School	5	6	6	18
Kowhai School	6	6	7	18
Total	18	18	18	54

Our student sample consisted of 18 New Entrant children reading at emergent levels, 18 Year 2 children reading at Early to Fluent[1] levels, and 18 Year 4 children reading at newly independent to independent levels. The students selected tended to cluster in the mid-range of class reading performance. We used a purposive sampling approach to select a range of students who were reading "below", "at", and "above" their chronological age within this range. If a student's reading age was within 6 months either side of his or her actual age they were classified as reading "at" the level expected for their age. If their reading age was more than 6 months either side of their actual age, they were classified as being "above" or "below" the level expected for their age.

Due to parent non-response at the sampling stage, a balance of reading ability within the year level groups was not attained in the sample. The majority of students in the sample were reading "at" their chronological age (31) with fewer reading "above" (15), and fewer still reading "below" (8).

[1] These terms are based on the Ready to Read colour wheel (Ministry of Education, 2001).

We also sampled to obtain a gender balance at each level within each school. Half of the students were girls and half were boys.

We sampled students from the New Entrant classes who had been at school between 1 and 7 months. The New Entrant sample consisted of 10 girls and 8 boys. All but one of these students were emergent readers. The Year 2 student sample consisted of nine girls and nine boys. All of the students in the Year 2 sample were early to fluent readers. The Year 4 sample consisted of 8 girls and 10 boys who were all newly independent to independent readers. Table 2 shows the students' approximate reading levels by their year level.

Table 2 **Students' approximate reading level by year level**

	Approximate reading level			
	"Below" Number of students	"At" Number of students	"Above" Number of students	Total
New Entrant	1	16	1	18
Year 2	5	5	8	18
Year 4	2	10	6	18
Total	8	31	15	54

Table 3 shows students' approximate reading levels by school. In the Totara School (decile 10) sample, there were significantly more students reading at higher levels than in the Kowhai School and Rimu School samples.

Table 3 **Students' approximate reading level by school**

	Approximate reading level			
	"Below" Number of students	"At" Number of students	"Above" Number of students	Total
Totara School	-	10	8	18
Kowhai School	3	11	5	19
Rimu School	5	10	2	17
Total	8	31	15	54

(P = 0.03 for Totara School compared with Kowhai School and Rimu School combined.)

Almost two-thirds (34) of the students were identified by their teachers as Päkehä/New Zealand European, 12 as Mäori, 3 as Pasifika, 4 as Asian, and 1 as European. Sixteen of the students were the oldest child in their family, 19 were the second oldest, and 19 were the third or fourth child in their family.

Parent sample

We interviewed one parent of each child in the study. Nearly all (50) of the parents were the child's mother, four were the child's father. Most (38) identified as Päkehä/New Zealand European, nine as Mäori, two as Pasifika, three as Asian, and two as Mäori/New Zealand

European. Most (46) had attended primary school in New Zealand; eight had attended primary school in the Pacific, Asia, or Europe.

The first language of most (50) of the parents was English. Two parents spoke a Pasifika first language, and two, an Asian first language. Seven of the parents spoke to the child in more than one language. Ten of the parents had no formal school qualifications, and 19 had a school qualification. Ten parents, mostly those from the decile 10 school, had a degree or postgraduate qualification, and 15 had other tertiary, or trades, qualifications.

Methods

Interviews with school staff, parents, and students

The main method used in this study to gather information was semi-structured interviews with teachers, literacy leaders, parents, and students. Informal discussions with the school principal and other staff were also held. The interviews contained fixed-choice questions as well as open-ended questions. A copy of the literacy leader interview is contained in Appendix A, the teacher interview in Appendix B, the parent interview in Appendix C, and the student interview in Appendix D.

Table 4 provides a summary of the main themes covered in the interviews.

Table 4 **Summary of interview themes**

	Interview			
	Literacy leader	**Teacher**	**Parent**	**Student**
School-wide approaches to sharing information about literacy	✓	✓	✓	
Classroom-based approaches to share information about literacy		✓	✓	
Role of teachers and parents in supporting reading development	✓	✓	✓	
Parental involvement in school literacy programmes	✓	✓	✓	
Sharing of parental information about home literacy practices	✓	✓	✓	
Access to non-school sources of information about literacy			✓	
Home reading behaviours	✓	✓	✓	✓
Perspectives on student reading		✓	✓	✓

The interview schedules were piloted with students, parents, and teachers in the greater Wellington area.

Collection of school documents and school data

Data on students' gender, ethnicity, and reading ages were collected from the schools, along with examples of the written information provided to parents which contained literacy information. The documents collected included booklets provided to parents at information evenings, syndicate letters, newsletters, and reading logs.

Data analysis

The notes and transcripts of the interviews with school staff were analysed for themes related to the research questions. Parent and student responses to the interview questions were noted during each interview. Open-ended comments were coded by themes. Frequency tables were produced for the parent and student data, and chi-square statistics from contingency tables were used to test for significance. These data were analysed for patterns and trends within and between each school and year level, and by reading performance as appropriate, in relation to the research questions. Only statistically significant differences are indicated in the text. Probability values where P was equal to or less than 0.05 are reported with tables, where significant differences between groups were found.

Constraints of the data

The findings discussed in this report are based on self-report. In some cases parents may have misjudged the frequency or ways in which reading-related activities in their home occurred. We used two approaches to diminish these limitations. One was to ask parents to recall specific occasions in which they engaged in home literacy activities, that is, their most recent experiences of reading to their child, hearing their child read, and talking with their child about their independent home reading. We also asked parents general questions about the typical patterns in regard to these behaviours. The other methodological approach was to use student data to supplement that obtained from their parents.

As children reading below their chronological age are underrepresented in the sample, some caution is needed when making generalisations from the findings.

Consent and ethics

We prepared an introductory letter and a consent form for the children, and asked their teachers to read this through and explain the nature of the study to them. We also sent a letter of introduction and a consent form to the children's parents and to the teachers in the study.

We provided the school staff with a copy of the school description pertaining to their school to ensure that the descriptions of school programmes were accurate, and the quotes attributed to them fairly reflected their viewpoints.

In this report pseudonyms are used for school and family names.

Advisory group

A virtual advisory group was established for this project. This group consisted of representatives from Learning Media, the Ministry of Education, and two researchers from other organisations with expertise in the area of literacy. Members of the advisory group were consulted over the research methodology, and reviewed the research instruments and final report. NZCER peer reviewers fulfilled a similar role.

Overview of the report structure

This report begins with the three school staffs' approaches to, and experiences of, sharing literacy information with the parents in their communities. We then go on to describe parents' perceptions and experiences of sharing literacy information with schools and the literacy activities engaged in by parents and children at home. We contextualise these experiences through a series of vignettes in the following chapter. The final chapter draws together the themes emerging from the research.

2. The schools

Introduction

This section of the report provides an overview of the strategies adopted by the three schools in this study to develop and maintain partnerships with the school community in support of students' literacy, and in particular, reading development.

The description of each school is based on interviews with literacy leaders, New Entrant, Year 2, and Year 4 teachers, and an examination of school literacy documents.

Totara School

Introduction and background

Totara School is a decile 10 school with a roll of 400–500 students. Three-quarters of the students are Päkehä/European, with the next largest group being Asian. The school has a small number of Mäori, Pasifika, and students of other ethnicities.

The teachers interviewed included one New Entrant teacher, one Year 2 teacher, one Year 4 teacher, and the junior and middle school literacy leaders.

The school community

The teachers considered their school community to be affluent and perceived the majority of the parents in the school's community as being interested in and supportive of their children's learning. They saw parents as having high expectations of the school and described the high level of skills and knowledge with which the majority of students arrived at school:

> Most of the parents in this school are highly interested. They are quite an affluent community and therefore there is perhaps a greater kind of range of books accessible to the families who can afford them… Because the parents culturally are familiar with the system, we have a big turn out when there is an opportunity for parents to come to learn about our syndicate or the teaching strategies we are going to employ during the year. So a lot of parents came to find out how that happens. Big responses, a lot of parents come to

interviews. In some schools it's a struggle to get parents to come because it's culturally unfamiliar I guess. (Year 4 teacher)

Well they [students] came with so much knowledge they are obviously getting a lot of help from home. (New Entrant teacher)

Teachers' views of parents' and teachers' roles

Teachers saw their own role to be facilitating the development of children's literacy skills. They saw the role of parents to be to read to and with their children, and provide them with access to a range of texts. Teachers wanted parents to consider the cues and strategies used by their child when hearing them read and to discuss the texts they brought home to read aloud with them. The teachers considered that there was a relatively close alignment in the goals of school staff and parents. Overall, the school staff expressed moderate to high levels of confidence that the home literacy activities of the students in their classes were aligned with school literacy activities and teacher expectations.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at a syndicate level

The junior syndicate ran two meetings each year to provide parents with information about the teaching of reading and writing. These meetings were highly interactive and involved the parents in activities such as deciphering phonetically written text, looking at children's books to identify the challenges and supports at different levels, and analysing the variety of conventions and strategies children need to learn. The junior school literacy leader used these activities as a way of introducing the purposes of guided and shared reading and the role of home reading in the school reading programme, and the reasons why particular texts are sent home. She drew on her experience and resources as a college of education lecturer in the running of these meetings. She had also produced a booklet for parents, *Literacy in the Junior Syndicate*. It contains information on the strategies beginning readers and writers are developing, and how writing and reading are taught at school. It also provides guidelines for hearing children read at home, and helping children with spelling.

In the middle syndicate literacy information was presented to parents at the syndicate meeting that was run at the beginning of each year, and this was supported by written information for parents to take away. This included information on how reading and writing are taught and assessed at this level of the school, and about the fact that children are reading increasingly complex text across an increasing range of genres. Parents were also given guidelines on reading with their children, information about the use of independent, instructional, and advanced levels of text, along with specific information on the promotion of literal, inferential, and valuative comprehension. The person who was responsible for providing the reading component of this meeting was the Year 4 teacher we interviewed:

> …I gave everybody handouts on all the different ways to read with children using text at different levels and complexity so they knew the difference between reading an independent text and reading a text that kids were struggling with. I also introduced them to the reading programme as a whole, on how it worked and where the middle school syndicate fits within that. (Year 4 teacher)

Teachers considered the meetings on reading and writing and the booklet *Literacy in the Junior Syndicate* a useful reference point when parents came to them with queries or concerns about their children's reading programme, as it provided a shared base to which both parents and teachers could refer:

> I find that it is probably very valuable to have the information evenings, particularly pertaining to reading because that is just tremendously helpful to the parents. And also for the teachers because then you get an idea of how the parents teach their children how to read and it is normally [based on] their experience [of learning to read] as a child. (Year 2 teacher)

> They [the parents] can see what they are doing in the classroom and what the children actually articulate or tell them…is the same as what is in the handbook. (Year 2 teacher)

> I feel more confident because when I go up to talk to [a parent about their] child's reading… I know they have been to the reading night and I go, 'Remember the reading we talked about?' … I have even had some parents say to me, 'Remember when we were doing that reading night, that's what we were talking about isn't it?' … So that to me says why it's important and when I talk to them I feel more confident. I am not feeling I'm bridging a thousand prejudices, [things] that they don't know about. We have some common understandings as a starting point, such as how children are taught to read at school. (Junior school literacy leader)

The challenges identified by the junior school teachers included informing parents who were unable to attend the information evenings and have not read the written information provided:

> [If they do not attend the information meeting] they just don't have the understanding really… (Year 2 teacher)

One of the challenges identified by the Year 4 (middle syndicate) teacher was the amount of information for parents to take in and he suggested that a separate night for literacy be run in the future. He was also keen to see the inclusion of modelling for parents of processes for supporting children as they read aloud.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at a class level

The teachers described a variety of ways in which they communicated with the parents of the children in their classes about their progress in reading including bi-annual reports, parent-teacher interviews, informal chats initiated either by parents or teachers, and meetings with parents set up by teachers for specific purposes. One-on-one meetings were considered, by all the staff we

interviewed, to be the most effective way of communicating with parents about their children's reading progress:

> Speaking one-on-one. Then they can ask questions. [It is] more direct and to the point rather than sending a note home that is general. It can actually be more specific for the child. (New Entrant teacher)

> …it's a lot more specific and it's tailored for their child. The reports are also specific, but they are really leaping off points. They are the beginning of a discussion. It's from the reports that some of these questions can be raised… (Year 4 teacher)

Finding out about students' home literacy experiences

The teachers considered information about students' home literacy experiences to be important because it provided them with ideas of how to adapt their teaching programme and how to better support parents in working with their child at home. Teachers described the way parents sometimes observed aspects of their child's home reading behaviour that they were not aware of and how they valued this information because it helped them to better meet children's learning needs at school:

> If they are finding reading independently at home difficult or if it is something they are reticent about, it enables me to take steps to address that. It may mean that perhaps they have not been provided with the appropriate reading material. Perhaps the family is having problems accessing suitable books, perhaps the child is struggling in areas that I am not aware of. Sometimes interaction with parents has given me an opportunity to respond to things I haven't been conscious of, such as whether or not the child is reading exclusively fiction or non-fiction, or if the child is only reading a certain genre. That kind of information is really valuable. I may respond immediately by giving them additional resources, support, or encouragement or by ensuring that when we cover that part of the programme, or explore a particular genre, the child's needs are met and they are made aware of this. (Year 4 teacher)

The teachers described the way in which parents frequently initiated this form of information sharing. The New Entrant and Year 2 teachers estimated that at least half the parents of students in their class had approached them once or more that year to discuss aspects of their children's literacy development. The Year 4 teacher also indicated that he had relatively frequent visits from some of the parents of the children in his class.

Parents' involvement in school

Parents' involvement in school-wide initiatives

Totara School offered a tape-assisted reading programme to students who needed extra help in reading, and used parent volunteers to run this programme. This commitment involved reading with a child three times a week for half an hour. The parents involved were trained by school

staff. Other opportunities for parent involvement in school literacy activities occurred at class level.

Sharing professional knowledge from day one

In the New Entrant classes the parents were required to stay in class on their children's first day at school to provide the child with some home support. The New Entrant teacher took this opportunity to share professional knowledge with parents. On these days, teachers modelled school literacy practices:

> We try and nab them on the first full school visit when they are five. We have typical school days—we don't have a special day for new entrants…We have writing… We [indirectly] train the parents as to how to teach the writing while we've got them captive and then that often means that makes them quite confident. We try and do that sort of thing… (Junior school literacy leader)

In-class involvement in literacy activities

The junior school ran an individualised writing programme in which each child was responsible for setting and working towards individual goals. Parents who volunteered to work in the junior school were asked to be involved during writing time, and were considered to contribute to the success of the programme:

> We actually do need a lot of parent help for that [writing programme] because in order for it to work well children need to be seen on a regular basis. If you just have the teacher, well they actually won't be seen for quite some time…you know you can only do so much… It actually makes the parents aware as well. (Year 2 teacher)

Both the junior school teachers we interviewed had parent involvement with the class writing programme on a daily basis. The role of the parents was much like that of the teacher. This was to sit with children at the beginning of each session to discuss the writing goal for the day. They then met with students at the end of the session to mark their work with them and discuss the students' progress towards their goals.

The Year 4 teacher described the way in which he sent home newsletters encouraging parents to come in and watch or participate in class literacy activities. At the time of the interview he had two parents who came in to work with students for whom English is a second language.

Providing parents with expertise and support

Teachers used a variety of approaches to train parents to be experts in the writing programme. These included modelling the process of working with children in the writing programme, and also providing parents with written information about this process:

> I find that if I model and just jolly them along with my sense of humour and make them feel at ease, they are a lot better. Some of them do find it a bit daunting now, they are just sort of here and I said, 'Well if you come and sit next to me for a couple of children while I conference.' (Year 2 teacher)
>
> I give them [parents] all the prompts but I also talk to them about how to use them… The week before I gave them a little instruction on introductions to barrier games [a form of language game] and I have given them an example of how I would do that. (Year 4 teacher)

Benefits of including parents in class literacy activities

All the teachers valued the parent involvement they had in their literacy programmes:

> I don't have enough time to do one-on-one reading and listening with these students every day. So those parents who have offered their services, I have snapped them up. (Year 4 teacher)
>
> It enables us to teach almost the way I philosophically believe… It allows me to teach explicitly in small groups or individually. You train the parents who can then also do that. (Junior school literacy leader)

The teachers considered parent involvement had a number of benefits for the children in their classes, including more one-on-one time with an adult, and relating to community members of diverse ages and ethnicities:

> All the kids know Uncle T because Uncle T is Paresh's uncle. And Jessica's granny comes along on Wednesday so it's always also lovely that they get the variety in ages, variety in ethnicities. Uncle T is Indian and Jessica's granny is almost 80. It is really nice. You see school as…everyone is learning and doing things [together] rather than in isolation. (Junior school literacy leader)
>
> They [the students] love interacting with adults…it's that opportunity to discuss, and to enjoy having an audience, which is something they don't often have… But also they can explore texts that are a little more difficult than they might be able to read on their own, particularly when they are in a non-threatening kind of situation, when they are reading together. (Year 4 teacher)
>
> They just find it really cool when a parent or someone comes in because you know it is somebody's Mum or Dad in the class coming in to help and plus it is just different, you know, from their class teacher… (Year 2 teacher)

The teachers also considered that parents benefited by gaining knowledge about what happens in the classroom, seeing the progress their own child is making at school, gaining ideas or confidence for helping their own children at home, and gaining the satisfaction that comes from helping children learn:

> I had some nice feedback from some parents where they have said they actually know what we are doing. Often we are in this little room with four walls and *we* know what we are

> doing because we are trained. But the world changes every year, every term… philosophically we do things differently [than what the parents may have experienced when they were at school] and the parents are informed… A lot of those parents would actually know what is actually helping their child… They have got knowledge and they feel more included… This knowledge also prevents misunderstandings between home and school. The parents know why we do what we do. (Junior school literacy leader)

Challenges in including parents in class literacy activities

The fact that the junior school teachers were committed to fully training parents to be in active teaching roles rather than as more passive "helpers" provided both the teachers and parents involved with a number of challenges. Teachers described the time and energy required to train and support parents as "huge":

> Often they come back and say … 'I'm sorry I know you're [busy]…but what do I do about so and so?'… I think, 'Interrupt me as many times as you want because it *is* complex!' (Junior school literacy leader)

A related challenge was negotiating with parents who had teaching approaches or understandings about literacy learning that differed from those held by the teacher. One of the ways teachers tried to manage these situations was by anticipating and/or addressing possible differences in advance:

> I don't want frustration levels to get high. I've always been a little bit anxious that maybe these times, rather than being fun times, could be times where the parent feels like they need to make the child work for every word, particularly if you are working at a guided level. I've made a real emphasis to say, 'This has got to be fun, I want them to enjoy it,' and, 'If you feel like frustration levels are getting high then please – *you* do the work, [to] lighten [it] up.' (Year 4 teacher)

Teachers were aware that parents could sometimes feel quite vulnerable when working alongside a teacher in the classroom:

> [They will ask] 'How do I do it?' and, 'When I write the correct version of these letters do I use so and so?' So they are also putting themselves, I think, into a very vulnerable position. (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers also commented on sometimes feeling a bit "under the spotlight" themselves with parents in the room, and one noted that she felt she couldn't be "growly" if she needed to.

Differences in parents' involvement and school information sharing by level

When asked about school approaches to communicating with parents about reading, the middle school literacy leader indicated that "there is less of it as you go up". The emphasis on information sharing in the junior school was because information and support for parents was seen to be especially important in the first few years of school because this was when the basic

foundations were set. The junior school literacy leader also commented on the visible and concrete nature of learning to read and write in the early years of schooling. She considered that parents could understand the need to learn to read, and the process by which it occurred and that perhaps this was less so for literacy activities higher up the school. These views were reinforced by some of the comments made by the Year 4 teacher:

> I think parents and teachers give a great deal of emphasis to literacy, particularly to reading in the early years, and children are keen and excited and motivated about it too. I think that lessens somewhat, that sense of urgency and importance. [Do you think it *is* as urgent and important?] I can understand why people become a little less anxious about it. I think it is just as important. I can understand why the urgency, that sense of anxiety is not there to the same degree once a child is obviously starting to develop the skills. I think too because children are perhaps abandoned—left to reading independently. Because the texts become more difficult perhaps there is not as much reading as there may have been when they were younger. That might contribute to it. There is not as much direction probably given in what the children read or ensuring that the texts they are reading are appropriate. (Year 4 teacher)

The middle school literacy leader considered parents of Year 4 to 8 students could benefit from more information and support about helping their children with reading. She believed these parents needed information on the skills being focused on at these levels and about the importance of exposing students to a range of text types. The junior and middle school literacy leaders commented on the need for children to have support as they made the transition to reading independently in order to develop their comprehension and critical thinking skills:

> …A lot of children, by that stage are reading at their chronological age relatively fluently, but I just think it's that whole inference thing. That's what comes out later on. As the children get older they lack inference. They can answer the knowledge questions about the text, and they're quite good at Table of Contents and things like that. It's working out what the text is actually saying… (Middle school literacy leader)

> Other skills that they [parents] could be developing are making sure their children read a broad range of texts so that they don't just get focused on Harry Potter… And also just being able to maybe look at the newspaper in different ways, or being able to work out what it actually means… (Middle school literacy leader)

Both the junior and middle school literacy leaders noted that the parents of New Entrant to Year 2 children were more likely to be involved in school literacy activities than the parents of older children. Both observed that this drop of involvement occurred once children had moved out of Year 2 and usually occurred when parents believed their child had learnt how to read:

> …I really notice that it drops off and that parents don't seem to be available in the middle school… [What do you think are the reasons for those differences?] Once those kids can read the parents will relax. (Junior school literacy leader)

The literacy leaders also commented on the decreasing number of parents available to be involved in school literacy activities due to the increasing ratio of employed parents as children grew older.

They noted that further up the school parent involvement was more likely to take the form of involvement with school trips than with literacy activities.

The junior and middle school literacy leaders considered that both parents and students would benefit from further parent involvement in class literacy activities up to and including Year 5:

> …You could do some fabulous thinking critically stuff…You could actually have one parent, actually modelling it to the children and then doing it with them. You can do some quite exciting stuff and it would be very much one-on-one. (Junior school literacy leader)

Summary

The teachers at Totara School considered that the home literacy practices of their community were on the whole closely aligned with those of the school. This belief was based on their observations of students' literacy behaviours, parent involvement in school literacy events, and their formal and informal meetings with parents. They provided parents with a relatively high level of professional knowledge. The junior school literacy leader offered the parents professional development and education at the level of pre-service teacher training. A parallel can be drawn between the commitment of the teachers we interviewed to explicit teaching of literacy skills to their students and the way in which teachers approached the sharing of professional information with their community. Consistent with one of the principles of good practice identified in the research literature, teachers went to considerable lengths to make professional knowledge explicit rather than hidden. The junior school literacy leader described the way in which this was empowering for teachers because of the opportunities it provided for "articulating your practice".

She observed that sharing professional knowledge earned respect from the parent community and described the way in which parents appreciated not being talked down to:

> One parent came up to me [after the meeting] and said it was so nice not to be talked down to… I am aware that this community is very educated. (Junior school literacy leader)

The school's approach to sharing professional knowledge on reading and writing was also considered to be empowering for parents. The teachers viewed the parents involved in class literacy activities as professionals and not just as "helpers":

> The key thing is information. It is actually giving parents information. If you are informed well then you have got knowledge and knowledge is powerful. (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers commented on the relatively high level of information sharing that went on in the first 2 years of school, and the relatively high level of involvement of parents in class literacy activities at this level. Teachers considered it important that parents and teachers continued to share literacy information over the transition from learning to read to independent reading but noted that their

opportunities to share this information dropped noticeably at Year 2, the stage at which students are commonly beginning to make this transition.

Rimu School

Introduction and background

Rimu School is a decile 5 contributing school. In 2003 approximately three-quarters of the students on the school roll were Päkehä/European, 15 percent were Mäori, and 5 percent were Pasifika. A small number of students were from other ethnic groups.

The information in this description was gathered from school documents and data, an informal discussion held with the principal, and interviews with one New Entrant teacher, one Year 2 teacher, one Year 4 teacher, and the school literacy leader.

The school community

Teachers described the parent community of Rimu School as consisting of two different groups. One group, containing the majority of parents, was interested in reading and supported the school's home reading programme:

> I've got some parents that are really keen and ask me lots of questions about reading and how they can help them at home, and if it's a book that the child has struggled at, what can they do? (New Entrant teacher)

> Most of them [parents], pretty much 70 percent in my class anyway, do the reading homework with the children, and fill in their reading logs which are in their home bags… They're always very interested at interview nights and [about] things on the reading side of their child's…education. (Literacy leader)

The other group of parents was less visible; teachers noted they had "never seen" some of these parents:

> But we have also got a group of parents who…don't fill in the home reader, they are not giving that support to the child… Some of them I think don't see the importance – they don't value the schooling the same. (New Entrant teacher)

Teachers perceived these parents to have had negative experiences of school. In addition, some parents' work commitments resulted in them having less time available to support their child.

The school had tried a number of strategies to reach these parents, but had not found any one to be particularly successful. The majority of parents would usually attend parent-teacher meetings, but fewer parents attended parent information evenings.

Teachers' views of parents' and teachers' roles

Teachers viewed their relationship with parents as a partnership in which the two parties had complementary roles. Teachers saw their role to include providing strategies to empower students with "the skills and the knowledge to work out words"; introducing students to different types of reading, taking students to their next step, providing models of good reading behaviours. Teachers saw parents as "first teachers" and wanted them to continue this role in partnership with the school by providing reading mileage through home reading activities and access to different types of reading materials; and praise, encouragement, and modelling of good reading behaviours. As students got older, teachers saw parents' role to be to encourage students to use a range of strategies to work out unknown words, to have discussions about the deeper meanings of text, and to support independent reading behaviours such as enrolling in a library and choosing appropriate books.

Teachers' levels of confidence in parents' engagement in home literacy activities which aligned with the school literacy programme and teacher expectations decreased as students got older and teachers had less information about students' home literacy practices. The New Entrant and Year 2 teachers were "confident" or "very confident" that most parents knew how to support their child's reading development when the child was reading aloud to their parent, or when the parent was reading aloud to the child:

> I know a lot of my parents do reading with their children morning and night. I know a lot of them use the yellow book that we have for our reading logs and they use it in the way that it is meant to be [used]. I also know that some of them do extra things… They do encourage their children like, driving the car – reading signs, pointing out things. Talking to me if they have a problem or something, or if I want to talk to them…they are open to suggestions... A lot of them ask me, 'How can I do this better?' (Year 2 teacher)

In contrast to the views of the junior teachers the Year 4 teacher was "not very confident" that parents had this knowledge.

Although teachers considered that most parents knew the strategies to use to support their child they considered that some members of the parent community did not place enough value on home reading activities. This was especially the case as students got older. Two of the teachers were unsure whether parents had the knowledge to assist students to choose appropriate books to read, or whether parents saw the value of enrolling their children in a local library.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at a school-wide level

Initiating early contacts with parents to share knowledge

Rimu School had a whole-school approach to literacy. Parent information evenings at which information about the literacy programme was shared with parents were a key aspect of this. To provide an initial contact with parents the teachers from the junior part of the school held an

annual parent information evening about reading at the local kindergarten, which was the main feeder to the school. At this evening parents were shown strategies they could use at home, and were given information about the school reading programme:

> I actually take them through a guided reading lesson and a shared book lesson and give them an indication of how I run those sessions with them [students] to show them [parents] the variety of reading. So that's probably for some of them the first contact. (New Entrant teacher)

Sharing knowledge and encouraging participation

At the start of each year a parent information evening for the whole school was held. This information evening was about the whole school programme, but a substantial portion covered the reading programme. Parents were divided into syndicate groups to hear about the programme for their child's age group. At these sessions teachers described the school's approach to reading, and discussed the home reading programme.

Teachers stressed the importance of the face-to-face contact with parents that occurred at parent information evenings. This provided parents with the opportunity to ask questions, and teachers with the opportunity to model reading strategies. Although teachers perceived the meetings as a key vehicle through which consistent messages about reading were shared with parents, the school had struggled at times to get parents to participate in either whole-school or syndicate information evenings. One strategy the school found particularly successful in attracting parents to meetings was to include activities for both parents and students:

> We get parents along to the first meeting at the beginning of the year because we are talking about a variety of things. But we have found if we set up parent education evenings we hardly get anybody. But if we include the children doing something, we get the parents. (New Entrant teacher)

In 2003, there was a perception at the school that:

> A lot of children don't probably see males or have a male role model reading. (New Entrant teacher)

To provide role models, and to encourage parent and student involvement in the information evening, fathers were invited to the library, given pyjamas and milo, and encouraged to read to students. This session was viewed as highly successful by both parents and teachers.

Another whole-school activity, which combined parent and student participation with information sharing, was the book week the school sometimes held. In 2002 the book week included a number of activities which were planned to co-ordinate with a parent information evening.

Forming partnerships with parents and students

Another key aspect of the school-wide approach was the monitored home reading programme. This programme took different forms depending on the age of the students. The junior school students were given books to take home in home bags and the *R.E.A.D. I.T. Home Reading* booklet (Kluzek & Coldwell, 2001) as a reading log to record their home reading. Books were made available for older students to choose and take home—though this was more of an optional activity. The homework sheets of older students included a log for students to record the books they had read.

The *R.E.A.D. I.T.* booklet was one of the main ways the junior school teachers shared information about reading with parents. This booklet provided parents with information about reading strategies and activities they could do at home to support their child's reading development. The junior school teachers commented that since they had started using this booklet they felt less need to send out incidental leaflets. They found use of the booklet to be an effective strategy for motivating parents and students, providing parents with the "big picture" about reading, and for initiating discussions about reading with parents.

One key aspect of the *R.E.A.D. I.T.* booklet was that it enabled students, teachers, and parents to work together. It included spaces for parents to write comments, for students to indicate how much they liked what they were reading, and for teachers to comment.

Another key aspect of the booklet was the inclusion of awards to recognise the number of days a child had read at home. These awards motivated students and reinforced the messages staff were trying to give to parents about the importance of their role and of providing their children with praise and encouragement.

Along with the monitored reading programme teachers also gave students homework sheets, games, and other tasks which had a reading component and encouraged parental involvement at home. The New Entrant and Year 2 children took home a library book they had chosen once a week.

Teachers considered that the partnership they formed with students and parents to monitor junior students' home reading supported students' literacy development and contributed to the success of the programme. One teacher described parents' response to the booklet as:

> ...really positive. The comments I have had this year have been great. I think it just makes them feel a wee bit accountable too because there is a space to fill in each time and so I think it has encouraged some parents to read more with the child than they would have. A lot of them come and talk to me about it initially when they first start school. (New Entrant teacher)

Teachers noted they did not get the same positive reaction and level of parental interest in relation to other school materials such as the reading log used prior to the *R.E.A.D. I.T.* booklet, handouts, or homework sheets. The Year 4 teacher considered that Year 4 students could benefit from a

similar monitored home reading programme, but was concerned about the number of school books that went missing at home.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at syndicate level

At the start of the year each syndicate sent out information letters and leaflets to families. These letters included information about the homework programme, of which the reading programme was a large part; expectations of home reading activities; and an invitation to parents to participate in a parent-tutor programme.

The junior syndicate tailored the content of other newsletters to the needs of parents; for example, if a number of parents had similar queries about reading, a newsletter providing more information about this area was developed. The senior syndicate also sometimes sent out newsletters to parents which included tips for parents about how they could support their child's reading development.

The syndicates also ran parent information evenings during the year but found the numbers attending these meetings to be "disappointing" unless the meetings included students.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at class level

All the teachers considered the most effective way of communicating with parents about literacy practices was through face-to-face meetings at which each child's progress and needs were discussed. These meetings could be formal, such as parent-teacher interviews, or informal, such as the discussions which occurred as parents dropped off or picked up their children. Occasionally, if a teacher had a particular concern, they telephoned parents to discuss this concern.

Parent-teacher interviews were one of the main ways teachers shared professional knowledge with parents, and informed parents about their child's literacy development. At these meetings teachers discussed the child's progress, suggested next steps parents could make at home, and gave parents material about reading to take home. During these meetings teachers also provided parents with information about areas such as the school programme, the colour wheel, and developmental stages. There were also displays for parents concerning the classroom programme and what they could use at home to support it.

In the junior school the content of the first parent-teacher meeting built on the information provided at the kindergarten and school parent information meetings, and from students' progression through the home reading booklet. This meeting was viewed as a time to discuss and share ideas about the reading activities and strategies used at home and school. Subsequent meetings built on these discussions.

The junior school teachers had frequent informal contact with a number of parents. During these talks they discussed each child's reading development, suggested strategies and activities parents could use at home, and answered parents' queries. From these discussions, and from teachers' observations of students, teachers developed extra activities for parents to do at home with individual students:

> …if parents have a concern it is an open door, they come in and ask me and talk to me about it either before or after school and I've often talked to them one-on-one about any concerns they have… (New Entrant teacher)

The New Entrant teacher sent home games and tasks to target particular children's needs:

> …I send home sight word games when I feel they need a boost with an explanation on how to play it for the parents… I've sent home envelopes with the specific alphabet letters and sounds that a specific child might need to learn. (New Entrant teacher)

The Year 2 teacher also sent home alphabet cards, matching word and picture games, and other tasks for students who were struggling with particular basic sounds and blends. By Year 4 students were doing a variety of different homework tasks and the information sent home about reading became more occasional.

Other ways parents were kept informed of their child's progress, and provided with some information about literacy development, were through school reports and the portfolios which students took home. School reports provided parents with information about students' literacy skills, for example, their comprehension skills, their use of strategies, their capacity for sustained independent reading, and their ability to independently choose reading material.

Finding out about students' home literacy experiences

Teachers considered it important that they knew about the home literacy practices and home environment of the students in their classes, and they had a number of formal and informal ways of accessing this information. The more formal avenues were the parent-teacher interviews and the information parents and students recorded on the home reading logs. The more informal avenues consisted of the regular contact teachers had with a number of parents, and the information students provided to teachers about their home reading activities and visits to the library. The teachers in the junior syndicate reported that nearly all of the parents had approached them to talk about their child's reading at some point during the year. The prevalence of these discussions dropped by Year 4 as students became more independent.

Junior school teachers used the information they gained about parents' home literacy practices, and students' home literacy activities, interests, and difficulties in a number of ways. One was to adapt their programmes to take into account the individual needs and interests of each student. This practice was prevalent in the New Entrant class as the teacher was able to use the information she gained from the first parent-teacher interview of which a substantial part was

focused on the school reading programme and home literacy practices. The teacher used this information to target students, who were not getting one-on-one assistance at home, for extra support. She also suggested further strategies or activities for parents to do at home, and shared professional information about the strategies used at school:

> Some of them have said, 'I cover up the pictures.' So I talk through why it's better not to do that, and talk through some of the strategies that we use in the classroom. And if some of them come in and talk to me and want to know how to help their child, I'll talk about the strategies that I'm working on with that child at the moment. (New Entrant teacher)

The teachers of older students had more informal access to information about students' home literacy practices which tended to come from a few "keen" parents. Teachers used this information to ensure students were engaged in a wide range of literacy activities at school which extended the ones offered at home.

One situation in which the teachers of all three year levels had found this knowledge particularly useful was when the information parents offered was inconsistent with their own observations, for example, if a child read a lot at home, but not at school, or vice versa. The parent of a Year 4 child, who the teacher described as a "reluctant reader", had recently initiated contact with the teacher to discuss her child's interest in Harry Potter books. The teacher adapted the class reading programme to include the reading of Harry Potter books in class, and provided other opportunities for the student to tap into his interest in these books. This student read his book alongside the teacher when he read to the class, and on his own during silent reading. Both the child's parent and teacher commented on the dramatic turnaround they had observed in this child's interest in reading at school as a result:

> He'll virtually carry it around with him wherever he goes, and sometimes it is difficult to prise him away from it! (Year 4 teacher)

Empowering students

Trying to empower students whose parents did not read to their child, listen to them read, encourage them to read independently, or fill in the home reading booklet, was a difficulty for teachers. They attempted to fill this gap by organising extra time with teacher aides for younger students whom they perceived to be lacking support at home. Teachers also sent home sight word games for these students to play by themselves. At all levels they encouraged students to develop independent home reading behaviours by encouraging and praising students for reading to their siblings, grandparents, dolls, teddy bears, or themselves:

> A different approach was used with older students. Teachers encouraged these students to take ownership over their learning by setting and meeting their own reading goals. They also set homework activities which involved independent reading and research and encouraged students to report back to the class about the books they had read at home or at school using a 'book fair' format which was popular with students. Using this set format, students

reported to the class about a book they had read including information about the author, title, illustrator, plot, and aspects they found interesting.

Parents' involvement in school

Rimu School had a formal parent (and grandparent) reading tutor training programme which was run by the special needs teacher. The emphasis of this programme was on offering training to parents on listening skills and reading strategies. The parent-tutors provided one-on-one support to Year 3 and older students to assist them with their independent reading. In particular, students who had just finishing Reading Recovery, or who did not get one-on-one support at home, were targeted. Although some of the teachers in this study had tutors in their classrooms earlier in 2003, at the time of the interviews, none had a parent-tutor in their classroom.

Parents were also invited to assist in the classroom programme on a more informal basis. This assistance was organised by individual teachers; for example, in the past parents had read stories to students during library time, read one-on-one with students, or been involved in the writing programme. Teachers provided parents with information about reading strategies and behaviour management as they modelled these behaviours in class. The New Entrant teacher did not have parental support for reading in the classroom as she considered this unsettled new students as they made the transition to school. Instead, teacher aides were used to listen to some children read in a one-on-one situation.

Benefits of including parents in school literacy activities

Teachers of the Years 2 and 4 students perceived the parent-tutor programme, and parent assistance at school in general, to have a number of benefits for all concerned. A key element was that more students were able to have one-on-one reading sessions with an adult. An added benefit was that students could see that adults in their community valued reading. Teachers considered that older students enjoyed their parents being at school and gained confidence from their presence. An additional benefit was that it gave both teachers and parents insights into each other's activities and helped to strengthen home-school partnerships. Teachers considered that the parents who assisted in the classroom learnt strategies they could use at home and felt positive about contributing to their, and other, children's education.

Challenges in including parents in school literacy activities

Although the parent-tutor and parental assistance programmes were perceived as successful, the school had found it difficult at times to get parents to participate:

> We have a parent-tutors in reading programme which has been fairly hard to get volunteers for this year. Most of the parents work so the time commitment is quite hard for them. (Literacy leader)

One strategy teachers used to increase parental involvement was to approach parents and grandparents personally.

Another challenge teachers faced was matching school and parental expectations. Teachers modelled teaching strategies and expectations, and attitudes towards confidentiality, to give parents an indication of school protocols. A personal challenge for some teachers was opening up their classrooms and the feeling they were being "watched".

Differences in parents' involvement and school information sharing by level

The professional knowledge about reading that teachers shared with parents, and the emphasis placed on the home reading programme, changed as students got older. Communications with parents about reading, and communication in general with parents, tapered off as students progressed up the school. There were a number of reasons for this. The main reason was that reading was a key focus of the junior school. As students got older other areas were given more priority:

> It's probably a much more concentrated time in the junior school – [Reading is] our main homework. Once they move further up the school they have maths and other topics for homework as well… The emphasis is shared more. (New Entrant teacher)

Other reasons given for the decrease in communications about reading was that the visibility of reading in the home decreased once the home reading programme became less structured in the middle school, and both parents and teachers considered students could read independently and therefore did not need extra support:

> I think parents probably aren't as vigilant about their reading…the responsibility is more on the parents as children become older to continue that regular reading than probably it is at the earlier level because we send the books home, the material is there. Whereas at the older level they have to actually find the material and some parents probably just don't, or don't set that time aside for them to go and read. (New Entrant teacher)

Another was that at this age the students were also less interested in reading as their interest in a range of other areas grew and as some perceived reading as "uncool". Also as students got older more parents were working and therefore less available for discussions with teachers.

Teachers discussed some of the wider challenges they faced as they attempted to share their professional knowledge with parents. Increasing parent participation in meetings and activities was the main challenge. Some of the strategies outlined previously had been developed to

improve participation. Another concern some teachers had was that they considered they needed to give parents more information about reading but were not always sure how much to give.

Teachers considered they needed better ways to communicate the "big picture" of reading to parents. This could assist them to better manage parents' expectations and potentially lessen parents' tendency to compare their child to other children:

> …at the start of the year one of the other classes was doing spelling words…a lot of the parents really really wanted spelling at the start of the year but a lot of the kids were nowhere near ready. (Year 2 teacher)

> Parents generally want to know where their child is in terms of the rest of the class as opposed to thinking of their child as an individual… A lot of them get quite hung up on the colour wheel – what colour means, what and why their child isn't on the same as their friend's colour, and all that sort of stuff… (Literacy leader)

Teachers considered parents needed more information about the developmental stages, how children might progress through these stages, and the individual variation you could expect:

> I think some of them [parents] just think that all children develop at the same rate…when in reality it's not that way. Everyone is different and some might be a little slower to take off. Others might be quicker. I think parents don't have that understanding so much about the developmental aspect. (Year 2 teacher)

> At [parent information] meetings [we could]... say that they all progress at different stages and that kind of thing so you don't have to repeat it every time a parent comes in. Give them information and maybe give some theories – some of it might be over their head but just stuff that could help them and give them ideas at the start of the year... They have got more of an overview of the big picture at the start so that they can straight away see. So it gives them more of an idea of where their child is progressing to. (Year 2 teacher)

The literacy leader felt that parents of students in the middle years could benefit from more information about reading, and in particular, strategies to support their child's development of comprehension skills as at this level parents often became overly focused on decoding and wanted their child to keep progressing up the colour wheel. This information could also assist parents to understand that, although their child was finding the books coming home "easy" to read, they were not moving up a level because their comprehension was not yet near the next level.

Summary

One of the strengths of the literacy programme at Rimu School was the way the junior school syndicate activities linked to form a progression, which supported, and built on, the initial partnerships formed between teachers and parents. The kindergarten parent information evening provided a foundation for the initial parent-teacher interviews, which also drew on the information parents recorded in the home reading booklet. Effective literacy partnerships involved two-way information sharing which enabled changes to be made both at home and at school. All

teachers at Rimu School provided examples of instances in which information about students' home literacy practices had changed aspects of their classroom practice. A flow of information between home and school was particularly apparent in the New Entrant class.

Like other schools, Rimu School was trying to provide incentives to encourage parents with busy working lives to participate in school activities. Personal connections were important at the school as well as partnerships between teachers, parents, and students. The activities which encouraged all three parties to be involved and which had a social "fun" element appeared to be the most successful in sharing messages about reading.

Kowhai School

Introduction and background

Kowhai School is a decile 1 school with a roll of 300–400 students. In 2003 the school roll was half Mäori, approximately one-quarter Päkehä/European, and approximately one-fifth Pasifika, with the remaining students being Asian or of other ethnicities. Kowhai School is a contributing school, with junior (Years 1 to 3) and senior (Years 4 to 6) syndicates.

The teachers interviewed included one New Entrant teacher, one Year 2 teacher, one Year 4 teacher, and the junior school literacy leader. We also had an informal interview with the senior school literacy leader.

The school community

The teachers described the school community as comprising a "core" of parents who were highly involved and supportive of school literacy activities with another group largely uninvolved. This perception was based on the attendance of parents at school events and meetings. Some teachers considered that school literacy practices were not practised in the homes of some children and expressed concern that these children were not getting the support they needed at home. Teachers observed the impact of poverty and life stresses on many of the families in the school community. These parents were perceived as not having the time or material resources to easily support the literacy development of their children:

> …A lot of our community have so much going on in their lives, so many difficulties… If they are single parent families, if they are unemployed, if they are on a domestic purposes benefit, their income is quite low, they don't have a lot of money… They often have three or four children under a certain age. So there are all those factors that come into it that make it very difficult for them… So it's more of a socioeconomic problem really. (Year 4 teacher)

Teachers also described the difficulties faced by parents lacking skills and confidence in reading and writing due to a lack of educational opportunities, and the difficulties faced by parents for whom English was a second language.

Teachers' views of parents' and teachers' roles

Teachers described their own roles as that of teaching students the skills and knowledge they needed and viewed parents as partners who could encourage and model reading to their children:

> It's a partnership. What we can teach them at school is limited by the time we've got. (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers considered the role of parents in their children's literacy development to be "essential". However they tended to express relatively low levels of confidence that the parents of the children they taught did the sorts of things they considered important when reading to their children, hearing their children read, helping their children choose books, and supporting their independent reading. These beliefs were based on teachers' conversations with students and their observations of their literacy practices. Overall, teacher confidence decreased with the age of the students:

> The way they listen to stories in class. They are not used to it. If you don't have pictures to show them… (New Entrant teacher)

> …The comprehension levels of the children are very low… They find it really hard, some kids find it really hard to actually talk about what happened in the story… I think maybe it is a lot to do with not talking about the book after they've read it. (Year 2 teacher)

> They're not… When I talk to my kids about different issues… I get the feeling that they're not talked to like that by a lot of adults. (Year 4 teacher)

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at a school-wide level

The school had adopted a multi-pronged approach to supporting and developing partnerships with its local community in order to support the literacy development of its students.

Including parents in school literacy events

The school provided parents with a number of opportunities to be included in school literacy events. The Books in Homes Duffy assemblies were considered one of the most successful ways of doing this. This was because of the awards presented to children, parents, and grandparents and the high profile of visiting speakers. The school literacy leaders described how the Duffy books and assemblies helped raise the profile of reading, and supported home reading by children and family members:

> In supporting home reading it's absolutely fantastic. The kids get books right from when they're pre-schoolers. For a large number of our kids the only books they have at home are Duffy books. (Senior school literacy leader)

> Most parents will read those books to the kids and use that option there… From the kids' point of view they get a lot out of it because, here they are, they own a book! They have never owned a book before… (Junior school literacy leader)

Sharing student publications with families

Another way in which the school had attempted to build a literacy community was through sharing student publications with families. This was done through the school authors' board in the school foyer which displayed samples of published work from each class in the school:

> Parents absolutely love it. Parents can often be seen standing there reading it. When we had the school alterations it was taken down and when it went back up, we had a lot of comments from parents saying, 'Oh we missed it!' (Senior school literacy leader)

Sending student publications home to families was considered to be another successful way of linking with family members in the area of literacy.

School-wide meetings

One of the challenges faced by the staff at Kowhai School was offering ways of sharing professional knowledge about literacy in such a way that parents chose to attend. Staff reported having little past success in attracting parents to school meetings:

> We've had some meetings where we've only had two people turn up… (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers considered there were a number of reasons for this. These included parents' lack of confidence about entering the school and of feeling socially isolated at school meetings:

> The main barrier is getting them into the schools… I think that's their own experiences at school, because often when they do come in they say, 'Gosh this is so different to what it used to be when I was at school.' (Junior school literacy leader)

> …A new place, a strange place, new people... I think that perhaps if there were networks of people… That's probably where it works best is if you have got a group of parents and they come along together and that's okay. But it's the ones who aren't in part of that network or aren't in with the group who are hard to track down. (Junior school literacy leader)

The junior school literacy leader emphasised the importance of relationship building forming the foundation for the sharing of professional knowledge:

> …Before you can actually focus on a curriculum, there needs to be a lot of social type of interaction. Parents need to feel safe coming into the school, they need to know they are not going to be embarrassed by whatever when they turn up… [They may worry that] the teachers could ask them embarrassing questions… (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers commented on higher parent attendance at meetings that provided a social component with opportunities to develop relationships with staff and other parents, and when there was

networking between parents about attending meetings. These were all features of the literacy meetings run as part of the Home-School Partnership Programme, which the school ran in 2001 to 2002. The meetings were offered in several different languages (Mäori, Niuean, and Samoan) and were convened by a partnership between a teacher and a member of the Mäori, Niuean, and Samoan communities. In the second year a group was also set up for Päkehä/European parents. The school provided childcare for parents attending, incorporated fun events in the evenings such as door prizes, and shared food:

> It was a partnership – it was a teacher and a parent working together getting it all prepared. It was a social thing because there was food and raffle draws and all those things. Parents were able to get together and talk in their own languages and get more understanding. (Junior school literacy leader)

The senior school literacy leader considered that the success of this programme related to the "informal publicity" by the parents themselves. She described the way parents of a particular cultural group "would ring around" and "come as a group". Parents were keen to attend a presentation delivered in their first language and to meet together with other parents from their particular community.

Although the Home-School Partnership Programme was considered to be one of the more successful school-wide initiatives for sharing professional knowledge in the area of literacy, the school felt unable to continue offering it in 2003 due to the constraints of funding and time:

> A lot of preparation had to go into it, making the match ups [with different community groups] and all sorts of things, and that was huge. Money was involved and there was no budget for it. It was downright funded the first year but after that we had to carry it on, so we did for a year, but when you start losing teachers because there is not enough funding, well those sorts of things go too. (Junior school literacy leader)

Teachers found parent attendance higher at events that their children also attended, especially when their children played a central role at the event, such as a performance. They thought parents were keen to attend to support their children and that they found attending school events less threatening when they came with their child, and when they knew they would not be left with no one to talk to:

> [It's] the security of being with somebody and not left standing on your own in a room. [Do you think that is why more parents come to school meetings that involve children?] Yes, they don't have to interact with anybody, they can just sit there and watch it and go home again. (Junior school literacy leader)

The junior school literacy leader also spoke of the importance of presenting information to parents in a way that was easy to understand:

> Language is the big one. [What do you mean by that?]…Teachers talking in the parents' language, not teacher talk, using the phrase of the parents [so that] they understand.

> Keeping the information simple, not over-feeding them information. (Junior school literacy leader)

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at syndicate level

Both the junior and senior school syndicates sent home written information to parents covering the type of books their child brought home, strategies for assisting children when reading aloud, and information on the importance of children reading and being read a variety of text types.

In addition to this written information, each syndicate ran other literacy events for the purpose of sharing professional knowledge with parents.

The junior school ran an annual literacy-based event for parents. This ran on a 3-year cycle with the first year involving a parent information evening, the next, an open day when parents could visit junior school classrooms, while the third consisted of a display in the hall.

At the time of the interviews the school had just won a small amount of additional funding to re-instate an initiative which the junior school literacy leader had considered particularly effective in the past. This was a coffee morning for parents. The constraints of money and time had prevented the continuation of this initiative, even though it had been considered a successful way of establishing partnerships between parents and the school.

Like the Home-School Partnership Programme this initiative had offered parents the opportunity to meet in an informal, social setting involving the sharing of food and providing opportunities for the establishment of relationships as well as for the sharing of ideas:

> We had a coffee morning and I would just get the parents up to the staffroom and we would just talk about issues that arose at home and then sometimes we would have a theme… now this is going back years. But those things worked. [Why did they work do you think?] It's relaxed, the first time. It's a coffee morning – it sounds like it's fun… They were good and they grew from the first time when a small number came and the next time it was bigger and then it grew bigger. In the end it was getting too big for the staffroom… (Junior school literacy leader).

In the senior syndicate a publication produced by the students, such as a syndicate newspaper, was sent home once a term with a covering letter providing information to parents about the genre and the teaching objectives for students. The most recent publication was a poetry anthology in which every student in the syndicate had a poem published. These were very popular and a number of parents came in to school asking for extra copies of the anthology to give to other family members. The success of this strategy for building community partnerships and sharing professional knowledge was emphasised by the Year 4 teacher. Student work was also shared with parents through digital and hardcopy portfolios.

Sharing professional knowledge about literacy at class level

Teachers considered the most effective way of communicating with parents about their children's literacy development was through face-to-face meetings, whether informal chats before or after school, or more formal meetings such as parent-teacher interviews. In the past teachers had not always found these meetings well attended. This was addressed by supplementing the traditional parent-teacher interview with three-way conferences including the teacher, parent, and student for a discussion of the student's learning goals. Two conferences were held: one at the beginning of the year to discuss goal setting; and one mid-way through the year to discuss progress made towards these goals. Shared goal setting was considered a particularly effective means for building partnerships, and increasing parental involvement:

> We've noticed a difference in the turn out of parents [at parent-teacher interviews] just by involving the children in goal setting meetings. The kids run it…It brings the parents in because the kids are central. It's a celebration of their success. (Senior school literacy leader)

Another initiative adopted by the school was supplementing the traditional school report, which went home at the end of the year, with "home books". These books contained samples of student work and teacher comments and were sent home each term. These books provided parents with information about the stages their children were working at. For example, in the junior school these books contained a copy of the colour wheel so that parents could see the level at which their child was reading. These home books also contained samples of student work. The principle behind the home book is similar to that of the three-way conference, in that the student and their work are the central focus when forming partnerships with parents:

> Basically they go home twice a term and they have like examples of what the kids are doing so, like we have like reading samples, you know we write on what they are doing well and maybe their next step or something… They just have so much about the child in it, it is all their work you know and it builds up. I think they take them into their next class…so every term the parent can see the progress on how the child is going. (Year 2 teacher)

Teachers emphasised the importance of explicit and honest information when forming partnerships with parents:

> [It's important] not to pussy foot around in it. If they are reading under their chronological age, I say that at parent-teacher interviews, and I have a sheet that's got the child and it's got their age and it's got exactly what they are doing at each level, and the behaviours that the child is doing. Just so that the parents are aware and that at the end of the year [they don't say] 'Oh but you never told me.' I do ring parents quite a bit about different issues. There are lots of informal chats… (Year 4 teacher)

Finding out about students' home literacy experiences

Teachers considered it important that they understand the home literacy practices of the students in their classes. However teachers did not appear to have a great deal of this kind of information, and parents did not appear to have contributed it:

> It is essential but I find that I don't get anything. (Year 2 teacher)

The New Entrant teacher indicated that "some" parents had come to talk with her during the year about their child's literacy development while both the Year 2 and Year 4 teachers reported that "none" had approached them. Teachers also indicated that it was not always easy to contact parents:

> … Half the kids haven't got phones at home so it is so hard. It is really frustrating because they either haven't got phones or we don't see the parents. Some of them I have never [seen]. I wouldn't have a clue who their parents are so that it is really hard. (Year 2 teacher)

The types of information teachers had received from parents tended to relate to things going on in family life such as parental separation or illness. One parent said the classroom teacher had asked to meet with her to discuss possible ways in which the child's experience at köhanga reo could be incorporated into the classroom programme. The teacher had suggested that the child assist in the teaching of te reo Mäori in class and that she send home books in Mäori as well as in English for him to read. At the time of the interview these initiatives had not been put into place.

Empowering students

Both teachers and parents noted that some parents in the school community had more understanding of school literacy practices than others and that some parents relied on their children as a source of information about school practices. Because of this school staff were aware of the importance of providing students with metacognitive skills and a high level of independence so they could articulate the aims and purposes of their learning, both for themselves and for their parents and take responsibility for extending their own learning. This was achieved by giving students responsibility for individual goal setting.

The Year 4 teacher gave a specific example of a child who was able to independently join his local library as a result of being given the skills to do this at school:

> Providing the children with independence…I think is one big thing. This child…he wanted to join the [local] library, so he went along and joined himself and now he goes along. I mean this is a child from a gang-related background. He himself knows how because we go to the community library. They all have their own card down there. He knows that he can go to the library. That he can use the computer. He knows about the joining up – the system. He knows about the collection of text. What types of books you can look for… It's actually educating the *child* to be independent and for him to have those skills to be able to utilise. (Year 4 teacher)

Parents' involvement in school

Kowhai School also made use of community volunteers trained by the Resource Teacher of Literacy. These volunteers heard children requiring extra support read on a daily basis. This initiative was similar to Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka (HPP) in its use of parent tutors and was considered to be extremely successful:

> This has been really successful. It has been going for eight weeks now. [What do you think has made this so successful?] The relationships that the volunteer and the children have developed. (Junior school literacy leader)

Kowhai School also attempted to include parents, extended family, and other community members in school literacy activities by encouraging them to read to children, hear children read, or join the fortnightly trip each class makes to the local public library.

Benefits of including parents in school literacy activities

Teachers also saw benefits for parents or extended family members who had been involved in class literacy activities in the past. They thought parents learnt about the literacy activities children are involved in at school, saw teachers model approaches for helping children with literacy activities, gained confidence in their own ability to support children's literacy development, and in some cases increased their own literacy knowledge or skills.

> They learn more about how their children learn and the methods that they use to learn. Their own experiences at school were so different and they are trying to teach their children at home by those methods. This can be confusing for the child. [Any other benefits?] Probably being involved at school, there is a partnership there. (Junior school literacy leader)

> I think it is really important for parents to see what their child is doing, because a lot of them are unaware that their child is achieving… (Year 4 teacher)

> A lot of the children in our school do not belong to the public library. Some parents have joined their kids up as a result of helping with class trips to the library. (Senior school literacy leader)

Including parents in classroom literacy activities gave students experience of interacting with other adults in the classroom, extra one-on-one help, and let them see that the adults in their wider community valued reading and writing:

> I think then they can see that there is family recognising the importance of education… (Year 4 teacher)

Challenges in including parents in school literacy activities

Apart from parents joining class trips to the library, all three teachers had experienced difficulty in finding parents available to be involved with class literacy activities. At the time of the interview

only the New Entrant teacher had whänau involvement in her classroom literacy programme, which consisted of a grandmother coming in to class to read to children:

> There are only about five parents that I have actually seen, and they all work so it is not possible. (Year 2 teacher)
>
> I have an open door policy in my class and I would love for the parents to come in and I make that clear at the parent-teacher interviews… I would love them to be in the room, hearing the children read, hearing their plays, helping at independent literacy time, but it just doesn't happen. (Year 4 teacher)
>
> …availability—quite honestly because either they are working or they have got pre-schoolers… I have had pre-schoolers in. Parents have brought them in. (New Entrant teacher)

Teachers gave a number of possible reasons for the lack of parents available to take part in class literacy activities. These included the large number of parents with jobs or with pre-schoolers, parents' lack of confidence about their ability to help in class, and parents not valuing literacy activities, or preferring to help with other types of school events such as sport. The junior school literacy leader emphasised the importance of nurturing and training parent volunteers:

> The teacher actually needs to match the parent up to the task that she is asking them to do. Some of our parents can't read so it might be silly to ask them to read a story to a group, and that is one of the reasons that we can't get some parents to actually come in. We know that, the kids will tell us that, and sometimes the parents will tell us that on a one-to-one. So that is one of the things, teachers nurturing those volunteers. (Junior school literacy leader)

Both literacy leaders considered parent involvement in school literacy activities was as important in the senior school as it was in the junior, but observed that the parents of junior school children were more likely to be involved than those of older children. The junior school literacy leader observed that "after Year 2 it drops off quite dramatically". The literacy leaders observed that some parents considered their help in class was not as necessary once their child was reading independently, or they had learnt all they felt they needed to know about their literacy development. They thought that some parents felt less confident about helping children with class reading or writing at the higher levels of the school. Both literacy leaders also noted that the number of parents with jobs or on courses increased with the age of children, affecting their availability.

Differences in parents' involvement and school information sharing by level

Both literacy leaders indicated that, while different teachers took different approaches, the junior school tended to place more emphasis on communicating with parents about reading. In the senior school more is done through the children, as they learn to take responsibility for themselves.

We asked the literacy leaders if there were any particular levels of the school at which they thought parents could benefit from more information and support about helping their children with reading. Both identified the point at which students moved from the junior to the senior syndicate. They felt parents needed to understand that children did not move as quickly through the reading levels as they became independent readers, and that the focus shifted from the technicalities of learning how to read, to thinking critically about text, and using it for a range of purposes:

> I think when they get to the independent stage it's quite important because it's almost like there's a transfer of responsibility of teachers teaching children to read…and then reading to learn. So you are passing it over to the child, but the child needs to be encouraged out of school to do that. [What would the parents' role be there? What information would the parent need?] They need to appreciate the value of reading because a lot of them don't read themselves. I don't think that comes naturally and so that is a hard thing really. A lot of our parents would say their sports is more important… They [the children] have learnt to read but they don't see that they will lose a lot of that if they don't continue to read… And encouraging them in their interests, reading and their interests, researching things…go to the library. They need to have someone there reminding them until they are independent… It's another process, it starts again from scratch almost but it's not teaching them to read, it's teaching them to read for learning. (Junior school literacy leader)

> Parents need to know to chat with their children about their reading and ask questions. Quite a few of our children, especially our Samoan children, actually read quickly and fluently and even with some expression, but they have no idea about what they've been reading when they come to the end of it… The issue with comprehension is huge. They can usually read the words and so it's hard for the parent to understand that their child may be having reading difficulties. Their understanding isn't as high as their decoding… Parents need to know the types of questions to ask and ideas to talk about – so it's not just factual questions… Parents need to talk with children about what they read. And parents need to know that this type of talking is important for comprehension – not just talking about books, but talking about all sorts of things. (Senior school literacy leader)

This view was reinforced by some of the comments made by the Year 4 teacher who commented on parents' misunderstanding of the importance of comprehension. The Year 4 teacher considered that some parents found it difficult to understand the importance of providing students with a depth of understanding at a lower reading level rather than pushing them on to higher levels of reading material.

The junior school literacy leader identified another point of transition, from preschool to school entry, to be a time when parents could benefit from more information about supporting their children's literacy development:

> I think a lot more could do it, they have done it that transition time before they start school. Some years we have done that really well, but as the workload's increased… I would go to the pre-school centres once a term and talk to the parents of the children who are coming that term and we would go through the routines and what would happen at school and what

> our expectations were and ask the parents what their expectations were. And then we had, and we still have, those transition visits where they come in for 6 weeks before they 5. They come in for that developmental period the first 2 weeks and then the next 2 weeks they stay through the literacy time…and the parents are actually with them so they are all getting that picture of what's happening in the literacy programme... (Junior school literacy leader)

Summary

Overall, the staff at Kowhai School expressed lower levels of confidence than the teachers at the other two schools that parents engaged in the types of literacy-related activities at home that they considered important. Teachers considered that some parents did not place enough value on their child's reading on the basis of their interactions with these parents, their lack of school involvement, or observations of children's school literacy behaviours. Teachers were quick to note however that this was not true of all parents, and that at times the life circumstances of some parents impacted on their ability to assist their child at home.

The literacy leaders and teachers identified the need to increase the information sharing occurring between themselves and parents, as students became independent readers. In particular, they saw the need to share with parents ideas about how to support reading comprehension through exposing their child to a range of text types and talking with their child about text.

The staff at Kowhai School had developed a number of innovations aimed at building stronger partnerships with the parents in their community and encouraging their involvement in school events. The initiatives considered to be most successful at Kowhai School were those that involved including the child in these partnerships. This was done through replacing the traditional parent-teacher interview with a three-way conference which, in the senior school, was run as much as possible by the student, and through supplementing the traditional school report with portfolios of annotated student work, teacher comments, and professional information. A deliberate attempt was made by school staff to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and develop the skills to enable them to take their parents on their learning journey. Teachers saw the benefits of extending this principle to school meetings for parents, noting that attendance was greatest when they revolved around students, as was the case with the Duffy assemblies.

Key to the success of parent and teacher meetings was a social component, which enabled the sharing of food and the building of relationships, both between school staff and parents, and between parents and other parents. These were the features of the two initiatives considered to have been the most successful, that is the Home-School Partnership Programme, and the coffee group for new parents. The success of the Home-School Partnership Programme also rested on a number of principles of effective partnerships, namely the active role it gave to the parent-partners, and in the deliberate building of a community around a common goal. The challenges of these new models were both money and time. When the need to prioritise funding arose, the

funding of class teachers was prioritised over additional initiatives to support partnerships with parents.

Discussion of the findings from the schools

The schools selected for this study were known for their interest and good practice in building literacy partnerships with the parents in their communities. As a result there were many similarities in the approaches taken by these schools to sharing literacy-related information and practices with parents.

Teachers' interest in building literacy partnerships with parents was based on their belief in the importance of the role of parents. In most cases they described the role of parents as working in partnership with school staff. When teachers were asked about the sorts of things they hoped parents would do in specific situations, such as reading to their children or hearing them read, they tended to identify activities and behaviours that were closely tied to their own roles as teachers.

Although teachers considered information about students' home literacy practices to be important, the degree to which parents offered or teachers sought information about home literacy practices varied. There tended to be a stronger information flow from school to home than vice versa. The formal structures for information sharing, such as parent information evenings, tended to emphasise information sharing from the school's perspective. Teachers relied on more informal avenues to collect information about home literacy practices with the exception of parent-teacher interviews, which were used for this purpose.

The teachers in the study thought that some parents valued different aspects of their child's reading development than they did. This mainly related to concepts about what being a good reader means. Teachers observed that some parents viewed reading ability purely in terms of the ability to decode increasingly complex text. Teachers had a broader conception of reading, which included the ability to read a wide range of text types, the ability to comprehend texts at different levels, and to think critically about text. Teachers noted that it was important to explain to parents this broader conception of reading especially as students moved up the school when more emphasis was placed on broadening the type of texts they read and the activities they engaged in than on "moving up the levels".

All the teachers in this study expressed a commitment to sharing of information with parents about their child's reading. This involved the sharing of information at class level through structured reporting procedures such as school reports, student portfolios, parent-teacher interviews or three-way conferences, and through informal contact such as chats before or after school. Opportunities were also made for parents to contribute to class-based literacy activities. Each school had also developed strategies for sharing knowledge about literacy at a school-wide

or syndicate level with parents through school-based meetings, and written information sent home with reading books, in home books, and in newsletters.

The main differences in these schools related to the contexts in which they were situated, the perceived needs of their communities, and the impact these had on teacher expectations. All the teachers commented on the difficulty of reaching those parents who did not come to the school for interviews or meetings. The extent of this difficulty differed by school with Totara School experiencing the highest involvement of parents and Kowhai School, the least. Teachers interpreted parents' lack of visibility at the school in a number of ways. These included parents lacking confidence in entering the school or contacting the teacher, parents being unable to attend school events such as parent-teacher interviews or meetings because of their life circumstances, or parents not prioritising or valuing information sharing with the school.

Teacher confidence that parents engaged in school-like activities with their child related to the presence of parents at school interviews and meetings, and to their observations of the literacy behaviours exhibited by the children in their classes. The teachers from Totara School, the decile 10 school, expressed the most confidence that the parents in their community engaged in school-like literacy activities with their children at home, followed by those from Rimu School. Teachers from Kowhai School expressed relatively low levels of confidence. Teacher confidence also differed by year level, with teachers of Year 4 students expressing lower overall levels of confidence than those of New Entrant or Year 2 children.

Despite differing levels of confidence, all the staff in this study expressed a commitment to building and maintaining partnerships with the parents in their communities, and were proactive in exploring ways of reaching their less visible parents. Teachers and literacy leaders observed that relationships with parents formed the foundation for information sharing. At both Kowhai and Rimu Schools those initiatives considered most successful for sharing literacy information with parents were those that involved a social element involving the sharing of food and fun activities as well as the sharing of information. Teachers also commented on the increased likelihood of parents attending school events if they had been invited to attend by other parents in their community.

School-based events in which children were involved were also perceived as successful. These included parent meetings at which children performed, or at which childcare or opportunities for parents to bring their children with them were offered such as the Home-School Partnership Programme or the parent coffee morning offered at Kowhai School.

Teacher comments suggest a range of possible reasons for the success of school-based events in which children were involved. These included parents perceiving school events involving their child as being more relevant or important, feeling more confident in going to the school when accompanied by their child, and not having to find babysitters if attending school events with their children.

Opportunities for students to take a central role in partnerships with parents were also provided through three-way conferences. Teachers and literacy leaders described the way in which children were given responsibility for goal setting so they could explain the aims and purposes of their learning. While the primary purpose of this was to allow students to take responsibility for their learning, teachers observed that this also provided an avenue for both children and teachers to share pedagogical information with parents. These three-way conferences also provided opportunities for home literacy practices to be discussed.

The schools in this study adopted a number of initiatives to ensure that the child was central to other forms of communication with parents. Examples included developing portfolios of student work to be shared at interviews with parents and attaching pedagogical information to student literacy-related publications that were shared with the school community.

Teachers' experiences, confidence in, and expectations of parents impacted on the type and nature of information sharing they engaged in with parents. The issue of how much pedagogical information to share with parents was one that the teachers in this study approached differently. Finding the right balance between "putting off" parents with too much information or dis-empowering them with too little was not always straightforward. Some of the teachers at Kowhai School spoke of the importance of not overwhelming parents with too much information and educational jargon. Some of the teachers at Rimu School expressed uncertainty about how much information to share with parents. The philosophy of the teachers at Totara School of "articulating their practice" meant that the information shared with parents was comprehensive. The junior school literacy leader saw parent acquisition of knowledge as providing them with a sense of belonging.

The observations and experiences of the staff at the three schools in this study demonstrate the way in which information sharing can spiral up or down. An upward spiralling of information sharing could be seen occurring at Totara School where a high number of parents showed interest in their child's literacy in ways visible to school staff, such as attending interviews, meetings, or working alongside the teacher in the classroom. The Totara School teachers had high expectations of the involvement of the parents in their community based on their prior experiences and the literacy skills the children in their classes came equipped with. The high expectations of teachers resulted in the sharing of a high level of pedagogical knowledge at literacy meetings, interviews, in printed materials, and in training parents to teach writing to junior school students. These parents were then even better equipped to support their children as readers and writers at home, and had even more common ground from which to share information with teachers in the future.

Teacher dilemmas about the nature and amount of information to share with parents highlights a need for systematic approaches to collecting evidence about the effectiveness of school approaches to building partnerships around literacy practices. Teacher decision making tended to be based on prior experience, observations, and anecdotal evidence, as did teacher beliefs about the success of approaches to sharing literacy information with parents.

The challenge faced by schools with lower parent involvement was how to offer the parents in their community the power and sense of belonging that being informed about school practices provides. The schools in this study had developed a variety of ways of making this possible through creating a sense of community.

3. Parents' experiences of information sharing about literacy with the school

Introduction

Next we look at the parents' perspectives including their literacy goals for their children, and their views of their own and the teacher's roles. We focus on parents' experiences of school attempts to share literacy information at class, syndicate, and school levels, and their views on the content and mode of delivery of the information they received. We also consider parents' involvement in classroom literacy activities, and opportunities provided to parents to share information about their home literacy practices. Only statistically significant differences by school, class level, or child's reading performance are reported. We found that while there were significant differences by year level there were very few significant differences by children's reading performance. This may have been because there were few children reading below their chronological age in the sample.

Parents' goals

Attitudes to reading

When we asked the 54 parents in this study about the attitudes towards reading they wanted their children to develop, most (46) mentioned an enjoyment or interest in reading. Some also considered it important that their children become independent, self-motivated, or habitual readers (10), and that they develop confidence in their reading ability (9):

> To love books and enjoy reading. (New Entrant parent)
>
> To [want to] read mainly. He's not a bookworm but he can read. Not to be scared to ask questions. To be confident in reading. (Year 2 parent)
>
> I would like him not to rely on me all the time to read to him. I would like him to read on his own. (Year 4 parent)

While the majority of responses rested on the assumption that reading is important, relatively few parents commented explicitly on the value and purpose of reading, or why it was important that

their child enjoy it. A small group (6) indicated that they saw reading as a vehicle for broadening their children's horizons, or for gaining knowledge and new ideas (6):

> To enjoy reading. To be a confident reader, and for him to know that he can read. To know that reading gives you knowledge, and knowledge can give you more awareness. (New Entrant parent)

> Just a love of reading and an appreciation of the world of knowledge and experiences he can develop from reading. (Year 4 parent)

Skills and knowledge

When we asked parents about the skills and knowledge they hoped their child would learn, over one-third (19) did not specify the skills or knowledge they wanted their child to gain. Instead, they either made general statements about their child reading at the right level, making progress, and "learning the basics" (13) or indicated that they were not sure (6):

> The basics for where she's at. [Like do you have an idea…?] Not really. (New Entrant parent)

> It's hard to answer. I'm not that aware of what she should be able to do. It's my first child at school, at this level. I don't know what to expect her to learn, and what is normal for her age. (Year 2 parent)

Of those parents who did specify the skills and knowledge they hoped their child would acquire, the most frequent response mentioned by just under two-thirds related to children's understanding of what they read (21):

> Recognising words and making sense of what he is reading, so he can tell me about what he is reading. Understanding what he has read and being able to relate it back to me. (Year 2 parent)

> To learn to digest and interpret what he reads, to take his comprehension to the next level. To have the ability to analyse and interpret, not just sound out words. (Year 4 parent)

Parents also considered word recognition (7), the ability to sound out words (6), and independence (6) to be important:

> To be able to pick words more herself—not relying upon pictures in books to get her through the word. (Year 2 parent)

> Sounding out the words by herself. Giving it a try before she asks. (Year 4 parent)

> To increase his ability to be able to read for longer on his own and also to feel confident that he can read something and have a go at something. (Year 2 parent)

Parents' views of their role in supporting their child as a reader

Parents' support of their child's reading development

We asked parents an open-ended question about the things they did at home which might help their child as a reader, and prompted them to consider non-reading activities such as writing and talking, as well as those that more overtly related to reading. Table 5 below shows the 17 most frequently mentioned activities. Providing reading materials and opportunities for writing were mentioned by a similar number of parents of children at each year level. More parents of New Entrant and Year 2 children mentioned reading to or with their child, listening to their child read, talking, going to the library, or playing word games with their child. A greater number of parents of Year 2 children mentioned incorporating reading into everyday activities such as going to the supermarket. More parents of Years 2 and 4 children saw modelling reading themselves as supporting their child's reading development than those of New Entrant children.

Table 5 **Most frequently mentioned home activities to support reading by year level**

Activity	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Provide reading material in the home	9	9	9	27
Read to or with child	11	8	4	23
Encourage or provide opportunities for writing	7	8	8	23
Incorporate reading into everyday activities, e.g. at the supermarket	3	11	5	19
Listen to child read aloud	9	7	1	17
Talk with and listen to child in general (not specifically related to text)	6	5	2	13
Model reading	2	6	5	13
Go to the library with child	5	4	2	11
Play word games or games based on grapho-phonic skills	5	4	2	11
Provide time and routines for child to read	4	3	2	9
Encourage/tell child to read/that reading is important	3	2	4	9
Talk with child about reading material	4	3	1	8
Tell child stories	2	4	0	6
Provide computer reading programs/games	2	3	1	6
Direct teaching or testing of child	3	3	0	6
Introduce child to new types of books	0	3	2	5
Help child learn spelling words	2	2	1	5

Parents' views of the importance of their role

When we asked parents how important they considered their role to be in their child's reading development, approximately three-quarters (39) described it as "essential", and approximately one-quarter (13) as "important". Only one parent considered their role to be "not very important", and one was "not sure". The reasons most parents considered their role to be so important included the need for parents and teachers to work as partners (14), for parents to show children they valued reading (12), and for parents to encourage (11), extend (10), and give one-on-one time (8) to their children.

Parents' confidence in supporting their children

Just over half the parents (30) felt "very confident" in their abilities to support their child's reading development at home. Over a third (20) felt "quite confident", only a few (3) felt "not very confident", and one was "not sure".

The most frequently reported reason for parent confidence was their own knowledge about, confidence in, or enjoyment of reading (21). Other reasons included having gained professional knowledge about reading from the school, or from non-school-related sources (9). Some parents referred to the fact that their child was performing well at reading (5).

> It seems like a natural thing to do. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I just did the school course on how to read a book. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I've helped the teacher at school. I knew what they were doing. Otherwise I wouldn't know… (New Entrant parent)

The most frequently reported reasons for parents' lack of confidence related to not being sure of what was expected of them (5) and the belief that they were not good at reading (5):

> I can help her sound out but I don't know what methods they use at school to teach them. (New Entrant parent)
>
> It's a new style of leaming for me with my education. They thought the school would do everything and I fell through the gaps. (Year 4 parent)
>
> At this stage she's quite young so I feel confident because she's bringing home easy books. I'm not a great reader and I'm not good at spelling and that so I don't want her to be like me. Once she brings home harder books I might not be confident because I'm not good with the longer words. (Year 2 parent)

Parents' views of teachers' roles

Parents' views of the importance of teachers' roles

Most parents (43) considered the role of the teacher to be "essential" in their child's reading development, some (8) rated the teacher's role as "important", one as "not very important", and one was "not sure". The most frequent reasons parents gave for rating the role of the teacher as "essential" or "important" were their professional knowledge and experience (39), the high regard in which their children held them (16), and the amount of instructional time the teacher had with them (6).

Half the parents (27) indicated that they were "very confident" in the ability of their child's teacher to support the development of their child as a reader. Just under half (23) indicated that they were "quite confident". One was "not very confident", and the remaining (3) were "not

sure". The most frequently mentioned reasons for parents' feelings of confidence were a general trust in the teacher's professional or personal qualities (25), the belief that their child was making good progress (18), and the parent's good relationship with the teacher (6). The most frequently mentioned reservations in regard to parental confidence in the teacher related to large class sizes (7), and the belief that their child was not being extended enough (4). Other reasons for parents' lack of confidence related to a lack of teacher experience (3), communication with them (3), or rapport with their child (3).

Most of the parents (39) thought that the literacy goals of their child's teacher were consistent with their own. Some parents were not sure (7), chose not to answer (4), or considered the literacy goals of the teacher differed from their own (4).

Parents' knowledge of class literacy practices

While most parents were either "quite confident" or "very confident" in the ability of the classroom teacher to support their child's reading development, most parents indicated that they did not know much about the sorts of things teachers did at school to help children develop as readers. In this respect little had changed when comparing the experiences of these parents to those in the Wylie and Smith (1995) study. Over one-third (22) considered they knew "nothing", approximately half (28) considered they knew "a bit", while only a small number of parents (4) considered they knew "a lot". Significantly more parents from Kowhai School and Rimu School than from Totara School reported knowing "nothing" about the way in which their child's teacher taught them reading, as shown in Table 6. This was consistent with the differing degrees of confidence teachers expressed in their school's parents engaging in the school-like literacy practices they considered desirable.

Table 6 **Parents' knowledge of class reading practices**

Parent perceptions	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Know nothing	2	10	10	22
Know "a lot" or "a bit"	16	7	9	32
Total	18	17	19	54

P = 0.007

However when we asked parents about what they did know, approximately one-quarter (13) either made very general statements or indicated that they were not sure. Of those parents who did mention specific details about what they thought went on in their children's classes the most frequent were that the children do reading in groups (8) and that the teacher reads to the children (6).

Information parents would like

Information about what the teacher does at school

Most parents (40) indicated that they would like more information about how their children's teachers taught children to read. Consistent with the data presented in Table 6, significantly more parents from Kowhai School and Rimu School than Totara School wanted more information, as shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7 **Parents' desire for more information on how the classroom teacher taught reading**

Parent desire for more information	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Wanted more information	9	15	16	40
Total	18	17	19	54

P = 0.02

Of the 21 parents who knew "nothing" about how reading was taught at school, nearly all (18) wanted more information and of the 32 who knew "a lot" or "a bit" approximately two-thirds (21) wanted more information.

Parents had quite specific information needs. Approximately half of those parents who wanted more information were interested in learning about the goals and approaches of the teacher (21):

> …How are the children taught? Do they get put in groups? Do they have one-on-one? How are their needs identified? Do they do assessments and how often? How do they determine whether kids need Reading Recovery? (New Entrant parent)

> …I'd like to know what ways they use to teach children to read. If it was working, I'd do that. (New Entrant parent)

Over a third (15) wanted information about the different reading stages or levels children move through:

> A sense of the steps so we can have realistic expectations. (Year 2 parent)

> When they have moved into their groups, why have they been moved and what are they doing? What are the stages of reading?… More specific information about what she's moving on to. (Year 2 parent)

One-quarter (10) wanted to know what the teacher was currently focusing on at school so they could also focus on that at home:

> As they move up the school, what the changes are in how reading is taught. [Why would that be useful?] So you can support what's happening at school. (Year 2 parent)

Parents were also interested in the reading material students used at school (8), the amount and frequency of reading that occurred at school (6), and how letter/sound relationships and new words were taught (4).

Information about supporting home reading

Along with information about the school programme, most parents (40) indicated that they would like more information about how to support their child's reading development at home, either currently or in the future. Just under half of these (17) made general statements about the information they wanted, including clarification of the expectations of the teacher, of their role at home, and information for aligning their home practices with the school's:

> Anything that can help me to assist his reading. There are different ways and it would be nice to get a different perspective. (Year 2 parent)

> That would be good the whole way through school. Expectations of parents and suggestions of how the parents can help. (New Entrant parent)

Specific information desired included information about the reading stages or levels children go through (7), information about how to interest or maintain their child's interest in reading (5), and how to choose appropriate books for their child's use at home (4):

> If I had an understanding of how the system worked and where she was at I could understand what skills she needed at each stage. Not to push her, but just to know where she was headed. (New Entrant parent)

> How to keep her focused and interested. (Year 2 parent)

> I would like to know books which are of interest to boys. (Year 4 parent)

Information parents would have liked in the past

Just under half of the parents (26) indicated that they would have liked more information in the past about how to help their children with reading. Half of these did not specify the nature of the information they would have liked, seven would have liked information about the stages or levels a child progresses through when learning to read, and six would have liked more information about their particular child's reading performance. A number of parents would have liked information on the importance of reading with their children (3) and about what to do when hearing a child read aloud (3):

> From the ages of 5 to 7 this is the time to be conveying information. Don't tell me when he's turning to a senior he is not doing so well, which is what I've encountered over the years. I get a little suspicious with the, 'He's doing ok.' The problem with teachers at the school level is that they don't want to be too blatant. [I] get this wishy-washy, 'He's doing fine.' Don't tell me at Years 4 and 5 'He's doing ok' and then as he is about to leave school he has a problem which has happened to other parents I know. (Year 4 parent)

> With my previous daughter the school told us she was going to extra reading lessons. It would have been good if they could have told us earlier and suggested things we could do to help at home. (New Entrant parent)

> I wish I'd known how to encourage her instead of being frustrated. At the time it was frustrating because I didn't know how to help her. I didn't know what I was doing. I wish I'd known how to sound out words. I wish I had a better education before I had my children. I'm getting to learn as they learn. I learn the stuff as I need it. We're helping each other as parent and children. In my day they didn't used to encourage you. They just used to push you to the side if you didn't click on. (Year 4 parent)

School-wide or syndicate-wide information

We asked parents an open-ended question about the information about reading they had received from the school. Most (44) reported receiving some form of information. Over one-third (20) had received information from a brochure or pamphlet about literacy sent home from school, and approximately one-third (15) referred to literacy information they had read in general school or syndicate notices. Nearly half (26) referred to a school- or syndicate-wide literacy meeting for parents but just under one-quarter (13) had attended. Other information included that provided in home books or reading logs accompanying school reading books (6), the colour wheel found on posters or the back of school reading books (3), and information packs received on their child's arrival at school (3). A number of parents also referred to Duffy books (5).

Preferred means for gaining information

We asked parents to select their preferred modes for receiving general school information about how to help children with reading. The two most frequently selected options were written information (28) and parent information meetings (20), followed by seeing a demonstration (14).

The reasons parents preferred written information included their inability to attend school meetings because of life circumstances, the possibility of referring back to written information, and being able to process written information at their own pace and time:

> Because I can sit back and read and understand. The paper form, I will always have. The information at a seminar, I can forget. (Year 4 parent)

> I'd prefer more notices and written information because with working lifestyles you can't make the appointments. If it's after school you have to take your kids with you. That [written information] would benefit everyone, not just the parents who are available. (Year 4 parent)

> …With written information both my husband and I can look at it. With a meeting only one of us can go. (New Entrant parent)

Parents' reasons for preferring information meetings included the potential for interaction and the possibility for talking to and hearing the views of other parents, and the opportunity to get more specific information:

> Meeting with other parents 'cause then I'd get an idea of what the other parents were thinking too. I like to know how other parents think—how *their* kids are learning. It's good to know how other parents think about teaching. You can get some different ideas from them as well. (Year 2 parent)

> …More evening meetings. They suit a lot of dads and full-time workers. In the evenings you get a different mix. I don't think written information is all that useful. It's easy to overlook. It's not as easy to use. At meetings you get positive feedback. You get a lot of parents who are already doing good things mixing with those who aren't. I feel confident about knowing what to do but I still go to the meetings to support other parents. (Year 2 parent)

Those parents who liked the idea of seeing a demonstration indicated that seeing something in practice was more meaningful to them than just hearing about it in theory:

> A demonstration would be good for a lot of parents. It's all very well to see things written down but if it's not in your culture or nature to be a reader, you're not going to start by reading a pamphlet… (Year 2 parent)

> You actually can see what they're doing. You can see how it's done and you can do the same at home. Seeing different ways demonstrated helps give ideas that we can do at home. (New Entrant parent)

Information sharing at class level

Teacher-initiated information sharing

Parents identified a number of channels through which they gained or shared information with their child's teacher about their child's reading progress. Most frequently mentioned were school reports (39) and parent-teacher interviews (38). At the time of the study five parents of New Entrant children had not been to parent-teacher interviews due to the time of year when their child started school, and six parents, two of children from each year level, had not received school reports. Another frequently mentioned opportunity for information sharing occurred through informal chats with the teacher (31). Parents also identified notes or notices from the classroom teacher (15), and other means such as telephone conversations.

While most parents identified at least one channel through which the classroom teacher had provided them with information about their child's reading development, only ten recalled instances in which they had been asked to share their knowledge about their child as a reader. The nature of these requests for information ranged from a survey on the interests and activities of all the children in the class to specific discussions about the child's reading:

> The teacher rang me a few times about the homework issue. He felt [child] was picking difficult books and pretending to read. He asked what he read at home. I told his teacher he doesn't read at home. [Do you know how the teacher was planning on using that

> information?] He set up a system of [child] bringing journals home to improve his fluency. (Year 4 parent)
>
> She [the teacher] asked me, 'Does he understand what he's reading when he reads at home?' [Do you know why she was asking that?] She'd noticed he sometimes doesn't comprehend but reads it anyway. She was wanting to work on this. (Year 2 parent)
>
> We get a form every 6 months to fill out her interests. [Do you know what the teacher does with that information?] I don't know. It would be good to know. (New Entrant parent)
>
> She [the teacher] asked me in for a talk because [child] came from köhanga. I said he was clued up in Mäori. She said she would send home every second book in Mäori. She was going to get [child] to teach her some Mäori, and the rest of the class too…but that hasn't happened yet. (New Entrant parent)

A small number of parents (6) indicated that they had worked with the classroom teacher to help their child with a particular need in reading. These experiences were all framed positively by parents and ranged from broadening or extending the child's reading material to providing information about how the parent could work with a particular reading issue with their child at home:

> Pointing to the words. She raised the issue. She suggested that I get her to point to the words. We were both aware [that the child wasn't looking at the words]... (New Entrant parent)
>
> He needed more reading at home as he is above the class reading [level]. Getting him more, and a wider range of books for him to read. (Year 4 parent)

Parent-initiated information sharing

Just under half the parents (26) considered it "essential" and just under half (24) "important" for teachers to find out about children's home reading experiences from parents. Only two parents considered this was "not very important", and two were "not sure". The main reason parents viewed teacher knowledge of home literacy practices as important was because this could help inform teaching decisions made at school (33). Parents also considered that it would help establish some consistency in messages and expectations across school and home settings (8) and would show the child that the teacher and parent were working as a team towards the same goals (5). The fact that parents might notice things about their child's reading that the teacher had not observed was also referred to by some parents (5).

Just under half the parents (23) had contacted the classroom teacher to discuss information or ideas about their child's literacy development. There were significant differences by year level. It was more likely for parents of New Entrant and Year 2 children to initiate contact with the teacher, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 **Parent-initiated contact with the teacher about reading by year level**

	New Entrants	Year 2	Year 4	Total
Initiated contact	8	12	3	23
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.01

There were also significant differences by school in the number of parents who had initiated contact with their child's teacher. Parents from Totara School and Rimu School were more likely to initiate contact with the classroom teacher as shown in Table 9.

Table 9 **Parent-initiated contact with the teacher about reading by school**

	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Initiated contact	8	11	4	23
Total	18	17	19	54

P = 0.03

The most frequently reported reason parents gave for contacting their child's teacher related to concern about their child's home reading or writing behaviours (8). Other reasons included concern about the nature of the school books being brought home from school (3), or to give the teacher general feedback about how their child was progressing with reading at home (3). Five parents reported informing teachers about changes in family circumstances, which might impact on the child's performance at school in general:

> I was telling her he was reading at a higher level at home than he was reading at school. She thought he was having trouble comprehending the material at school but I didn't think that could be the case given what I know he reads at home. (Year 2 parent)

> I was concerned because he won't read at home and I wanted to know whether he was keeping up at his level. (Year 2 parent)

The most common reason (19) parents gave for not sharing their ideas or knowledge about their child's literacy with the classroom teacher was that they had no worries about their child's progress or assumed that if there was a problem, the teacher would contact them. Some parents (8) indicated either that it had never occurred to them to approach the teacher with their ideas about their child's home reading, or that they were not sure of why they had never done this:

> I had no need. He must be ok 'cause we've had no information that he is a slow reader—no negative feedback. (Year 4 parent)

Most parents (47) were "very confident" about going to speak to the classroom teacher about their child's reading. Four felt "quite confident", and three were "not very confident". The main reason for parents' feelings of confidence (38) related to their perception of the teacher being approachable, friendly, and welcoming:

> She's easy to approach. You know she'd think about what you said. (New Entrant parent)

> They make me feel comfortable and they encourage discussions about [child]'s reading. (Year 2 parent)
>
> She rings me, and I too don't have any problems talking to her. She is approachable. (Year 4 parent)

A number of parents (8) who said they were "very" or "quite" confident made comments suggesting that their determination to support their child would over-ride any potential lack of confidence they might feel:

> My child's education is important to me. No matter what, I'd go to see the teacher. I'd need to be there for my child. (Year 4 parent)

Parents' reasons for feeling less than confident included bad previous experiences in approaching teachers, or a lack of confidence in approaching the current teacher:

> Because I knew that I'd approached the DP in the past and I was told it was just anxiety and I had to get through that in order to be heard. (Year 2 parent)
>
> I'm quite a shy person. (Year 4 parent)
>
> She is a little approachable. She is very different from other teachers. Other teachers have been bubbly, and this teacher is very quiet. (Year 2 parent)

Parents' knowledge of their child's reading ability

Most parents (40) considered that their child was reading at about the right level for their age, others (11) considered that their child was reading below that expected for their age, and several (3) indicated that they were "not sure".

Parents' perceptions of their child's ability were based on a wide range of information sources, the most frequently mentioned of which was information from their child's teacher through either verbal or written reports (21):

> Talking to the teacher, and the books that he is reading are age appropriate. When I am talking to his teacher she tells me what he is doing. (Year 4 parent)
>
> Her school report gave her reading age… (Year 2 parent)

Over one-third of parents (17) based their judgement on their own observations of their child's progress:

> I think he is doing very well. He is reading all the words in his book he brings home. He enjoys reading. He is a fast learner. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I think he's a bit below because he's still picking up the real basic words and he's not retaining them and I get a bit worried about that. I know he can do better. At the beginning of the year he read sentences. He keeps slipping back. (New Entrant parent)

> …My own expectation of where she should be. I'm confident she's at a good level. Her school report gave her reading age and [I think she is at the right level] from the words she can recognise. (Year 2 parent)

Parents' perceptions of their child's reading ability were also based on the difficulty of the books their children brought home from school (9), and comparisons made with their child's peers (7), and siblings (6):

> She's probably reading a bit higher [than her age] from the type of books she is bringing home. We are now having bigger words and she is reading books with conversations in them. (Year 2 parent)

> [She's] a bit behind. Other girls in her class are reading better. (New Entrant parent)

> Because she is at the same level as my other daughter was at. She has been steadily moving up her levels in reading… She was in orange level and now she has moved up two colours… (Year 2 parent)

A number of parents (5) were unsure what their views of their children's reading abilities were based on.

Although most parents had an opinion about the relative reading performance of their child, nearly half (25) were unsure of the level their child was reading at. Just over a quarter (14) described their child's level with general phrases such as "about average" and the remaining parents (15) gave an exact level such as "gold". There were significant differences by school in parents' ability to specify the level their child was reading at, with parents from Totara School having a more detailed picture of their child's performance.

Table 10 **Parents' awareness of their child's reading level**

	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Named a specific level	10	0	5	15
General idea of child's reading level or "not sure"	8	17	14	39
Total	18	17	19	54

P = 0.001

Parents' conceptions of the reading level of their child did not always correspond with school records of their reading performance. While all but one of the 15 parents of children reading above their chronological age considered their child to be reading at or above their age level, over one-third of the 21 children reading at their chronological age considered their child to be reading below the expected level for their age, and two were not sure. Of greater concern was that five of the eight parents of children reading below their chronological age believed that their child was reading at about the right level for their age, and one was "not sure". This lack of knowledge may have obstructed the actions of some of these parents. These findings point to the need for providing more explicit information to parents about their children's performance and its implications, especially for those children reading below their chronological age.

The impact of information on parents' home literacy practices

Over one-third of the parents (21) considered the professional information they had received from school had changed some of their home literacy practices, particularly information about hearing children read aloud (16). This included information on encouraging early readers to finger point as they read, knowing what to say when a child comes to an unknown word, and understanding the role of pictures when learning to read:

> Pointing to the words as we read them. This made a huge improvement. He's recognising the words and not just remembering them. (Year 2 parent)

> Before I got information from the school I didn't know how to help my children with reading. I'd just sit and listen. I would feel quite frustrated. They'd get to a word they didn't know. I'd give the sounds. But I realise I'd practically given them the answer. When I got shown what to do by the teachers it got better… (Year 4 parent)

> That you encourage the child to use the picture to guess the word. About sounding out. Encouraging them to sound out words they're not sure of. Not rushing to intervene when a child stops at a word. Giving them time to work it out but not too long… (New Entrant parent)

Parents also considered their home practices had changed as a result of school information about reading to children (5), the importance of talking with children in general and in relation to shared text (4), and on engaging their child's interest in reading (4):

> …To say, 'What do you think is going to happen?' to get her input into the story. To point to the words when I read to her… We give her more time to interact with us when we're reading the story. (New Entrant parent)

> …[Giving] more encouragement. I was tougher on my [older] boy. I learnt not to knock them – their confidence [and to] make it a happy pleasant time, so that's changed. (Year 4 parent)

Some parents (5) considered that school information had made them feel more informed in general, or had given them confidence by confirming what they were already doing:

> It gave me the confidence to know I was doing the right sort of thing… (Year 2 parent)

The impact of other information sources on parents' home literacy practices

We asked parents to indicate from a list the other sources of literacy information they used. As shown in Table 11, nearly all parents (48) reported accessing literacy information from at least one of the non-school sources listed, and most of these (40) mentioned more than two different sources of this information.

Table 11 **Non-school sources of literacy information accessed by parents**

Source	Total (n=54)
Books	37
Family	31
Friends	27
Television	22
Posters/pamphlets	23
Librarian	22
Bookshop assistant	19
Newspapers	17
Videos	16
Internet	15
Radio	11
Other	9

When asked about the impact of this non-school information the most frequent responses were that it had provided general ideas or confirmation about their home literacy practices (20), and given them ideas about hearing children read aloud (10), most of which (7) related to sounding out or recognising words:

> I got the idea of reading to them before they are born and right from when they're very young. [Where did you get that idea?] From family. (Year 2 parent)
>
> A friend told [me] about phonics flash cards. I bought them and used them at home… A phonics CDROM. We adapted the ideas. I learnt that phonics was the key to reading. We got the idea of making games and songs about phonics – with sounds. (New Entrant parent)
>
> Sounding out a word. Thinking of other words that are like the one that they don't know. [Where did you get these ideas?] From Sesame Street. (New Entrant Parent)

Parents also got new ideas or changed home practices from information about making reading fun (5), about all reading being beneficial, no matter what the source (5), about the importance of reading to children (4), and about the types of books their children might enjoy (4):

> Different approaches. Mainly try to relax about things and to make it fun and not make it hard work. (Year 2 parent)
>
> We have messages from Grandma that more reading is better – that the more you read, the better you get…it doesn't really matter what it is – the Internet, cartoons… (Year 4 parent)
>
> When you take the kids shopping you can say, 'What's that?' and ask them what different labels say. (New Entrant parent)
>
> [I read a] book that told what books to buy for your child at different ages and what to look for at different ages… When they're one, just one picture and one word. It also has lists of titles of books you can buy at different ages. (New Entrant parent)

After one parent mentioned that the information she gained from television was information about phonics from a *Reading Master* infomercial we asked other parents about the information they accessed from television. Comments made by five parents suggest that *Reading Master* infomercials had a considerable influence on their beliefs about learning to read and their actions at home:

> The *Reading Master* advertisement gave me ideas such as flashcards. I got ideas from it and made up my own *Reading Master* system at home, because it was really expensive. I made flashcards. I made cards with vowels. I bought simple books and started with those. I learnt about breaking words down. I did all this before she started school when she was at kindy. (Year 2 parent)

Over one-quarter of the parents (15) indicated that information from non-school sources served to confirm existing ideas and practices, and five indicated that the information had helped them feel more informed in a general sense, but did not specify exactly how their ideas or practices had changed:

> [It] confirmed [our] ideas in general – let us know we are on the right track. (Year 2 parent)

> …Good Morning TV [showed] how to encourage kids to read by reading to them. We were already doing that. (New Entrant parent)

The findings from this study indicate that the quality of the other sources of literacy information parents had access to varied considerably with some referring to *Sesame Street* or infomercials while others referred to information from friends or family members who were teachers or librarians, or from their own reading about literacy.

When information from school and other sources differs

There were some parents (5) who considered that the information they received from school differed from that obtained from non-school sources. When faced with this discrepancy, most of these parents (4) chose to use the non-school source. The reasons given for this included believing that the school had not provided them with the information they needed, that the school approach did not suit their child, or that the non-school approach was better because of their observations of the results with other children they knew:

> The school says to look at the picture [when you don't know the word]. They were just teaching one way. The infomercial says that's not necessarily the right way for your child and that different children learn in different ways. I realised he needed to learn by sounding out. [Which information did you use?] I tried to combine both. The school information wasn't working so I used the infomercial ideas. (Year 4 parent)

> The school's saying get your child to read aloud to you and my sister's idea is to read aloud to *them*… [How did you decide which information to use?] My sister's approach, to a certain level, as her kids did really well. (Year 4 parent)

Parents' involvement in school reading activities

At the time of the interviews approximately one-quarter of the parents (14) had worked with children in classrooms on literacy-related activities during 2003. Their involvement included reading to children, hearing children read, and working with children on reading-related activities, or with writing. There were significant differences in the involvement of parents in school literacy activities by class level, with a decrease in involvement at Year 4 as shown in Table 12.

Table 12 **Parents' involvement in class literacy activities by year level**

	New Entrants	Year 2	Year 4	Total
Parent involvement	5	8	1	14
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.03

There were also significant differences in the involvement of parents in school literacy activities by school.

Table 13 **Parents' involvement in class literacy activities by school**

	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Parent involvement	9	5	-	14
Total	18	17	19	54

P = 0.002

Nearly half the parents (26) indicated that they planned to be involved in such activities in the future, the same number (26) indicated that they did not, and two were "not sure". There was a significant drop in the numbers of parents intending to be involved in future school literacy activities by year level as shown in Table 14.

Table 14 **Parents' plans to be involved in class literacy activities in the future**

Plans for future involvement	New Entrants	Year 2	Year 4	Total
Plans to be involved in the future	13	10	3	26
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.003

The main reasons for parents' intentions to be involved in literacy activities in the future included a desire to help the teacher and to reduce the adult/child ratio in class (11), or to gain personal satisfaction from feeling involved in the class and helping children (10). Eight parents indicated that they wanted to observe what happens in class or their own child's progress at school. Others (5) indicated that their future involvement would be possible due to changes in life circumstances such as pre-schoolers beginning kindergarten or school, or commitments such as study or work coming to an end:

> [I plan to be involved] when my son starts school. Not so much to help [child]. I want to be involved in the school learning. At kindy you can just be involved whenever you like. I want

> to feel part of it at school like I was at kindy. It's the satisfaction of being able to help children learn and progress, even if it is just one child. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I would love to be involved with school activities to help with children. I know schools are under-resourced so if I can help in any way I will. At the moment I can't as I have three other children with me at home. (Year 2 parent)
>
> I like to know what my children are learning – and I am learning as well. (Year 4 parent)

Of those parents who did not plan to be involved in class literacy activities in the future, the most frequently mentioned reason (14) was other commitments during the day such as full- or part-time jobs, study, childcare, or other engagements. Some parents (5) indicated that they did not feel they had the confidence or skills to be involved:

> I work 40 hours a week. (New Entrant parent)
>
> My home environment is busy. I don't feel confident doing something like that. I can spell and read enough to get me through life but I'm not up there. English and reading and that, is not my strong point. (Year 2 parent)

Discussion of the findings about parents' experiences of information sharing

Parents' views of their own and the teacher's role

The findings from this study suggest that parents regarded their own role in their child's literacy development to be as important as that of the teacher, with most rating the roles of both parents and teachers as essential. On the whole parents saw themselves as working in partnership with school staff, and most considered the goals of their child's teacher to align with their own. When describing their role, a number of parents referred directly to the joint responsibility of home and school, or to their partnership with school staff. Parents described their roles in terms of showing children that reading was valued or important, in encouraging and extending their children, and giving them the one-on-one time they may not get at school.

Parents expressed similar levels of confidence in their own ability to support their child as a reader at home, as in the teacher's ability to support their child as a reader at school. Most felt "very" or "quite confident" about their own and the teacher's ability. When asked about specific reading activities such as reading to, listening to, and supporting the independent reading of their child, parents rated their self-confidence even higher than when asked about their ability in general, with most indicating that they were "very confident".

Parents' access to and use of information

Most parents accessed information about their children through one or more forms of class level information sharing, such as parent-teacher interviews or three-way conferences, school reports, or informal chats with the teacher.

Overall, parents, like teachers, considered one-on-one meetings to be the most effective way of sharing literacy information, and were less likely to access information shared at syndicate- or school-wide levels. While all three schools in this study had developed a variety of approaches to sharing information with parents, a considerable number of parents were either unaware of these approaches or had not accessed them.

A few teachers interpreted parents' absence from class or school meetings as signalling a lack of interest in their children's literacy development. One teacher described some parents as valuing their child's literacy development "in theory but not in practice". While this may have been the case for some parents it is also possible that the practice of parents was not always visible to teachers. All of the parents we interviewed, including those who were not aware of school attempts to share literacy information with them, expressed a strong commitment to their child's literacy development, and described a range of ways in which they tried to support their child as a reader.

Teachers also explained parents' absence from class or school meetings by referring to parents' life circumstances. This interpretation was consistent with comments made by some parents who commented on the difficulty they faced in accessing information through school meetings in particular. This was largely due to work or other life commitments, or to their inability to leave their children in the evenings. For other parents, attending school meetings was a possibility but not a priority. These parents tended to state a preference for receiving school information in written form.

Some teachers expressed the belief that parents' lack of involvement in school literacy meetings and activities was due to a lack of confidence and this interpretation was consistent with some parent comments, particularly with regard to volunteering to contribute to class literacy activities.

Parents' preferences for receiving syndicate- or school-wide pedagogical information

Parents varied in their preferences for the means by which the school shared pedagogical literacy information with them. This finding supports the schools' practices of sharing information with parents in a variety of forms. Some teachers expressed the belief that too much written material was off-putting for parents and considered that oral presentations better suited the needs and learning styles of the parents in their communities. However, written information, either on its own or in conjunction with meetings or demonstrations, was the most frequently mentioned format parents wished to receive information at the syndicate- or school-wide level. Parents

valued written information because it provided the opportunity to process the information at their own pace, at a time that suited them, and provided them with something to refer back to.

Parents' involvement by level

The steady reduction in parent contact with school staff on literacy-related issues observed by teachers following Year 2 was confirmed by the findings from the parent interviews. There were significant differences in the occurrence of parent-initiated contact with the classroom teacher by year level with a sharp drop in this occurrence at Year 4. There was also a significant drop at Year 4 in parents' involvement in class literacy activities and in their reported intentions of future involvement. Findings from the parent interviews showed that although parents of Year 4 children were less actively involved in class literacy activities and less likely to contact the classroom teacher, they were no less interested in gaining pedagogical literacy information than the parents of the younger children.

Parents' information needs

Although some teachers expressed concern about overwhelming parents with too much information, most parents reported wanting more information about how reading is taught at school and how they could better support their child's reading development at home. Parents from Totara School considered they knew more about class reading practices than those from the other two schools, and were less likely to indicate they wanted more of this information. This finding was consistent with teacher views about the school-related knowledge and home-literacy practices of the parents in their respective communities. While we did not directly ask parents about their views on the complexity of the information they received, some parents indicated that they valued its comprehensive nature and appreciated not being "talked down to" by school staff.

Information about how reading is taught at school

Although the majority of parents expressed confidence in the ability of their child's teacher, over three-quarters did not know the sorts of things their child's teacher did at school to teach reading and most indicated that they would like this information. Of particular interest was information about the goals and approaches of the teacher. Parents' desire for information about how reading is taught at school stemmed largely from a desire to align their home practices with those of school staff. Significantly more parents from Kowhai and Rimu Schools reported knowing "nothing" about how their child's teacher taught reading, and significantly more of these parents reported wanting more information about how their child was taught to read. A distinctive feature of the written and oral information provided to parents by staff at Totara School was the inclusion of information on how reading is taught at school, which may partly account for this difference. However, it is also possible that the parents from Totara School had more knowledge about

school practices to begin with, as the parents from this school had, in general, higher qualifications than those from the other two schools.

Big picture information about reading

With a few exceptions the information provided by teachers at class, syndicate, and school-wide level tended to cover what parents could expect their child to be doing at the particular stage they were currently at. In some cases this information also extended to the "next steps". A common theme that emerged from questions relating to information parents currently wanted, would like in the future, or wished they had in the past, related to developmental stages. Parents wanted to know, not just where their child was currently at, or even just the "next steps" but all the stages they could expect their child to go through in their literacy development. They expressed an interest in the bigger picture of reading development and a desire for information that covered the skills and knowledge their children would acquire over time. Teachers also considered that they needed to place more emphasis on the bigger picture of reading instruction, and provide parents with more information on the development of reading skills and knowledge occurring once children had "learnt to read".

Information about comprehension

Parents' most frequently reported goal in terms of their child's reading development was that they understand what they read. Parents expressed their desire for their children to understand what they read, but a number of parent comments suggest that the process of comprehending, and how this is taught and learnt, is an area of uncertainty. This provides a contrast with the certainty with which parents spoke of the assistance they provided to their children with sounding out words.

Information about children's performance relative to their cohort

There was a high percentage of parents whose understandings of their child's reading performance differed from the performance data held by their child's teacher. Of particular concern was the number of parents of children with reading ages below their chronological age, who were unaware of this. These findings reinforce the need for teachers to make explicit the performance of children, not only in relation to their previous performance but also in relation to their cohort and national standards.

The impact of other sources of information

The findings from this study demonstrate the considerable impact non-school sources of literacy information have on parents. Most of the parents identified non-school sources of literacy information which had provided them with new ideas, changed aspects of their home literacy practices, or confirmed what they were already doing. The most frequently mentioned of these

were family and friends, books, television, posters and pamphlets, and librarians. Although we did not directly ask parents about the use of their children as sources of information, comments made by a number of parents suggested that this was in fact the case. Other comments suggested that parents were drawing on their own experiences of learning to read, or their own ideas about how children might learn to read.

The nature of the information parents described attaining from non-school sources varied considerably depending on parents' life circumstances. While some parents referred to talking with relatives or friends who were teachers or librarians, others referred to information gained from *Reading Master* infomercials or *Sesame Street*. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this information in itself, it tended to be piecemeal and the parents concerned did not always have a wider frame in which to contextualise this information. In some cases parents were combining such piecemeal information with other ideas to build theories and practices that did not always align with those of the school.

Teachers' knowledge of home literacy practices

Parents, like teachers, considered it either "important" or "essential" that teachers knew about the home literacy practices of the children they taught. While just under half of the parents indicated that they had initiated contact with their child's teacher about their child's reading at home, not many parents recalled having been asked for this type of information. This imbalance can be understood when considering the fact that while any given parent has only one child in common with the class teacher, the teacher may have 20–30 children to focus on. It does however draw attention to the nature of partnerships between school staff and parents and highlight the importance of partnerships in which both school and home literacy knowledge are equally valued. Comments made by a number of parents provided insight into information about home reading, which may have been of use to the classroom teacher in aligning school literacy practices with those of the students' homes. When this form of information sharing had occurred both parents and teachers commented on clear benefits for the students involved.

4. Parents' and students' experiences of home reading activities

Introduction

To create a more detailed picture of the degree of alignment between home and school literacy activities, and the interactions occurring at home around text, with children at different stages in their reading development, we asked the parents a number of questions about home literacy practices. We asked about the frequency and nature of their reading to children, hearing children read, and supporting children's independent time with books. We also asked parents about their views on the importance of these activities and their confidence in taking part in them. We asked the students to answer questions about their most recent experiences of being read to, of reading aloud, and of independent time with text. We have reported only significant differences. We found that while there were significant differences by year level, there were relatively few significant differences by the reading performance of the child. This may have been because there were very few children reading below their chronological age in our sample.

Reading to children

Parents' views on the importance of reading to their child

Most parents considered it either "essential" (29) or "important" (23) for their child to listen to books being read aloud at home. One parent considered it to be "not very important" and one was "not sure". The main reason for parents' views on the importance of reading to children was that it exposed them to new vocabulary (20):

> It develops her language. We are bilingual. Hearing the words extends her vocabulary in English. (Year 4 parent)
>
> That helps her develop her reading skills because she's watching you read. If there's a word she sees that she doesn't know, she hears it and puts the two together. (New Entrant parent)

Other common reasons given by parents for the importance of reading to children included the belief that it helps children's understanding of text (9), provides the opportunity for parents to be close with their child (9), and provides children with enjoyment, escapism, and the opportunity to

use their imagination (8). Others considered it important because it taught children to listen or concentrate (7), provided children with content knowledge (6), or helped children to see reading as a habit valued by their parents (6):

> She has time to look at the pictures while I'm reading and she could understand what is happening with the pictures. She is focusing on listening rather than making the word out. (Year 2 parent)

> So he can learn by gaining information from the book. [Do you think listening to books helps him learn about reading or become a better reader?] If you get *him* to read sentences. Not if you're reading the story to him. He's just going to sit there and listen if you do that. (New Entrant parent)

> Because being read out loud to can give her values in the future. To sit and listen to someone read helps with listening skills… It's real life—listening skills… (Year 4 parent)

Parents' confidence in reading to their child

Most parents (43) reported feeling very confident about reading to their child. Some (9) reported feeling "quite confident", one parent was "not very confident", and one, "not sure".

Parent confidence in reading to their child related primarily to their own confidence in and enjoyment of reading (36). Other common reasons included the child's enjoyment and engagement when listening to texts (9) and feeling confident relating to children (5):

> I love it! She loves me reading to her. She brings books out. I'll put on the funny voices and she'll laugh. We'll have a good time. (Year 2 parent)

> We've always done it and not just started reading when they are older. My Mum and Dad always read to us too. (Year 2 parent)

> After having three kids I feel that I can read and I feel good that I'm teaching my kids to read. I never got taught to read properly and I'm making sure that they do. (New Entrant parent)

The most frequently reported reasons (8) for parents' lack of confidence was the belief that they were not very good at reading in general or at reading aloud:

> Sometimes, because my education is still picking up, I find the reading hard. I'm breaking words down for myself and I'm trying to work it out. Sometimes it's a bit dicey, like when we're looking at an encyclopaedia – and I don't know some words. I'm still growing with my children as well. I look in the dictionary to help me. I've got the *Collins New English Dictionary* so it's one of those big ones. It's got all the big words. I show her how to look in the dictionary so she learns how to find things out. She knows I am learning too. (Year 4 parent)

> 'Cos I get my words mixed up and I get tongue-tied. I don't read the actual word properly. It's due to being moved around too many schools over the years, and I paid the price for

that. That's why I'm really keen to read with [child]. I'm learning with [child]. She corrects me, and my older children correct me. (New Entrant parent)

We know what words we can say and what words we can't say. Sometimes the words don't sound the way they are spelt. (Year 2 parent)

Parents' frequency of reading to their child

There were significant differences by year level, but not by school, between those who reported reading to their child every day and those who reported reading less frequently. The parents of Year 4 children were less likely to read to their children daily, than those of New Entrants or Year 2 children.

Table 15 **Parents' reported frequency of reading to their child by year level**

Frequency of reading to child	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Every day	12	10	3	25
Less often than every day	6	8	15	29
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.007

Parents' most recent experience of reading to their child

When parents last read to their child

We asked the parents to indicate when their child had last been read to, and there were also significant differences by year level between those who had read to their child within the last three days and those who had not, with a sharp drop occurring at Year 4. This is shown in Table 16 below.

Table 16 **The most recent time parents read to their child**

Frequency of reading to child	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Within the last 3 days	12	12	1	25
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.0001

Just over half the parents (31) read fiction, usually some form of story book, to their child during their most recent reading experience and some (7) read non-fiction. Other texts mentioned included poems, nursery rhymes, and the newspaper. A number of parents (5) could not recall what they had read.

Students' recollections of their most recent experience of being read to

We also asked the students to tell us when they were last read to at home, and who read to them. Nearly all (49) of the students indicated that someone read to them at home. Consistent with parent reports significantly more New Entrant students reporting being read to in the last three days than students of the two other year levels, as shown in Table 17.

Table 17 **Students' report of the most recent time they were read to at home by year level**

Frequency of being read to	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Within the last 3 days	14	7	6	27
Not within the last 3 days/Could not remember	4	11	12	27
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.01

The person who most recently read to the student was their mother (22), followed by their father (12), a sibling (8), an extended family member (5), or a parent and sibling group (2). This information shows the important role of siblings and the extended family, as well as parents, in supporting the students' reading.

Parents' talk around text when reading to their child

During their most recent experience of reading to their child, just over half the parents (30) indicated that they had talked with their child about some aspect of the literal content of the text:

> He wanted to know what they were—the different spiders, and what they did. (Year 2 parent)

A smaller group of parents (7) described discussions, which suggested that their talk moved beyond the literal content of the text, and a few (3) described discussions involving predicting what might happen next:

> [We talked about] why not to overfeed a fish, and how the boy didn't listen. (New Entrant parent)

> I wondered if he understood the concept of the book and I went back and asked him what did he think was going to happen. (Year 2 parent)

> I explained to her the ideas of the book and explained beyond what the books give. I relate it to something bigger than just the story book—Like the bigger picture of the book. (New Entrant parent)

Just over one-third of the parents (20) talked with their child about something in the text that related to the child, relating the text to the child's current or past interests and life experiences (11) or to their future aspirations (9):

> Briefly we laughed about how she doesn't want to stay in bed but how the kids in the story did. (New Entrant parent)
>
> …I asked, 'What if you were to build a raft?' [Child] explained how he would then do this. (Year 4 parent)

Just over half (30) discussed the pictures of the text in their most recent experience of reading to their child. In most cases (20) this involved responding to something in the picture. A number of parents (10) also described discussions that involved making links between the pictures and the text. For a small number of parents (4) there were no pictures in the text they read:

> The odd-looking creatures – they're not actually animals and he was asking about them. We talked about how they looked. (New Entrant parent)
>
> How he got new shoes [in the story] so they changed colour, so we talked about colour [in the picture]. (Year 2 parent)

Just under one-third of the parents (17) talked about words in the text with their child. This discussion most frequently (10) involved talking about the meaning of words. A few parents (3) talked about other aspects of words such as plays on words. Some parents (5) could not remember the nature of the discussion they had:

> …She asked questions. They're old nursery rhymes and they have things in them that we don't have anymore. We read Little Polly Flinders. She wanted to know what cinders are and I explained they're in front of the fire. We talked about other words she hasn't heard before because they're not used. (Year 2 parent)
>
> He was asking why the monster was eating the number eight and we talked about the two meanings of the word; eight and ate. (New Entrant parent)

A number of parents (17) asked questions of their child, about the content of the text, the child's opinion of the text, their predictions, or their summary of the text. Some parents (3) could not recall the nature of the questions they asked:

> [I asked child] what the platypus had for lunch so that I can see that he is understanding what he reads. (Year 4 parent)
>
> If she enjoyed the story. (Year 2 parent)

Students' recollections of talk around text in their most recent experience of being read to

Just under half (21) of the 49 students who had been read to remembered discussing the text with the reader as it was being read to them. Similar to parents' recollections, discussions centred around the content of the book (13), the pictures (11), or the words in the book (9):

> [We] talked about how she had two mums and dads – how it was kind of weird. (Year 2 student)

I said about when Slinky Malinky got the bone. Daddy said about when they got the bone. When Muffin McClay got caught in bushes I said, 'He got spiked.' Daddy said, 'It would hurt.' (New Entrant student)

I said some of the pictures looked good – how toad had a mischievous look on his face – how that went with the story. She [mother] agreed. (Year 4 student)

Mum said, 'Here's a question mark, here's a comma.' (New Entrant student)

Hearing children read

Parents' views on the importance of their child reading aloud at home

Most parents (47) considered it either "essential" (39) or "important" (8) that their child read aloud at home. Five considered this was "not very important" and two were "not sure". There were significant differences by class level in the degree of importance parents placed on their child reading aloud at home, with parents of New Entrant and Year 2 children being more likely to see this as "essential".

Table 18 **Parents' views on the importance of their child reading aloud at home**

Level of importance	Class level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Essential	17	14	8	39
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.003

The main reasons parents considered it important for their child to read aloud at home were that it helped build their child's confidence (21), gave parents the opportunity to judge their child's progress (18), and provided practice of the skills taught at school (17):

So he can hear his own voice. It gives him confidence to hear how good he sounds. It makes him feel good about reading. (New Entrant parent)

We need to know where she's at. She needs to be able to read at home because it reinforces what the teacher does. It builds her self-esteem because we're telling her how wonderful she is. It helps us to see if there are any problems. (New Entrant parent)

So we can support him. I'm concerned he isn't understanding what he reads. I want him to know that he needs to read and it make sense, and when he reads at home it gives me the chance to check. We can give him positive feedback when he reads at home to us. (Year 2 parent)

Some parents (10) held the view that by hearing themselves read their child would learn more about reading or be more likely to understand what they were reading:

> Because with reading out loud they get to know and understand better what they are reading, and by reading out loud you know they have read it. (Year 2 parent)
>
> She has to listen to herself. She needs to understand about what she is reading. (New Entrant parent)

The most frequent reason for parents' views that it was "not very important" for their child to read aloud (4) was that they considered their child to already be an independent reader:

> She's reading independently with her eyes. (Year 4 parent)

Parents' confidence in hearing their child read

Just over two-thirds of the parents (37) were "very confident" about hearing their child read. Just over one-quarter (14) were "quite confident", two were "not very confident", and one was "not sure".

There was a significant difference between those parents who felt very confident in knowing what to do when hearing their child read aloud and those who were less confident, by the reading performance of the child as shown in Table 19 below.

Table 19 **Parents' confidence in hearing their child read by reading performance**

Confidence level	Child's reading level: Below, at, or above chronological age			
	Below	At	Above	Total
Very confident	4	19	14	37
Total	8	31	15	54

P = 0.04

The most frequently reported reason for parents' feelings of confidence (14) related to their own confidence in reading. Other common reasons included receiving training or information from the school or other sources (8) and the perception that their child enjoyed reading or was progressing well (7). A number of parents (6) attributed their confidence to previous experience hearing their older children read. Seven parents gave no specific reason for their feelings of confidence:

> I am a wordy person – a reader. He is my third child so I've been through this process before. English is a subject I've always done well in. This conveys a love of words and confidence in reading. (Year 4 parent)
>
> It's very early days. It's basic reading. A few years down the track I might be wondering what I should be doing. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I think I'm doing it right. My children enjoy and are successful at reading. (Year 2 parent)
>
> The Blue Book [school literacy information book]. He has been at school a couple of years now so your own confidence about being a parent builds up. (Year 2 parent)

> [From] talking to the teacher – checking how they're doing it at school. (New Entrant parent)

The main reason given by those parents who felt less confident (5) related to lacking information about what to do and feeling unsure if what they were doing was "right":

> Sometimes I'm not sure what to say when he gets a word wrong. (Year 4 parent)
>
> I don't really know what the right way is. Do I talk about the pictures and does that spin off into other things? (New Entrant parent)
>
> When he gets frustrated or I get frustrated it's easier to walk away. It's knowing what to do when you can't be bothered or when he can't be bothered. (Year 4 parent)

Parents' views of school reading material

We asked those parents whose child had brought home books from school to read aloud within the last fortnight, about their views of this school reading material. As shown in Table 20, few parents of Year 4 children reported that such books had been sent home from school within the last fortnight.

Table 20 **Number of parents by year level whose child brought home books to read aloud within the last fortnight**

Reading books brought home for reading aloud	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Books brought home within the last fortnight	18	18	4	40
Total	18	18	18	54

P < 0.0001

Most of the 40 parents who reported reading material had been sent home from school within the last fortnight, considered school reading material to be "very interesting" or "moderately interesting" with only four rating it as "not very interesting".

Just over three-quarters of these parents (31), considered that their child brought about the right amount of reading material home from school. A small number considered that their child did not get enough (5), got too much (2), and a few (2) were not sure.

Approximately three-quarters (27) of these 40 parents considered this material to be at about the right level for their child. All but one of those who did not, thought it was too easy (12), mainly because of the fact that their child could read all the words.

We asked all the parents in the study what they would do if their child brought home reading material at an inappropriate level. Some responded to the issue of text being too difficult, some to text being too easy, and some to both issues. Parents indicated that if reading material was too hard they would tell the child's teacher (15) or help the child with more difficult material by

reading the whole or parts of the book to them (10), by helping them with difficult words (10), or by giving them extra time and practice with the book (4). If the material was too easy they would listen to their child read regardless (17), tell the child's teacher (17), or supplement material considered too easy with other reading material from home (5).

The frequency with which parents heard their children read

We asked the parents to indicate how often someone at home heard their child read. There were significant differences by year level between those who had reported hearing their child read every day and those who reported doing this less often.

Table 21 **Parents' reported frequency of hearing their child read by year level**

Frequency of hearing child read	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Every day	13	8	1	22
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.0002

One of the reasons for these differences is likely to be that school readers are not commonly sent home on a daily basis for reading aloud once a child is considered able to read independently. As indicated above few parents of Year 4 children reported that their child had brought home a school reading book for reading aloud, within the last fortnight.

Parents' most recent experience of hearing their child read

We asked the parents to indicate when they had last heard their child read. All of the parents of New Entrants had heard their child read within the last three days compared with two-thirds of the parents of Year 2 children and approximately one-third of the parents of Year 4 children.

Table 22 **The most recent time parents heard their child read**

Most recent time of hearing child read	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Within the last 3 days	18	12	5	35
Total	18	18	18	54

P < 0.0001

Students' most recent experience of reading aloud

Just under half of the students (25) indicated that they had read out loud to someone at home in the last three days. The student data showed a similar trend to the parent data though there was not an exact match.

Table 23 **Students' recollections of the last time they read to someone at home by year level**

Frequency of reading out loud	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Within the last 3 days	11	9	5	25
Not within the last 3 days/Could not remember	7	9	13	29
Total	18	18	18	54

(P = 0.04 New Entrant compared with Year 4)

Students from Rimu School were less likely to report that someone at home had listened to them read within the last three days than the students from the other two schools, as shown in Table 24.

Table 24 **Students' recollections of the last time they read to someone at home by school**

Frequency of reading to child	Year level			
	Totara School	Rimu School	Kowhai School	Total
Within the last 3 days	11	3	11	25
Not within the last 3 days/Could not remember	8	14	7	29
Total	19	17	18	54

P = 0.02

The person who had most recently heard the child read was most likely to be their mother (26), followed by their father (7), an extended family member (4), a parent and sibling group (3), a sibling (1), or another person (1).

Parents' talk around text when listening to their child read

We asked the 51 parents who had heard their child read aloud in the last term, to recall any talk around text that may have occurred in their most recent experience of hearing their child read aloud.

While most (40) indicated that they did not talk with their child about the book before their child started reading, just under half (25) had talked with their child about the content of the book either during or after the child's reading. In most cases (14) this talk related to the literal content of the book. A smaller group of parents (7) described discussions, which suggested that their talk moved beyond the literal content of the text. Other less frequently reported types of discussion included predictions of what would happen next, and the child's opinion of the text, and some (4) indicated that they had asked the child's opinion of the story.

Just over one-third of the parents (18) reported talking with their child about something in the text that related to the child. These discussions predominantly consisted of relating the text to the child's current or past interests and life experiences or to their future aspirations.

Of the 48 parents who heard their child read from a book that had pictures, 21 reported discussing the pictures with their child. This most frequently involved responding to something in the picture (10). A number of parents (4) also described discussions that involved making links between the pictures and the text.

Some of the parents (10) reported talking about words in the text with their child. All of the six parents who could recall the nature of their discussion reported talking about the meaning of one or more words.

Students' recollections of talk around text when reading to their parent

Half (21) of the 42 students who had read to someone at home recalled discussing the text with the person they read to. Similar to the discussions parents described, 11 students recalled talk about the pictures in the book, 10 about the content, and 6 about the words:

> My brother said they was a really silly name and he didn't like it. My mum said that there was magic people and they was some people who can do lots of tricks. (Year 2 student)

> I read the book then he [Dad] told me to shut the book and tell him what it's about. (Year 4 student)

Parents' descriptions of student approaches to unknown words

We asked the parents what their child usually did when faced with an unknown word. Just over one-third (21) indicated that their child would wait or ask for help, and 12 parents indicated that their child would skip, read over, or invent sounds or words to hold the place of the unknown word. The reading strategy the parents most frequently observed their child using involved some form of sounding out (26). Other strategies included looking at the pictures (8), re-reading from the beginning of the sentence (7), or reading on to the end of the sentence (7). Two parents of Year 4 children reported not knowing what their child usually did, as they had not heard them read aloud for some time.

Strategies students used with unknown words

We also asked the 42 students who had read to someone at home what they did when they came to a word they did not know. Most (39) could recall at least one strategy they used. A smaller number of students (11) mentioned two or three strategies. The most commonly mentioned strategies were some form of sounding out (22) or stopping for help (15). Other strategies included reading on (6), re-reading from the beginning of the sentence (5), skipping or guessing the word (3), looking at the pictures (1), or looking up the word in the dictionary (1):

> I tell mum. She helps me. She reads it to me. (New Entrant student)

> I point to it… Then I re-read the sentence… Then I just carry on with the book. [Do you do any other things?] I just sound it out and just pretend it was the same [right] word. (Year 2 student)
>
> I put my finger on it, carry on reading, and then go back. Or else I try to sound it out like I do with my spelling. (Year 4 student)

Parents' approaches to unknown words

We asked the parents what they usually did when their child came to an unknown word. The most frequently reported response (31) was to prompt with some form of grapho-phonic cue, and for over half of these parents (17) this was their only prompt. In some cases parents questioned the child about the look or sounds of the word and in others parents gave one or more of the sounds in the word. Parents also gave open-ended prompts such as "Try that again" (9) or prompted their child to re-read the sentence, or read on to the end of the sentence (8). Other prompts included telling the child the meaning of the word (6) or to look at the picture (5). Nearly one-third of the parents (16) indicated that after their child had attempted the word and still could not work it out they would tell them the word. A few parents (4) said they praised their child. Some parents (6) indicated that they did not expect their child to work out unknown words and told them the words straight away. A small number of parents (4) indicated that as their child was an independent reader they did not hear them read aloud any longer, and so did not answer this question.

Students' descriptions of parent approaches to unknown words

We asked the students what their family members told them to do when they came to a word they did not know. Most students (35) could recall at least one strategy, and nine mentioned two or three.

They recalled being asked to sound out the word or being assisted to do so (17). They also mentioned being told the word either after they had attempted it (9), or before they had attempted it (9), encouraged to work it out (4), to re-read a section of the story (2), to read on (2), or being told the meaning of the word (2):

> I say 'I don't know…' She [mum] says, 'Sound the word out.' She tells me the word. (New Entrant student)
>
> She [mum] goes, 'Sound it out.' If I can't do it she tells me it and reads one page for me. She sometimes sounds out the words [for me]. (Year 2 student)
>
> She [mum] says 'Sound it out.' She said 'The "concert" is a "kuh" not a "ss",' and then when I got to "grandparent" I couldn't read it as it was too hard. Mum put her finger on it to cover up [so the first syllable could be seen]. (Year 2 student)

Parents' reasons for their approaches to unknown words

We asked the parents to explain why they responded the way they did. Some parents provided a justification for the form of prompt they gave. Over half the parents (30) (most of whom relied primarily on grapho-phonic cues) emphasised the importance of not telling their child unknown words so that they would learn to work words out for themselves, and to be independent. A smaller number of parents (8) emphasised the importance of giving meaning-related cues or telling their child the meanings of unknown words because they considered it important that their children could not only sound out the word but could also understand what they were reading.

Other parents referred to their sources of information. Some indicated that their responses were informed by information from their child's school (7), or from their own experiences of learning to read (4).

Parents' difficulties when hearing their child read

Just under one-quarter of the parents (13) had difficulty when hearing their child read, usually involving the child, the parent, or both feeling restless, frustrated, or bored (8). Other difficulties included avoiding interruptions, and situations in which parents did not know how to help:

> I have to get myself into a calm space beforehand so I have infinite patience. I will teach him the word 'want' 50,000 times! He knows he is in the lowest reading group, and it would be inappropriate for me to be angry with him. (Year 2 parent)
>
> Frustration. If he gets frustrated or he can't be bothered. He's either mucking around or having trouble with a word you know he knows. You don't know if he's tired, can't be bothered or really doesn't know. (Year 4 parent)
>
> Sometimes I'm not sure if I should reinforce the 'point at the word' thing. (Year 4 parent)

Independent reading

Parents' views on the importance of independent reading

Most parents (36) considered it "essential" or "important" (17) that their child spend time reading or looking at books independently. The most frequently reported reasons it was considered important were to help children become independent readers (16), learn to enjoy reading (16), and develop the skills necessary for lifelong learning (10). Parents also commented on the need for children to practise reading (9), or valued the opportunities for relaxation and quiet time it offered their child (9). A number of parents (6) considered it important for their child to get "into the habit" of reading.

There were significant differences by year level on the degree of importance parents placed on their child spending time looking at or reading books independently, with more parents of Year 2 and Year 4 students rating this as "essential". This is shown in Table 25 below.

Table 25 **Parents' views of the importance of independent reading**

Level of importance	Class level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Essential	8	14	14	36
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.05

Parents' support of their child's independent reading

Parents supported their children as independent readers by providing reading material (28), providing time and routines for reading (20), modelling reading (12), encouraging reading (10), limiting TV watching time (7), and going to the library (6). Eight parents did not consider they did anything to specifically support their child's independent reading, or were "not sure".

Parents' confidence in supporting their child's independent reading

Most parents (36) were "very confident" in their ability to support their child's independent time with reading material, some (15) were "quite confident", one was "not very confident", and two were "not sure". The most frequently given reasons for parents' feelings of confidence included feeling confident about their own reading ability (25), and the perception that their child enjoyed or was progressing well in reading (11). A number of parents (7) did not identify specific reasons for their feelings of confidence:

> I'm a confident reader. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I know he can do it now. Before it was a struggle. Now he just whizzes through his books. (Year 2 parent)
>
> I'm confident he can do it and I can help him. (Year 4 parent)

Reasons given by those parents who felt less than confident included not having the ability, time, or patience to offer support to their child (4) or the observation that their child did not often look at books independently (4):

> I don't know how to. (Year 4 parent)
>
> I'm always busy with other siblings so I often don't have time. (Year 4 parent)
>
> I hardly ever see him with a book. I don't want to force him. (Year 4 parent)

Parents' views of the frequency of their child's independent reading

Most parents (43) indicated that their child read or looked at books independently every two to three days, and the majority of these (32) said this occurred every day. Most parents (37) indicated that they talked to their child about reading material and most of these (32) reported having such discussions at least once a week.

Parents' views on the frequency and nature of discussions with their child about their independent reading

We asked these parents when they last talked with their child about something they had been reading. For most (27) it had been within the last week, and in most cases involved a general discussion about the content of the book (23). In most cases the reported discussion was brief:

> The pictures – about fairies. She said she liked them. I just agreed. (New Entrant parent)

In relatively few of these interchanges about content did these discussions appear to go beyond the factual content of the book to become considerations of the deeper meanings in the text or related ideas:

> …She was wondering how the toy plane can fly. It was in a fairy tale and in fairy tales things can happen. (Year 2 parent)

> How Noah built the ark. Why did Noah build the ark and what were the reasons. The story tells of how Noah listened to God and did what he was asked to do. The moral of the story – he listened and did what he was asked. (Year 4 parent)

Other discussions were based around the child's opinion of the text (5), links between the text and the child's experiences (4), and general encouragement offered by the parent (3). A number of parents (4) could not recall the nature of the discussion they had had:

> How's that book going? Did you enjoy it? (Year 4 parent)

> She brought it to me. It was a Golden Book. It was about a new baby. We talked about when [our baby] came home and it was the same as in the book. She could relate to it because it was almost like a personal experience she was reading. It is those sorts of books she comes to talk to me about. (Year 2 parent)

Students' reports of independent reading

Most of the students (49) indicated that they read or looked at books independently at home. About half of these students (23) reported they had read or looked at a book independently in the last three days. There were no differences by school or year level in the frequency of independent reading reported by students, but a lower number of students reported they had looked at or read a book independently in the last three days compared with their parents' recollections of this occurring.

Unlike their parents, only a small number (6) of the students who had read books independently could recall having a discussion with someone at home about the book they had most recently read.

We asked the Year 2 and 4 students who read independently at home what they did when they were reading on their own and came to a word they did not know. Nearly all (34) could recall at least one strategy they used. Around half (16) mentioned two or three strategies. Students' comments indicate they had generalised the strategies taught at school and at home to their independent reading. The most commonly mentioned strategies were some form of sounding out (20):

> I look at the first, middle, and last letter and then I know it. (Year 2 student)
>
> Sometimes I look at the pictures or skip the word I don't know. Sometimes I sound it out by myself. (Year 2 student)

Other strategies included asking their parent to read the word (8), reading on (8), skipping or guessing the word (7), re-reading from the beginning of the sentence (4), asking for the meaning of the word (2), looking up the word in the dictionary (2), trying to work out the word (2), or looking at the pictures (1):

> I go and tell my mum. She tells me the word. (Year 2 student)
>
> I read back from the sentence to work out what would make sense. (Year 4 student)

The Year 4 students were significantly more likely to use the strategies of re-reading, or reading on than the students in Year 2 ($P = 0.01$).

Choosing reading material

Parents' views on their child's choice of reading material

While none of the New Entrant parents and only one of the Year 2 parents expressed concern about their child's choice of reading material, over one-third of the Year 4 parents (7) expressed this concern. Parent concerns related to the content, difficulty level, and breadth of material their child chose.

Parents' approaches to choosing reading material for their child

We asked parents what they looked for when choosing reading material for their child. The most frequent responses were reading material on a topic that interested their child (37), at a level that was appropriate for their child, or that contained appealing illustrations (12). Other responses included material that would challenge their child (5), text types that were new to their child (5), and texts which contained messages or morals that parents considered acceptable (5).

Parents' confidence in choosing reading material for their child

Approximately half the parents (28) indicated that they were "very confident" about choosing material for their child to read. Of the remaining parents, 19 were "quite confident" and 7 "not very confident". There was a significant difference in parent confidence in choosing reading material for their child by year level. As shown in Table 26 below there was a sharp drop in confidence by the parents of Year 4 children.

Table 26 **Parents' confidence in choosing reading material for their child by year level**

Level of confidence	Class level of child			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Very confident	10	13	5	28
Quite confident or Not very confident	8	5	13	26
Total	18	18	18	54

P = 0.03

The most frequently reported reasons for parents' feelings of confidence were the belief that they knew what their child was interested in (22). Other reasons related to parents' confidence in their own ability as readers, and familiarity with books (7), and knowledge of their child's reading ability (6):

> I'm a booky person from an artistic background. I have the foundations of reading from my own family and I want to pass that on to my children. I have the experience to know that children are going to need reading in their futures. (Year 4 parent)
>
> I used to be a book buyer. I have worked in a library. (Year 2 parent)
>
> I know what she's interested in and how hard it needs to be. (New Entrant parent)

Parents who felt less confident expressed a lack of confidence in knowing what their child would enjoy reading (12), what difficulty level of book to get (4), and a general lack of familiarity with children's books (2):

> I don't know – I'm not too sure because I don't know what reading level she's at so I just wing it. If I knew what reading level she was at that would give me more confidence. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I'm pretty confident picking the picture books but I'm not very confident about picking a chapter book that we would both like. For example *Alice in Wonderland* was bad. [It had] difficult language. If you start with the wrong one you are stuck with it. I would like more assistance picking chapter books. (New Entrant parent)
>
> I would like suggestions for topics of interest for boys. (Year 4 parent)

Going to the library

Over one-third of the children went to the library with a family member once a week (19), over one-third went once a month (19), a couple went about four times a year, and 12 went once a year

or less. In most families the child took sole responsibility for choosing the books (28), in some, the family member helped the child choose (14), and in two cases the parent usually selected the books. Parents saw their children choose library books largely by the pictures (17) or topic (15). A number of parents (7) also indicated that their child selected "old favourites".

Students' processes for choosing reading material

We asked the students how they chose books when they were by themselves. Nearly all (53) could name at least one approach they used, and about one-fifth (12) named two to four approaches. As shown in Table 27 older students used a wider range of strategies and were less likely to rely on old favourites.

Table 27 **Students' processes for choosing reading material by year level (n=53)**

Strategy used	Year level			
	NE	Y2	Y4	Total
Looking at the pictures	8	4	6	18
Choosing a known topic or series	3	4	7	14
Choosing old favourites	5	6	2	13
Testing it by reading a small secti on	-	2	5	7
Reading the blurb or introduction	-	-	5	5
Choosing a known author	-	-	4	4
Other	1	4	2	7

We asked the 36 Year 2 and 4 students about how they gauged text difficulty and most (30) of these students described one or more strategies as shown in Table 28. Most read a small section of the book to see how hard it was. The Year 4 students also referred to the quantity or density of text.

Table 28 **Students' strategies for gauging text difficulty by year level (n=30)**

Strategy used	Year level		
	Y2	Y4	Total
Tes ting the book by reading a small section	11	11	22
By looking at how many words the book has	1	3	4
By looking at how long the book is	-	3	3
By seeing if the book has pictures	-	2	2
By looking at the size of the print	-	2	2
Other	3	1	4

Students' views on reading in general and how parents and teachers could help them

Students' enjoyment of reading

Those students who engaged in the different aspects of home reading examined in this study rated each aspect highly as shown in Table 29. Students rated their enjoyment of looking at books and reading things in general highly, with almost three-quarters (39) choosing the highest rating on a 5-point scale.

Although parental involvement in students' reading development decreased as students got older, students' ratings of home reading activities remained relatively constant across schools and year levels except that Year 4 students were significantly less positive than the younger students about going to the library with someone from home *(P = 0.048)*.

Table 29 **Students' perspectives on different aspects of reading by year level (n=54)**

How much do you like:						Did not do	Total
Looking at books and reading things? (Total)	**39**	**9**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**-**	**54**
New Entrant	13	3	-	1	1	-	18
Year 2	14	-	4	-	-	-	18
Year 4	12	6	-	-	-	-	18
Someone at home reading to you? (Total)	**37**	**7**	**4**	**2**	**-**	**4**	**54**
New Entrant	14	4	-	-	-	-	18
Year 2	15	-	1	1	-	1	18
Year 4	8	3	3	1	-	3	18
Reading out loud at home? (Total)	**28**	**5**	**5**	**1**	**4**	**11**	**54**
New Entrant	13	2	-	1	1	1	18
Year 2	11	2	2	-	3	-	18
Year 4	4	1	3	-	-	10	18
Reading or looking at books by yourself at home? (Total)	**37**	**9**	**2**	**1**	**-**	**5**	**54**
New Entrant	11	3	-	-	-	4	18
Year 2	13	3	1	1	-	-	18
Year 4	13	3	1	-	-	1	18
Going to the library with someone from home? (Total)	**31**	**8**	**1**	**-**	**-**	**14**	**54**
New Entrant	12	1	-	-	-	5	18
Year 2	12	1	-	-	-	5	18
Year 4	7	6	1	-	-	4	18

As shown in Table 30 students who had different levels of reading performance rated the different aspects of home reading similarly except that students who were reading above their age level were significantly less positive than the other students about someone at home reading to them *(P = 0.01)*.

Table 30 **Students' perspectives on different aspects of reading by reading performance**

How much do you like:						Did not do	Total
Looking at books and reading things? (Total)	**39**	**9**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**-**	**54**
Reading below age level	5	2	1	-	-	-	8
Reading at age level	23	5	1	1	1	-	31
Reading above age level	11	2	2	-	-	-	15
Someone at home reading to you? (Total)	**37**	**7**	**4**	**2**	**-**	**4**	**54**
Reading below age level	7	1	-	-	-	-	8
Reading at age level	22	5	1	-	-	3	31
Reading above age level	8	1	3	2	-	1	15
Reading out loud at home? (Total)	**28**	**5**	**5**	**1**	**4**	**11**	**54**
Reading below age level	4	1	-	-	1	2	8
Reading at age level	16	3	4	1	1	6	31
Reading above age level	8	1	1	-	2	3	15
Reading or looking at books by yourself at home? (Total)	**37**	**9**	**2**	**1**	**-**	**5**	**54**
Reading below age level	6	1	-	-	-	1	8
Reading at age level	22	4	1	-	-	4	31
Reading above age level	9	4	1	1	-	-	15
Going to the library with someone from home? (Total)	**31**	**8**	**1**	**-**	**-**	**14**	**54**
Reading below age level	2	2	-	-	-	4	8
Reading at age level	20	4	-	-	-	7	31
Reading above age level	9	2	1	-	-	3	15

Most students said they liked the reading activities we asked about. They liked the content, pictures, and words in books, learning and developing skills, spending time with their family members and having an opportunity to show them their skills:

> It's [looking at books and reading things] fun. It helps me to learn. I read it and next time I know how to read. (Year 2 student)
>
> [Why do you like someone at home reading to you?] 'Cause I can listen and learn words that I can tell people. (Year 2 student)
>
> My father's got really good expression. (Year 4 student)
>
> [Why do you like reading out loud at home?] So everyone knows how I read because I want to show them how bright I am. (Year 4 student)

Other reasons given by students for liking reading activities included having choices, being independent, and liking quiet time:

> …I like reading books and looking at pictures by myself. I get to have fun looking at the pictures. (Year 2 student)

I like going to the library because it's quiet. [Is that good?] Yes – 'cause no one is yelling. (Year 4 student)

I like picking books. I like the computer – I always try to find my street. (Year 4 student)

Students' views of their reading ability

When asked how good they were at learning to read, most of the students rated themselves in the top two categories of a 5-point scale as shown in Table 31. There was a progressive drop by year level in students' perceptions of their ability with Year 4 students holding views that were significantly less positive than the views of younger students.

Table 31 **Students' views on their reading ability by year level**

How good do you think you are at learning to read?						Total
New Entrant	15	-	1	2	-	18
Year 2	9	6	3	-	-	18
Year 4	6	10	2	-	-	18
Total	30	16	6	2	-	54

(P = 0.005)

The students who rated themselves highly did so mostly because they could read a lot of words or hard words (20):

I know heaps of words. (New Entrant student)

Students also thought they were good at learning to read because their teacher gave them information which told them they were good (5) or they could see where they were in comparison to other students (4):

When I was reading in class when the teacher was testing he said I am one of the best readers in the class for my age. (Year 4 student)

I'm one of the best readers in our class but some are better. When we have running records they get a higher level than me. (Year 4 student)

Other reasons students gave were that they read a lot, they enjoyed reading, they could see their own progress, and their parents told them they were good. Some students were unable to specify a reason and indicated that they were "just good at it" (5).

The students who rated themselves lower down the scale mostly did so because they found reading difficult (13), or because of comparisons with other students (4):

I know I'm really not that good because I get muddled up. You have to read fast to make it make sense and that's hard. (Year 2 student)

I read a bit slow and I don't read that much books. (Year 4 student)

> I think I'm a bad reader because I wish I'd get all the words right when I read and I don't. Other kids get all the words right and I'm the only one that doesn't. Mostly when I'm reading books I just look at the pictures. (Year 2 student)

Students' perceptions of messages on how they could get better at reading

We asked students what their parents and teachers had told them they could do to get better at reading. Approximately one-third of students could not recall any messages their parents or teachers had given them about reading. These students were mostly New Entrants. The older students tended to describe similar strategies that both parents and teachers had suggested to them. About one-fifth commented that teachers or parents had told them to sound out words:

> Sound the words out, look at the letters, try and make the words make sense. (Teacher message to Year 2 student)

> Read over a sentence, sound it out, and say it again. (Parent message to Year 4 student)

A few students mentioned other strategies their parents or teachers had told them such as reading on if they got stuck or looking at the pictures.

About one-fifth commented that teachers or parents had told them to read a lot:

> I should practise a lot. I have to – if we haven't finished – we have to read the rest at home at night. (Teacher message to Year 2 student)

> Keep reading every day after school. (Parent message to Year 4 student)

A small number mentioned explicit suggestions their teachers had given them for improving their comprehension. No students indicated that their parents had made similar comments:

> [My teacher tells me to get better] by thinking about what the title might mean, and about where the story is set, and a problem that might be in a story and how it is solved. (Teacher message to Year 4 student)

Students' views on what they need to get better at reading

We also asked students what they thought they needed to do, and what their parents and teachers could do to help them get better at reading. Approximately one-quarter of students, mostly those who were New Entrants, did not have any suggestions. The suggestions students offered for themselves and for parents and teachers were similar. Most centred around the use of the reading strategies outlined above, for example, sounding out words or being reminded to sound out words, learning to tackle hard words or being assisted with words, or being reminded to look at pictures or re-read sentences. One group of suggestions concerned both parents and teachers encouraging students to read more, or reading more with students:

> Spend more time with the reading groups. (Year 4 student suggestion for teachers)

> Make them do their homework and not leave it to the last day. Sit down with you every day and read a book. It's good if it's your parent, because they're your family. (Year 4 student suggestion for parents)

Some students made suggestions for how parents and teachers could extend students more, or how students could extend themselves, by being given or choosing harder books to read:

> They could start the kids off with easy books and slowly give them harder and harder books. (Year 4 student suggestion for teachers)

A small number of students offered other types of suggestions:

> Make sure they pick out spelling words for children to get them better. (Year 4 student suggestion for teachers)
>
> Let them [students] choose their own books to take home because some of them are boring. (Year 4 student suggestions for teachers)
>
> Mainly keep on reading and do things on the computer where you do reading and play board games when you do reading. (Year 4 student suggestion for students)

Discussion of the findings relating to home reading activities

Most of the parents in this study read to their child, heard their child read, and supported their child's independent reading at home or by taking them to the library. Although there were no significant differences in the degree of importance parents placed on these activities by the year level of their child there were significant differences in the frequency with which these activities occurred.

Reading to children

There was a sharp decrease between Year 2 and Year 4 in the frequency with which parents reported reading to their child. While two-thirds of the parents of New Entrant children and two-thirds of the parents of Year 2 children had read to their child within three days of the interview, only one of the parents of Year 4 children had done so. Parents, like teachers, rated the importance of reading to their child highly but not all were clear *why* this was important. Approximately one-third of the parents, like teachers, saw reading to their children as important because it could extend their vocabulary, but only a small number of parents identified reading to children as a means for extending their comprehension skills. Comments made by some parents suggested that they considered their child to be learning only when their child was reading. This may help explain the steady drop in the frequency with which parents reported reading to their children and children reported being read to.

Hearing children read aloud

There was also a steady decrease in the frequency with which parents heard their child read by year level. This may partly be explained by the decreasing frequency with which children bring home school readers, as their reading independence increases.

The main differences between what teachers wanted parents to do at home when hearing their children read, and what parents and students actually reported doing, related to the responses of parents when their child came to an unknown word. Most teachers indicated a range of prompts they hoped parents would use such as asking their child to try the sounds in the word, look at the picture, and re-read the sentence or read on. Ideas of how to use these prompts were provided by all three schools in the written information produced for parents. The findings from this study suggest that nearly all parents who still heard their child read aloud usually responded with a grapho-phonic cue, such as "sound it out". A much smaller number of parents indicated that they usually provided other prompts in addition to grapho-phonic prompts. This suggests that the importance of children developing and using the strategy of considering the look and sound of unknown words to assist them in decoding is largely recognised and supported by parents. The message that fewer parents seemed to have put into practice is that a consideration of context is also an important strategy for readers to use.

Approximately one-third of parents whose children had brought reading books home to read aloud in the past fortnight considered this material to be too easy. This supports teachers' concerns that parents conceptualised the development of reading skills primarily as the capacity to decode text, suggesting that further information sharing needs to occur about the ways in which familiar or easier texts can be used as a basis for critical thinking and discussion.

Talk around text

Comments made by both parents and teachers suggest that they did not always place the same value on talking about text. Teachers thought talking about text was important for enriching oral language and comprehension. Teachers, particularly those from Kowhai School, expressed concern that some parents were not aware of the importance of this type of talk, based on their observations of their students' capacity to do this in class. This perception was confirmed by parent descriptions of the conversations they had with their child in their most recent experience of reading to them, and also by student descriptions of these conversations. These conversations tended to be brief and of a factual rather than an inferential nature. Such conclusions must be made cautiously, however, as these conversations were reported rather than observed. Less than one-fifth of the parents reported talking about the meanings of words encountered in the texts they shared, suggesting that either parents were reading texts containing no vocabulary new to their child, or that parents were not aware of the benefits of discussing the meanings of unknown words.

Supporting children's independent reading

Providing reading material in the home, modelling independent reading themselves, and providing time and routines for reading were the ways in which parents most frequently reported supporting their child to look at or read books on their own. All of the teachers considered it important that the parents helped their children to choose books. Most parents and children reported that children took responsibility for choosing their own books when at the library. While most parents indicated that they were "very" or "quite" confident about choosing books for their children, parents expressed less overall confidence in this area of supporting their children's literacy development than in others. This was especially so for the parents of Year 4 children. Over one-third (7) of the parents of children in Year 4 also expressed concern about the material their child chose for their independent reading. Information on the strategies children described using when choosing books, suggests that there was some basis for parent concern, and for the importance teachers placed on parents having input into their child's choice of reading material. Although most children described strategies for determining whether reading material was too difficult, few indicated that this was an approach they used when choosing books to read. Children most frequently chose books on the basis of the pictures on the cover or in the book, familiarity with the book, or by topic. While the issue of text difficulty is of less concern when children choose books for their parent to read to them, it becomes a matter of importance when children are choosing books for themselves to read.

Enjoyment and confidence

All the teachers considered it important that home reading activities be enjoyable and build children's confidence. The findings from this study indicate that for the majority of children this was the case. Most chose the top two points on a 5-point scale when rating their enjoyment of being read to, reading aloud, or reading independently at home. The home reading activities students most enjoyed were being read to and reading independently, and there were no significant differences by class level or school. The fact that children who are able to read independently enjoy being read to as much as those who are still learning to read is one worth emphasising as a number of parents had stopped reading to their child because they could read for themselves.

Most parents were "very confident" in their ability to read to their child, hear their child read, and support their independent reading. While we did not directly ask parents about their enjoyment in engaging in reading activities with their child at home, comments made during the course of the interviews suggested that many enjoyed this time they spent with their child and the opportunities it provided for building their relationships. Those parents who were not so confident and for whom engaging in school-like literacy activities at home were not always successful or enjoyable, tended to be those who lacked confidence in their own reading abilities or who did not consider themselves as readers.

5. Parent vignettes

Introduction

In this section we provide vignettes of seven parents. The vignettes presented here demonstrate the range of experiences across the parent sample in communicating with school staff about their child's reading and in supporting their child's development as a reader at home.

Rochelle

Rochelle identified as Pasifika and Päkehä. She went to school in New Zealand and attained no formal qualifications. Her partner's highest qualification was a school qualification. Ryder, the child focused on in this study, is the fourth child in his family. He identified as Mäori and his early childhood experiences included involvement in köhanga reo. At the time of the interview he was a New Entrant, an emergent reader, and was reading at his chronological age.

Rochelle did not consider herself to be a good reader, and did not have positive experiences of learning to read at school. Two of her older children had also faced reading difficulties, and her aims for Ryder had been shaped by these prior experiences. Rochelle saw reading as a crucial life skill, and expressed a sense of urgency that Ryder would develop this skill:

> The school needs to pick it up early... My [older] son got put into the special reading class. He was lucky to get in. I was so glad he got in. It's a shame my daughter missed out… If you don't know how to read you're lost.

Of utmost importance to Rochelle was that Ryder would understand what he read. This desire was shaped by her own experiences of not understanding the things she was given to read at school, and an awareness that her oldest daughter was currently facing similar problems at secondary school:

> I want him to understand what he's reading and not just read the words. To know what it's about. My reading wasn't that good and I want my kids' reading to be better. We never got taught how to understand what we were reading. A lot of Mums are putting effort into their kids' reading because they didn't get that.

Rochelle expressed regret at not having known of the importance of reading to children as pre-schoolers. She had read to none of her children and had only taken Ryder to the library on one occasion:

> I'd have liked to have had books from kindergarten – just for [child] to look at. So kids can get the idea that you look at books even before they learn to read. With my first child, I wish I had done a lot more reading with her. I didn't know it was important. I didn't know enough where I wish I had of. I wish I'd known that you need to put effort in when they're little. Now she's at college and she's falling behind in English and I think that goes back to her reading.

Now that Ryder had started school her primary focus was on the readers he brought home. Rochelle would read school readers to Ryder every day as well as hearing him read them to her.

She estimated that she read material other than school readers to Ryder about once a term. The Duffy books had a considerable impact on Rochelle and had provided her the resources to read to her son:

> Duffy books. That's excellent because there's a lot of families out there who can't afford books… Some of the books are quite dear, that they do get. I try to get them to enjoy reading and sit down and read…With the Duffy books coming home it has helped my kids start reading. Some kids have no books at home. When they bring a book home that's their book and it makes them feel good. And then parents will sit down and read it…

Rochelle indicated that she was now very confident about going to see the teachers at school but that this had not always been the case:

> I've learnt that when you want to know something you go in. I told myself—I tried to teach myself—don't sit back. Do something!

Rochelle appreciated the letter that was sent home by Ryder's teacher telling about herself and her expectations for the year. The class teacher had also invited Rochelle in for a chat. She had commented on Ryder's fluency in Mäori and told Rochelle that she would get him to teach her and the rest of the class some Mäori. She also indicated that she would send some Mäori readers home so that he could build on his time in köhanga, although at the time of the interview this had not yet occurred. Rochelle had also been offered the chance to work in the classroom on literacy-related activities but had been too busy with her own studies.

Rochelle has also approached Ryder's teacher on a number of occasions. On one occasion she went to discuss the fact that Ryder kept bringing home the same reader. The teacher had explained that Ryder chose the books to take home. The teacher acted on this discussion by encouraging him to vary his book selection, which he did. On another occasion Rochelle had been to school to tell Ryder's teacher she was teaching him to finger point as he read.

This story provides a reminder that approaching the school is not always an easy thing for parents to do. Rochelle had developed strategies for getting the information she needed from the school

from the experiences she had had with Ryder's older siblings. The initial contact made by Ryder's teacher had also paved the way for further discussions about his reading initiated by Rochelle.

Rochelle expressed regret at the lost opportunity of reading to her children as pre-schoolers, and the flow-on effects she considered this had had on her older children's school progress. The fact that she focused solely on the emergent level readers Ryder brought home from school suggests that she was less aware of the benefits of reading material other than school readers once a child starts school. In this context the importance of the arrival of Duffy books four times a year can be seen as especially significant in facilitating home reading of material other than readers.

Darshini

Darshini identified as Indian. She went to primary school in Fiji. Both she and her partner had tertiary qualifications. The child focused on in this study was her second child, Sangeeta, who at the time of the interview was a New Entrant emergent reader, reading at her chronological age. Darshini read to Sangeeta as a pre-schooler and continued to read to her every 2–3 days. She considered this to be important because the family was bilingual and "hearing the words helps extend her vocabulary in English".

Darshini had a full-time job, and this, combined with her other commitments, has meant that she had not been able to attend school literacy meetings or become involved in class literacy activities. Darshini had built up a relationship with her child's teacher through informal chats during times she had dropped off or picked up Sangeeta from school, and conversations about her reading initiated by both her and Sangeeta's teacher. This relationship formed the basis for a partnership between the teacher and the parent over a particular skill the teacher wanted her child to master. The teacher contacted Darshini to discuss the fact that Sangeeta was not looking at the words as she recited them and showed the parent how she was encouraging her to point to the words as she read them to help her establish one-to-one correspondence. Darshini had herself been feeling concerned about the way in which Sangeeta seemed to be reciting text from memory so the approach from the teacher was timely:

> She [the teacher] said, 'How is she reading?' I said she was memorising. She suggested pointing. She highlighted it to me and I noticed it. We made a point of both doing it.

The teacher showed that she valued Darshini's knowledge about her child's home reading by beginning the conversation with the question, "How is she reading?" She shared her observation that Sangeeta was not looking at the text during school reading in such a way as to acknowledge the parent's own knowledge of this:

> She raised the issue… We were both aware about the same time.

While Darshini had received a variety of written information from the school about reading, she considered that getting Sangeeta to point at the words as she read to be the most useful. Darshini described the way in which this information had changed her home practices when hearing her child read. She had received feedback from the teacher that her practices when hearing Sangeeta read at home had resulted in a change in her reading behaviour at school:

> Later [the teacher] mentioned that she was pointing to the words, and reading well, and it came through in her report also.

This story highlights the fact that a successful partnership does not necessarily need to involve huge quantities of time, or be maintained at an intense level throughout the whole year. Its success was a result of a number of factors. This partnership concentrated on a specific skill, at a specific moment in time. The teacher had already established a relationship with the parent prior to approaching her about her child's reading, and based her discussion with the parent on her knowledge of her child's reading at home. The way forward suggested by the teacher involved an intervention being implemented by both herself and the parent. The success of this intervention and partnership was reinforced by feedback from the teacher to the parent on at least two occasions, after the issue had been initially raised.

Tania

Tania identified as Päkehä. She went to school in New Zealand. Her highest qualification was a diploma, and her partner's was a school qualification. The child focused on in this study, Liam, was her third. At the time of the interview he was in Year 2 and reading above his chronological age.

Tania was aware of the sources of literacy information provided by the school and had made use of them all. She had read an information sheet about reading provided by Liam's teacher at the beginning of the year, and had also read a poster on the wall outside the classroom about the early stages of reading. She had gained information specific to Liam through a parent-teacher interview, a school report, and informal chats with the teacher. In addition she had worked alongside the teacher in Liam's classroom.

Tania had attended a syndicate meeting on the school's philosophy on reading. She found this meeting "really good", and was impressed by "the passion that came across" from the teachers involved. At this meeting Tania had received a booklet which included information on the early stages of reading and teacher expectations of the role of parents. Tania had read this booklet and considered it to have been particularly useful to her because it "covered all the basics" and she "learnt new things from it". She viewed it as a reference source which she could "refer back to it when I need to". Tania described the way in which the new things she had learnt from the school had changed her practices at home, particularly when hearing Liam read:

> Letting Liam have a go at the whole sentence—not interrupting when he stalls. If he stalls, let him finish the sentence, and then if he still can't get the word, say, 'Try reading that again'. Before I would tell him the word or sound it out.

When describing her most recent experience of hearing Liam read, Tania demonstrated practices aligned closely with the principles outlined in the school booklet:

> He attempted to sound it out but he carried on reading. He said the wrong word. [What happened after that?] I asked, 'Does that make sense? He had another go but he got it wrong. I corrected it for him.

Tania felt "very confident" about supporting Liam as a reader at home and she attributed this feeling of confidence to having been to the syndicate meeting on reading, and from having worked alongside Liam's teacher in the classroom:

> I think I can give him one-on-one at home that he might not get at school. I might be able to pick up on areas that he's not so confident in. He might not always be so confident in a group situation. I can offer extension. He feels comfortable at home. I think he will attempt things at home he wouldn't at school.

Tania described Liam as being in an "in-between stage" in his reading and the further information she wanted related to how to support children's reading "as they get older". He was bringing home Roald Dahl books but was "not actually reading them properly" because they were too advanced for him. She wanted to know how to keep boys engaged in reading, and suggestions of the types of books that would interest Liam now that he was becoming more independent as a reader. It was important to her for Liam to extend the range of material he read, and that he understood what he read.

This raises some interesting issues in relation to parent and teacher roles. By sharing the philosophy of reading underlying school approaches to teaching, the school staff involved could be seen to be addressing parents as teaching partners rather than merely supporters of pedagogical knowledge held and practised at the school. The school philosophy and its link to practice was also included in the written information parents were provided with. The parent in this study saw her own role to be an active, teaching one in which she was confident that she could offer her child the extension he might not get at school because of teacher/child ratios. This confidence was attributed solely to her experiences of school information sharing and involvement in the classroom. Tania had made use of all the opportunities available to gain pedagogical information from the school and felt relatively well informed, but still needed further information about how to support Liam as he began to read independently.

Sonia

Sonia identified as Päkehä and she went to school in New Zealand. She had a school qualification and her partner had a polytechnic qualification. At the time of the interview her oldest son, Jordan, was in Year 2 and reading below his chronological age.

Sonia had a good relationship with Jordan's teacher, and felt comfortable talking with her:

> She [the teacher] is always quite happy to see me and talk with me.

As well as an interview with his teacher, Sonia had chatted with her informally about his reading and gained information about the things she could do to assist him as a reader at home. These included getting him to point to the words as he read, and strategies to use when he faced unknown words such as sounding out. Sonia had also gained school-wide literacy information from the tips in the newsletter that went out each week but the one-to-one contact was Sonia's preferred means of gaining literacy information:

> Sitting with the teacher one-on-one. Not everyone has the same concerns and we could talk specifically on anything relating to his learning. The focus can be for my son.

This information sharing had resulted in changes to some of Sonia's home literacy practices:

> Pointing to the words as we read them. This made a huge improvement. He recognises the words and is not just memorising them.

Sonia was also using her child as a source of school literacy information:

> … The way I used to learn has changed, and we can learn together.
>
> I'm still learning to sound the words out. Like sometimes he says, 'It's not like that, it's like this,' because that is how the teacher does it.

Despite Sonia's good relationship with Jordan's teacher and opportunities to share information with her about Jordan's reading, Sonia was unaware that he was reading below his chronological age. This was because the information provided by Jordan's teacher was about his reading performance relative to his earlier performance, rather than relative to his cohort at the school or nationally, or to external standards:

> She has told me about his improvement. She has had an impact on him and I can see the improvement.

This had led Sonia to assume Jordan was reading at about the right level for his age. Sonia reported wanting more specific information about the nature of Jordan's improvement, but showed no awareness of the need to question his performance relative to his age:

> He is doing quite well. I'd like more reporting back on detail rather than just saying, 'He's doing well.' Tell me how and what it is he's doing well in. If he is stuck on a word I can work with that word at home.

This vignette demonstrates the value in teachers sharing explicit information with parents about children's progress. Sonia acted on the information about pointing to the words when Jordan was first learning to read but felt dissatisfied with the more general positive comments made by his teacher. More importantly this vignette demonstrates that while the sharing of information about children's progress is important, unless this is coupled with explicit information about the performance of children relative to their peers or national standards, parents can draw conclusions from teacher comments that are not always correct. It highlights the need for teachers to make explicit the performance of children in relation to their peers, or to external standards, as well as in relation to their previous performance so that parents are fully informed, and can act accordingly.

Jill

Jill identified as Päkehä. Her highest qualification was a school qualification and her partner's was a vocational trade qualification. The child focused on in this study was her oldest son, Matt. At the time of the interview Matt was in Year 4 and reading at his chronological age.

Jill thought Matt's teacher was "just great". She felt "very confident" about speaking to him and had been to talk to him about Matt's reading on a number of occasions.

Earlier in the year she had been to visit Matt's teacher because he was no longer bringing home school readers and this had created a vacuum in his home reading. His teacher had explained that as Matt was now reading School Journals he would no longer be sending readers home for him to read aloud, and that Matt would take responsibility for bringing home reading material he chose from the library.

Jill noted that Matt was often "too disorganised" to take home school library books. When he did bring school library books home they were often unsuitable because of his tendency to choose books by the pictures on the cover and the title:

> [He usually chooses books] by the pictures on the cover! Last time he chose a book because he liked the title, *Ghost of a Hanged Man*. I didn't think it was very appropriate. He wanted to know what it meant.
>
> He chooses things that are a lot older than what he can read but there doesn't seem to be things that cater for his age.

Jill was worried about the amount of reading Matt engaged in on his own at home and spoke again with the teacher about this. She told his teacher how enthusiastic he was when listening to his father read Harry Potter at home in contrast with the lack of interest he showed in his own reading. The teacher responded by choosing Harry Potter as the next book to read aloud to the class as a way of encouraging Matt's independent reading at school. He encouraged Matt to bring his Harry Potter book to school to read along silently as he read aloud. The teacher described the

way in which Matt also started choosing to read his Harry Potter book at silent reading time as well:

> He was a sort of reluctant reader and his dad used to read to him… Since I started reading Harry Potter in the classroom he is just totally hooked on it... He basically sits there when I'm reading and he reads it along and at silent reading time he's into the book. He'll virtually carry it with him around wherever he goes and sometimes it is difficult to prise him away from it.

This new-found enthusiasm for reading observed by Matt's teacher was also noted by his mother. She described the way in which he was now "really enthusiastic about reading". The confidence Matt himself expressed in his ability to read was linked back to his Harry Potter experiences:

> I've been reading for a long time. I know I'm good. [The teacher] thinks I'm really good at sounding out letters. In Harry Potter there's really hard words and I can read Harry Potter.

He had also taken on board better approaches for choosing books he could read from the library:

> If they have a Harry Potter book that I don't have I'd probably choose that or otherwise I'd choose a Goosebumps book. [Do you have any way of working out if books are too hard, too easy, or about right to read?] By the label. Yellow stickers are normally fine for seniors or middles. I look inside them and see how much words they've got on a page, and if they've got any pictures.

The success of this partnership had paved the way for further connections between this family and the school. The teacher had lost one of the parents who worked with him on literacy activities in class and at the time of the interview was in the process of organising Matt's grandfather to take her place.

This vignette shows how the transition to independent reading can be a vulnerable time for children and also a time in which parents may need additional support as their role of hearing their child read school readers aloud at home comes to an end. This may especially be the case when a parent's first child reaches this stage. By listening and responding to a parent's home experience this teacher established a partnership that facilitated the successful transition from newly independent to independent reading in a child he considered a reluctant reader.

Alofa

Alofa identified as Samoan and she went to primary school in Samoa. Samoan is the language spoken at home. Her and her partner's highest qualifications were school qualifications. The child focused on in this study was her oldest son, Sione, and at the time of the interview he was in Year 4 and reading at his chronological age.

Alofa had had little contact with the school, apart from attending a parent-teacher interview. She knew "nothing" about how reading was taught at school and was not sure of the goals of the teacher. When asked about her confidence in the teacher to support her son's development as a reader she indicated that she was "not sure" because there was "not much time during parent interviews to ask questions". She did not know what level Sione was reading at but thought he was probably reading below the level expected for his age:

> …because the way he is and the way he reads. He reads like a 6–7-year-old but he's 9 years old. He doesn't read often enough on his own.

Alofa had not been to see Sione's teacher to get or give information about his reading because she felt confident in her own ability to help Sione at home and because "the teacher has lots of other kids to help". The teacher had never asked her about Sione's reading at home. Alofa had not contributed to class literacy activities and did not intend doing so in future because of the types of texts she perceived the school using. She indicated that she preferred to read from the Bible and noted that this was not done at school.

A lack of contact with the school did not represent a lack of interest or active involvement in Sione's development as a reader. Alofa enjoyed reading herself and had sought information about reading from many other sources including TV, radio, videos, books, pamphlets, newspapers, librarians, and children's bookshop assistants. She took an active role at home and used the ideas she gained from these other sources to confirm whether or not she was doing the right things at home when she read to, and with, Sione. She read to Sione about four times a week and listened to him read about three times a week. The talk around text that Alofa described engaging in with Sione moved beyond the literal comprehension of the text to the underlying themes and morals: "How you don't have to be big to know lots" or "How Noah listened to God and did what he asked." She indicated that when choosing books for Sione she chose something with a moral "like David and Goliath". She talked to Sione about the texts she read to him, and "every time I see him reading". She was aware of the way in which the reading and singing they engaged in out of school helped to extend Sione's vocabulary because "he will have to know the words and the meaning".

Alofa considered her work with Sione at home to be "essential". Although she reported being "very confident" in her ability to support his development, her comments suggested that this was not always an easy process. Some of the strategies she reported using were consistent with those of the teacher, while others such as getting her son to pronounce each word he got wrong three times, were not. Comments made by Sione suggested that this strategy was at times a frustrating one for both mother and child. Alofa also indicated that she was struggling with supporting Sione to read independently of her:

> I would like him to not rely on me all the time to read to him. I would like him to read on his own… I have to sit with him to read with him. Otherwise he won't do it.
>
> I want him to know things and to understand. So anything to help him be independent.

Sione observed that the main difference between reading at home and reading at school was that the books he had at home did not have pictures. Given that the pictures were what Sione reported using to help him choose books for reading, this lack of pictures in home books may have contributed to his reluctance to read the books at home.

This is a story in which both the parent and the teacher had expertise, which both parties could have benefited from if it had been shared. Alofa with her interest in reading and her capacity for talk around text could have made a valuable contribution to the class literacy programme but chose not to be involved because of a perception of the text types used at school. Conversely the school may have been able to assist Alofa with strategies to support Sione's independent reading and information about how to help a child with unknown words other than "pronouncing the word three times". The only point of contact between Alofa and the school had been a parent-teacher interview when the pressures of time had prevented the sharing of information at the level that would be needed for this swapping of expertise to have occurred.

Fiona

Fiona identified as Päkehä and went to primary school in New Zealand. She had a diploma, while her partner has no formal qualification. Justin, the child focused on in this study, was their third and was in Year 4. He had had extra support with reading in Year 2 from a remedial reading teacher and at the time of the interview was reading below his chronological age. His mother felt that he saw reading "as a chore" and hoped that he would learn to enjoy reading and become more fluent. She was not sure of the level he was reading at but thought he was either "a bit behind" or else just "not interested". She felt that his problems stemmed from the fact that neither she nor her partner read at home and that they did not have material at home suitable for him to read. They had not taken their child to the library and did not tend to talk with him about books at the infrequent times in which he looked at them:

> We've never really read to our children… It's not something we've ever done. I've never thought about it. It's not a family thing we do.

Her experience with her older child, who also had had reading difficulties, was that "it suddenly clicked, but I don't know how".

This year Fiona had been to a parent-teacher interview and received a school report covering information on Justin's reading progress but had not been to the school literacy meeting or been involved with class literacy activities because of her full-time job. She found the teacher approachable and felt "quite confident" in the teacher's ability to support Justin as a reader. She considered the teacher hadn't quite got Justin "on board" yet but noted that that may have been Justin's fault. Despite Justin being her third child, Fiona knew "nothing" about how Justin was

supported as a reader at school, and would have liked more information, preferably written, so that she could refer to it in her own time:

> What they do for reading. As far as I know it's like silent reading. You just sit and read a book. I don't know how much one-on-one time there is. Are they all reading the same book? Is there group work? How does the reading programme work and what do they actually do?

Fiona considered the role of the teacher and partnerships between home and school to be essential for Justin's development as a reader, but saw the primary responsibility for Justin's progress to belong with the school:

> They need to reinforce what you're doing at home and vice versa. You need to do it together and give the same message… If they don't know what's going on at home and we don't know what's going on at school, it is possible he is doing no reading at all. It's not my responsibility to teach them. I'm concerned that school is relying on homework reading too much as a means of students' learning.

She had experienced a successful partnership with Justin's remedial reading teacher in Year 2 and had been "happy he was getting the extra help". She had received information from the remedial reading teacher at the time and had been contacted again by the remedial reading teacher earlier this year to say Justin needed help with his fluency. She had also contacted and been contacted by his classroom teacher on several occasions about Justin's reading. On one occasion the teacher rang to express concern about Justin's reading at school and to find out whether he read at home. The teacher had arranged to send journals home for Justin to read to improve his fluency but by the time of the interview this had "tailed off", partly because Justin "kept forgetting" to bring the books home.

While she had heard Justin read aloud at the beginning of the year, when journals were coming home more regularly, Fiona estimated that in the last two terms she would have heard Justin read aloud about once a month. She did not consider the information she had received from the school in the past about hearing children read to have been useful and disagreed with the school's message that children could be prompted to look at the pictures to help them with unknown words:

> The school says you should get children to look at the picture to work out words…I disagree with that teaching method.

Fiona had gained information on different ways of learning to read from the *Reading Master* infomercial she had seen on television and had applied this at home. Initially she had tried to combine what she considered to be the school's approach to unknown words with that of the infomercial but eventually she went with the infomercial ideas, as her family and friends had supported these ideas. Fiona describes herself as "quite confident" at knowing what to do when hearing Justin read aloud at home but found the experience a frustrating one, as her approach to getting Justin to sound out words did not always work:

> Some days he'll just sit and look at it. Sometimes he'll sound it out, and sometimes he'll just give up.
>
> I'm happy to help but sometimes I get frustrated. It's almost like the bond is too close. He gets upset or I get upset and it's not worth having an argument over… Frustration! If he gets frustrated or he can't be bothered. He's either mucking around or having trouble with a word you know he knows. You don't know if he's tired, can't be bothered, or really doesn't know…When he gets frustrated or I get frustrated it's easier to walk away. It's knowing what to do when you can't be bothered or he can't be bothered.

The story of Fiona demonstrates the way in which partnerships can be successful but also how easily they can break down due to time pressures on both teachers and parents and due to loss of motivation when reading experiences are not successful for parents and students. Fiona is representative of a number of parents who, when faced with a lack of information or information that was not working for them, sought information elsewhere, or grafted information from a range of sources in an attempt to find their own solutions. While this approach may prove successful in some situations, in others such as that of Fiona, it seemed merely to result in further frustration and an eventual "giving up" by the parent and the child.

6. Messages about reading: Emerging themes

Introduction

The messages about children's reading literacy conveyed by teachers and parents who participated in this study have in common a number of themes. The most prominent of these is the important place that school-parent partnerships hold in facilitating young children's reading skills. Teachers and parents across the socioeconomic and sociocultural strata represented by Totara, Rimu, and Kowhai Schools generally placed high value on these partnerships, and nearly all wanted to establish them, even when they were not always sure how to do so. A particular value of this study is that it has allowed us to draw from the themes emerging from our findings the mix of strategies schools and parents were using or signalled they would like to use to forge relationships with one another to develop New Entrant to Year 4 children's reading literacy. In this section of the report, we set down the themes and examine these against what is known from relevant research literature and suggest from this examination other possible effective strategies and implications for future research.

Mutual respect—teachers and parents as partners

The teachers and literacy leaders in this study rated the importance of parents in children's reading literacy development highly, and most tended to describe parents as partners, rather than purely as supporters of the classroom reading programme. Parents also tended to view themselves as working in partnership with school staff. They rated the importance of their own role as highly as that of the teachers and expressed as much confidence in their own ability to carry out this role as that of the teacher.

The mutual respect with which the teachers and parents in this study tended to hold one another aligns with Biddulph's (1993) emphasis on ensuring that partnerships—between parent and teacher, parent and parent, parent and child, and parent, teacher, and child—are at the heart of any strategies designed to enhance children's learning of and ongoing engagement with reading. The benefit of partnership is also consistent with other studies reviewed in Biddulph et al. (2003),

which identify a growing recognition by parents of this joint responsibility between school and family.

These attitudes reflect a shift in conceptions of the role parents can play in their children's development as readers. Earlier studies, notably those conducted by McNaughton et al. (1992) and Wylie and Smith (1995), found the notion of partnership to be far less prevalent. Teachers in Wylie and Smith's study, for example, expressed concern that their school practices would be undermined by parents' actions at home. The shift in attitude evident in the present study is thus relatively recent and, in fact, probably still transitional, as evidenced by a few of the study teachers using a mix of "parent as supporter" and "parent as partner" statements in their discourse. That the shift has occurred over the last 10 years or so, may be accounted for by several factors, including enhanced professional development for teachers in the areas of school-community relationships and literacy teaching and learning, and the increasing emphasis in government publications on the importance to children's learning of partnerships between home and school. This emphasis on partnership was certainly evident in the strategies schools and parents were using to communicate with one another.

Approaches schools found successful in building partnerships

Enhancing the traditional

The three schools were using a range of strategies to extend their traditional channels of communication with parents and increase the vitality of their interactions with them. For example:

- The parent-teacher interview had evolved into three-way conferences involving teachers, parents, and children, with the emphasis on celebrating children's learning. One school, for example, was using student-developed slideshows to showcase this learning.
- The school report had been supplemented with annotated portfolios of student work.
- The range of activities in the literacy evening had expanded to include time for socialising, interactive parent activities, and sharing of pedagogical information.
- Means of including parents and whänau had become more innovative, with events such as a bedtime reading evening, a parents' coffee morning, and visits from high-profile New Zealanders to literacy-focused assemblies.

These developments would be gratifying for Wylie (1994), who concluded from the findings of the *Learning to Learn* study (Wylie & Smith, 1995) that schools needed to build on and enhance their existing communication strategies. "[It is] important," she wrote,

> to analyse existing channels such as homework (or what goes home), teacher parent interviews, and reports, to see whether they are meeting the needs of both teachers and parents, and whether they could be made more vital (p. 4).

Making it fun

The school- and syndicate-wide initiatives found to be successful at the schools in this study were those that provided opportunities for parents and teachers to establish relationships by making time for socialising, fun activities, and the sharing of food as well as the sharing of information. Funkhouser and Gonzales (1997) also found that creating or using community events was an effective way of drawing in parents.

Including the children

Also common to the information-sharing events considered successful by school staff were those events in which children were involved. These included assemblies at which children received awards, parent meetings at which children performed, or at which childcare or opportunities for parents to bring their children with them were offered, such as the Home-School Partnership Programme or the parent coffee morning offered at Kowhai School. Opportunities for students to be involved in partnerships with parents were also provided through three-way conferences.

Teacher and parent comments suggest a range of possible reasons for the success of school-based events in which children were involved. These included parents perceiving these events to be more relevant or important, parents feeling more confident in going to the school when accompanied by their child, and parents not having to find babysitters when attending school events with their children.

Providing child-specific information

Most parents had accessed information through one or more forms of class level, child-specific information sharing, such as informal chats or more formal meetings with their child's teacher or through school reports. Both teachers and parents considered one-to-one dialogue to be the most useful way of sharing literacy information.

Encouraging communication between parents

In their best evidence synthesis of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand, Biddulph et al. (2003) identified parent-to-parent communication as a key principle underlying the formation of successful school-community partnerships. This was an important component in the building of partnerships in this study. One of the main benefits some parents reported gaining from attending school literacy meetings was the opportunity to share their experiences with other parents, and teachers observed that parents were more likely to attend school literacy events when invited by other parents in their community.

Providing information in different ways

The practice at all three schools of providing information in a wide variety of written and oral forms contributed to the success of their communication with parents. Parents varied in their preferences for the means by which school staff shared literacy information, according to their preferred modes of learning and to their life circumstances. The provision of information in a variety of formats catered for differing needs and preferences. This finding is consistent with the findings of studies by Epstein (1995) and Funkhouser and Gonzales (1997).

Using video

One type of information sharing not exploited by the schools in this study was video. Given that television was the most frequently cited source of information about children's reading development (after family, friends, and books), this format might be worth exploring. To capitalise on the benefits of increasing the visibility of the child in parent-teacher partnerships, children could be videoed reading with their class teacher and the video taken home to share with a parent. Video clips or stills could also be used alongside or incorporated into slideshow presentations of the kind used by students during their three-way conferences at Kowhai School.

Sharing information via video could meet the needs of parents unable to attend school meetings, of those who prefer information in a visual rather than a written format, and of those wanting to see demonstrations of teachers working with children as they read aloud. Such videos would provide a broader context for the information provided by the *Reading Master* television infomercials alluded to by some of the parents we interviewed. They could also provide a means of instigating relationships with parents whose contact with the school is minimal.

The need for inclusiveness

Making vicious cycles virtuous

The findings from this study demonstrate the way in which parents already familiar with school practices are in a stronger position to become more familiar with them than those parents who are not. Parents who demonstrate their interest in their child's literacy in ways visible to school staff may have an impact on teacher expectations and influence the information staff share with parents. This state of affairs leads to a virtuous cycle in which teacher information sharing and expectations impact positively on home practices, which impacts positively on the child's literacy achievement, which encourages further parent contact, and so on. This upward spiralling of information sharing was demonstrated at the decile 10 Totara School at which staff either assumed or recognised that most of the parents were familiar with school literacy practices. They had high expectations of parents' capacity to engage in school-like literacy activities with their children at home, and offered comprehensive pedagogical literacy information and training to

parents working with children in class and at literacy meetings. The challenge for all the teachers in this study was how to initiate such an upward spiral with the harder to reach parents, and the extent of this challenge differed by school.

Engendering a sense of belonging

The three schools approached in a variety of ways the task of providing all parents with the power and sense of belonging that being informed of school literacy practices provides. One major method involves creating a sense of community at the school, particularly through the types of communication-enhancing strategies identified above. Another, used by the staff at Rimu School, is to take the school's messages about reading into the community by visiting groups such as köhanga reo or early childhood centres. However, interventions of these kind, successful though they may be, involve financial and time commitments that schools do not always have at their disposal. As this study illustrates, when funds are stretched, priority is placed on supporting students' learning in class.

Aligning school and home literacy practices

Overall, the three schools in this study were meeting the need expressed in the *Report of the Literacy Taskforce* (Ministry of Education, 1999) to provide literacy information to parents and to help parents gain confidence in their own abilities to support their children's literacy. McNaughton (2002) identifies three ways in which continuity between families and schools may be enhanced in this regard: (i) by modifying or supplementing family activities to better match class activities; (ii) by modifying or supplementing class activities to better match family activities; and (iii) a combination of both.

While both parents and teachers described themselves as working in partnership with each other, both parties tended to view this partnership as centering on parent adoption of *school* literacy practices when working with their child at home. Parents were keen to find out more about school literacy practices so as to align their home practices with those of the school, and the teachers were keen to support them in doing so. There was less sharing of parents' knowledge of children's home literacy practices, and in the majority of cases, parents initiated this. The challenge that remained, therefore, was that of more systematically seeking information about home literacy practices and parent knowledge so as to inform the classroom programme.

The need for clear evaluation and sustainability of partnership initiatives

Moving beyond perceptions

Epstein (2004) emphasises the importance of schools continually working to improve the planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategies for building on their partnerships with the parents and the systematic collection of evidence on the impact of school initiatives to inform decisions about building on current approaches. The teachers of the three participating schools often based their judgements on the success of school initiatives designed to facilitate literacy partnerships with parents on perception. For example, teachers tended to determine the success of school meetings by the number of parents who attended, or by the anecdotal feedback they received. In similar vein, some teachers' beliefs about parent understanding of school literacy information were based on anecdotal feedback from parents and on their observations of children's literacy behaviours at school. Decisions about the nature and quantity of literacy information to share with parents were therefore often based on teacher perceptions of parents' needs, interest, and capacity to understand pedagogical information.

Setting up robust evaluation systems

Criteria against which teachers can judge the success of their school-wide initiatives and a systematic means of collecting evidence of their success against these criteria allow schools to better tailor their initiatives to parent need. Funkhouser and Gonzales (1997), for example, found home-school partnerships to be most effective when schools assessed their initiatives using multiple indicators such as family and staff participation in and satisfaction with school partnerships, measures of the quality of school-family interactions, and indicators of student progress. New Zealand examples of the collection and use of evidence on the effectiveness of home-school partnerships can be found in the case studies from the Literacy Leadership Programme, the Pasifika Home-School Partnership Programme, and the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Proposals Pool, on Te Kete Ipurangi.[2]

Building in sustainability

The study findings strongly suggest the importance of developing means of sustaining, in the long term, programmes or practices designed to build literacy-related partnerships with parents. While all schools had developed effective partnership strategies, they had not always been able to maintain them. The reasons for this included lack of time or funding necessary to maintain

[2] http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/litnum_case_e.php

programmes and the responsibility for this work resting with one staff member rather than being part of an integrated school-wide approach. As Funkhouser and Gonzales' (1997) research shows, home-school partnerships are most successful when they are a whole school endeavour rather than the work of a single person or programme. These two researchers along with Epstein (2004) also quote evidence that shows sustaining effective programmes of family and community involvement relies on school staff receiving external support and appropriate professional development.

The importance of aligning school and home practices

Biddulph et al. (2003) indicate that schools that provide parents with pedagogical knowledge and access to resources may increase children's achievement. However, a message sent does not always mean a message received. Although the three schools in this study provided pedagogical knowledge to parents in a variety of ways in an attempt to enhance children's literacy performance, potential was there for a mismatch to occur between what the teachers thought parents know and do, and what parents actually knew and did, a situation highlighted in the work of McNaughton et al. (1992). The information gained from parents about the occurrence and nature of their experiences in hearing children read, reading to children, and supporting their independent reading provide some indication of the degree of alignment between teacher messages and expectations and home practices, as reported by parents and children. We look here at where and how parents' home practices aligned with teacher expectations, and where and how they differed.

Using prompts when hearing children read

One area in which there was partial alignment between teacher messages and parent practices related to the prompts parents used when hearing children read. School messages about the importance of allowing children to take responsibility for working out unknown words, and about possible grapho-phonic prompts to use when supporting a child in doing so, were largely understood and practised by the parents in this study. However, although the importance of using sentence context in conjunction with grapho-phonic cues was emphasised by the teachers in the study, and included in the written information provided to parents, few parents employed this practice. A relatively small number of parents reported providing prompts such as suggesting their child look at the picture, re-read the sentence from the beginning, or read on, and this was confirmed by student interview responses.

The importance of students being able to use sentence context in conjunction with grapho-phonic cues is identified in a recent longitudinal study that involved monitoring the literacy development of 152 students from school entry to the middle of Year 3 (Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow,

2003). One of the findings of this study was that the ability to use letter-sound patterns and to use sentence context made the strongest independent contributions to variance in early reading performance, and that the development of each of these abilities seemed to influence the development of the other. This finding indicates the need for schools to emphasise the benefits in using a variety of cues, and to teach parents how to determine the most appropriate cue to use in given situations.

Reading aloud to children to extend vocabulary and understanding of texts

All of the teachers considered reading to children to be an important home literacy activity, a message that many parents were aware of. Most parents of New Entrant children and just over half of the parents of Year 2 children reported reading to their child most days. However, this frequency decreased significantly between entry to school and Year 4, highlighting another area in which parent activity differed from teacher expectation, that of reading to older children. An earlier New Zealand study on reading to older children (Elley, 1989) shows significant benefits for the vocabulary acquisition of 7- and 8-year-olds in hearing text read aloud, if that text contains vocabulary new to the child. This message about reading is an important one, particularly for the parents of children who may be behind in their reading development, given Elley's (1989) findings that children who start out with a lower vocabulary can make the same gains as other children.

Teachers described the importance of parents reading to children texts of greater complexity than they could be expected to read on their own, and of extending their repertoire of text types. However, only a relatively small number of parents reported talking about the meaning of words with their child when they had last read to them. This suggests either that the parents were unaware of the benefits of discussing the meaning of words with their child or that the texts being read did not contain vocabulary beyond the understanding of their child. The interview responses suggest the latter may in fact have been more the case, as comments made by some parents indicated that the texts they mostly read to their child were the readers they brought home from school.

These findings highlight two potential messages, supported by the research literature, which parents may find useful when selecting books for their children and when reading to them. One is that children benefit in terms of vocabulary acquisition when the texts read to them contain vocabulary that is new to them. The second is that when additional explanations of unknown words are provided as they are encountered, the vocabulary gains can more than double (Elley, 1989). In this context, the books provided by the Books in Homes Scheme, commented on so favourably by some of the parents and teachers in this study, can be seen as especially important because they provide reading material that fulfils these purposes.

Schools could also explore providing parents with more information about the value of engaging in conversations with their children about the deeper meanings in text. This might include modelling possible ways of going about this. The conversations most parents and students in this study recalled having in their most recent reading shared experience did not tend to involve an exploration of the deeper levels of text, or thinking critically about text. However, interpretations of the nature of the talk around text initiated by the parents in this study need to be made cautiously, as these were reported rather than observed. Some texts provide more opportunities for such conversations than others, and so this finding may also have been due to the complexity of the texts parents had most recently been reading.

The research literature indicates that there may be socioeconomic-related differences in the types of talk around text parents engage in with their children. In a study on the talk around text occurring with pre-schoolers in middle-class families, Phillips and McNaughton (1990) found that the parents involved raised the cognitive demands they placed on their children as they grew older. In a similar study, Dickinson, De Temple, Hirschler, and Smith (1992) found this was not the case for the low-income mothers in their project. Research involving observations of the talk around text initiated by the parents of older children would provide a useful addition to this research.

Supporting children's independent reading

Providing reading material in the home, modelling independent reading themselves, and providing time and routines for reading were the ways in which parents most frequently reported supporting their child to look at or read books on their own. The area that parents expressed the least amount of confidence in was choosing books for their child to read, and this was especially so for the parents of Year 4 children. Although most parents reported that their child took responsibility for book selection at the library, the findings from this study suggest that many children could have benefited from adult support when selecting books. Although most children described strategies for determining whether reading material was too difficult, few indicated that this was an approach they used when choosing books to read. Children most frequently chose books on the basis of the pictures on the cover or in the book, familiarity with the book, or by topic. These findings are consistent with those of Brooker (1998).

Gallagher (1996) emphasises the importance of assisting children with book selection, particularly newly independent readers, while Hancock (1999) discusses the negative impact on student confidence that can occur for newly independent readers when faced with books that are too hard. Hancock (1999) also suggests ways in which teachers can support students' transition to independent reading. These include reading easy-read chapter books to the class, using them for guided reading, and talking about books so that children become familiar with a range of books at their reading level. This information would also be of use to parents, along with suggested authors and texts for children at different stages to read.

Parents' need for appropriate information

Successfully aligning school and home reading literacy practices requires providing parents with literacy-related information that is relevant and useful. Most parents reported finding the literacy information received from the school to be useful. Over one-third of the parents considered the pedagogical information from the school had changed aspects of their home literacy practices, and some indicated that the impact of this information had been considerable. The findings from this study also highlight several areas in which parents needed further information. They included the following.

Information on how reading is taught at school

Most parents indicated that they would like more information, not just on how to assist their child as a reader at home, but also about how teachers teach children to read at school. Staff at Totara School promoted consistency in the use of strategies across home and school settings by focusing explicitly on how teachers teach children to read and write. Both parents and teachers from this school commented on the value of sharing this pedagogical information. Teachers from Rimu and Kowhai Schools were less confident that the parents in their communities engaged in school-like literacy activities at home, and some were hesitant about overwhelming the parents in their communities with "too much" information. However, the parents from these communities were more likely to indicate they wanted more information about how reading is taught at school.

Big picture information about reading

Parents wanted information about the bigger picture of reading instruction, and about the skills and knowledge their child would need to acquire at various ages and stages. Like the parents in the *Learning to Learn* study (Wylie & Smith, 1995), some of these parents held a linear conception of learning. This conception may have been reinforced by the graded texts represented by changing colours on the colour wheel that children bring home in the early stages of learning to read.

Teachers also saw the need to share information about the bigger picture of reading instruction, but they conceptualised it differently. They wanted to stress to parents the importance of children being exposed to an increasingly wide range of text types rather than just texts of increasing levels of difficulty, and of using these texts for an increasingly wide range of purposes. They also wanted parents to know that children need to understand the different layers within a text and to think critically about text.

Although parents' and teachers' conceptions of reading differed, the information teachers thought important to share addressed the type of information that parents wanted, that is, understanding

where their child was heading, and how what they did now would assisted their child on that journey.

Information about children's performance relative to their cohort or curriculum levels

Parents' understanding of their child's reading ability did not always align with teacher records of their reading age. The number of parents who used personal judgement, the difficulty of texts their child bought home from school, and comparisons with their child's peers or siblings as a basis for gauging their child's reading ability suggests they lacked a standard against which they could judge their performance.

Parents' desire for the bigger picture of reading instruction also points to this need, and is consistent with the findings of Robinson and Timperley's (2000) study of the accountability practices in 12 primary schools. Only 2 of the 12 schools in their study presented (in reports to parents) the standards used to judge children's achievement in an easily interpreted form. The practice of rating students' performance against teacher perception of their potential, or against the school rather than the national cohort, resulted in low-performing students sometimes receiving relatively high evaluative rankings or comments. This finding provides a possible explanation for why some of the parents in the present study reported they were unaware that their child was reading below their chronological age. In their study, Robinson and Timperley (2000) also point to how a lack of explicit information about the standards used in evaluations of student performance prevents improvement through accountability, because the need to improve is obscured.

Information about comprehension

Parents' most frequently reported goal for their child's development of reading skills and knowledge was that they understand what they read. While parents appeared familiar with the process of supporting their child to sound out unknown words, and confident in their ability to do so, parents seemed less certain in how to help their child understand what they were reading. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One is that the process of learning to read is more concrete, while the capacity to comprehend is less easy to pin down in explicit terms. Another is that parents may have assumed that their child's decoding ability signalled their comprehension of text.

Most of the information provided to parents across the three schools, particularly at the New Entrant and Year 2 levels, focused on hearing children read and how to respond when children encounter unknown words. Information on the importance of parents continuing to read increasingly complex text to their child and the impact this may have on the development of their

comprehension skills was not so visible. Nor was information on the importance of extending the range of text types offered to children.

This trend can also be found in the *Feed the Mind* pamphlets. The pamphlet *How can we Help our Children to Become Readers?* appears to target parents of preschool children. The pamphlet targeted at parents of school-age students, *How can we Help our Children Read the Books They Bring Home From School?,* focuses primarily on reading school readers at home. The findings from this study suggest room for a further pamphlet addressing issues of understanding text, perhaps entitled, "How can we help our children understand what they read?" Similarly, a pamphlet focusing on supporting students as they make the transition to independent reading would also fill an information gap found in this study. This pamphlet might be titled, "How can we help our children when they stop bringing school books home to read aloud?"

Such pamphlets could be developed by schools and might address the importance of continuing to read to school-age children, and extending the range of text type and text complexity offered to children while continuing to re-read familiar books. They could also provide information about how to choose texts for children as they become newly independent and independent readers, and strategies for helping children make a start on these books. The pamphlets might even provide examples of the types of conversation parents and children can have when sharing a text together, or when talking about texts that either the child or parent may have read independently. Alternatively, this information might be presented in other formats, such as on the school website or in other school publications, such as newsletters.

Information for parents of children beyond Year 2

As Biddulph et al. (2003) observe, children's literacy needs change as they grow older, and the literacy experiences provided in the home may need to change to take account of this. The literacy leaders in our study considered that the parents of middle school, particularly Year 4 children, were those who would most benefit from more literacy information and support, especially in relation to helping students broaden their exposure to different text types and to comprehend and think critically about text. Some of the parents confirmed this need by indicating that they were unsure of their role in their child's literacy development once they considered their child had "learnt to read". The decreasing parental contact with teachers on literacy-related issues as children moved out of Year 2 reported by both parents and teachers, along with the decreasing school emphasis on sharing literacy information with parents, may result in an information vacuum for some parents.

Although the parents of Year 4 children were less actively involved in class literacy activities and less likely to contact the classroom teacher, they were no less interested in gaining pedagogical literacy information than those of the younger children. The challenge here is finding ways of sharing this information. One solution might be to provide parents of children in the first two

years at school with information about the transition to independent reading. This would capitalise on a time when parents are shown to be more highly involved in school literacy activities and would also meet the need identified by parents for big picture information about literacy development. It would also provide an opportunity to provide parents with information about the ways in which current home literacy activities, such as reading to children and talking about text, build children's capacity to comprehend and think critically about text.

Information on building relationships with teachers

The findings of this study also highlight the need to inform parents about the value that their partnerships with teachers have for their child's progress. Along with the partnership-building initiatives identified above, this need could be addressed by informing parents through school websites or publications of the ways in which their relationships with teachers may support their child's development as a reader. The information covered might include the value of parental involvement in school literacy activities, examples of home literacy practices parents could share with their child's teacher, and suggestions on how to initiate discussions with teachers.

Summary and conclusions

The last five years have seen a shifting construction in government publications of the role of teachers and parents in children's learning, and an increasing emphasis on the importance of establishing partnerships between home and school. This has been supported by the provision of an array of resources, programmes, and professional development opportunities that have been used or adapted by schools. Schools have also developed their own approaches to building partnerships with the parents in their communities.

The study reported here explored the approaches used at three schools recognised for their interest in improving links with parents around the topic of literacy, and set it within the context of this shift in the construction of parent and teacher roles. The nature of the contact between parents and school staff that occurred at different levels of the school, and in particular as students move beyond Year 2 and become more independent as readers, was also explored.

The study also examined the home literacy practices of parents and children in relation to the expectations of teachers, and the information offered by the school. It considered the ways in which parents of children at different stages of reading viewed their roles and engaged in literacy activities with their children at home.

The findings and themes emerging from them not only highlight the relevance to and importance of school-home partnerships to children's success as readers, but also show how such partnerships appear to be developing and can be developed within New Zealand at present. The findings, when

compared with those of earlier related studies, make evident the shifts that are occurring in parents' and teachers' views of their own and each other's roles, and in the channels of communication between them. On the whole, the teachers of the three participating schools were more likely to view parents as partners as opposed to supporters or detractors of the class programme. Most parents also saw themselves as working in partnership with their child's teacher, and expressed confidence in their ability to assist their child's development as a reader. However, both parents and teachers conceived of this partnership as centering on school literacy practices, especially as these related to the work of parents with their children at home. Information sharing about home literacy practices and about how reading is taught by teachers at school was not always a feature of these partnerships.

Teachers and literacy leaders from all schools commented on the difficulty in reaching some parents in their communities, and the extent of these difficulties differed by school. Although similar approaches were used for sharing information with parents across the three schools, the nature of the information shared with parents differed. An upward spiralling of information sharing could be seen occurring at Totara School. The high level of parent visibility in the school and the high level of school-like literacy expertise children came equipped with fuelled high teacher expectations of the parents in their community. These high expectations influenced decisions about the information to be shared with parents. Teachers provided parents with pre-service levels of pedagogical literacy education, which provided parents and teachers with even more common ground on which to converse.

Several strategies successful in involving parents in school literacy-related events were held in common by all three schools. One was raising the visibility of the child in home-school partnerships. Teachers found it easier to engage with parents when their children were included in literacy events, goal setting and reporting, and when literacy information shared with parents and the wider community was linked with children's work. Another was providing time and opportunities for building relationships, both between parents and teachers, and between the parents themselves. Events that provided the sharing of food, fun activities, and opportunities to socialise, such as the Home-School Partnership Programme were those considered particularly successful.

One mode of communication not used by any of the schools in this study was video. Given that television was the most frequently reported non-people-based source of information used by parents, this may be an effective alternative for sharing information with parents. Video would provide parents with the opportunity to see a demonstration of a teacher hearing a child read, ensure that those parents unable to attend school meetings would not be disadvantaged, and provide opportunities for teachers to model strategies tailored to the needs of individuals. The benefits found in raising the profile of the student in parent-teacher partnerships could be capitalised on by including the parent's own child in the video.

The positive impact of school messages about reading on home literacy practices was also evident in the findings. This impact was seen in the frequency with which parents of New Entrant and Year 2 children across all schools read to their children and heard their children read at home, and their use of grapho-phonic prompts to support their child's use of strategies relating to the look and sound of words.

The findings from this study also indicate a couple of areas in which the schools' approach to sharing pedagogical information did not always align with parents' reported or observed needs. Few parents reported using semantic or syntactic prompts when hearing their children read, and while the goal of many parents was that their child be able to understand what they read, they were not always sure of how to support their child's comprehension. Teachers also observed that comprehension and critical thinking about text were areas that they needed to cover in greater depth with parents. Providing parents with the big picture of children's reading development and an understanding of the standards against which their child's performance was assessed were also seen as particularly important.

The decreasing school emphasis on providing literacy support to parents after their children had left the junior classes reported by the literacy leaders at all three schools coincided with the decreasing involvement of parents in school literacy events from Year 2 observed by teachers and reported by parents. This situation may have resulted in reduced opportunities for some parents to gain information about the approaches to reading taken with children as they become newly independent, and independent readers. By providing New Entrant and Year 2 parents with the big picture of literacy instruction, teachers could both meet the reported needs of these parents and increase the chances of parents accessing information about how to support their child in comprehending and thinking critically about increasingly complex texts. This strategy would also provide opportunity to share with parents the value for children's comprehension of continuing to read to children once they have "learnt to read", and of reading to them texts beyond their current reading level. Parents talking to their children about the meanings of words and ideas in such texts also enhances children's comprehension.

The schools in this study were committed to sharing pedagogical knowledge with parents, had innovated on past approaches to build better relationships with parents, and were reflecting on possible new approaches to share information in ways that best suited the needs of their communities. The provision of ongoing financial support and professional development could help schools such as these to sustain and build on their partnerships with parents through the systematic collection and use of evidence on the effectiveness of their initiatives.

The findings from this study suggest that the ongoing challenge for these schools may be building partnerships with the less visible parents in their communities, and learning more about the home literacy practices of the children in their classes, especially for those whose school and home experiences differ.

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Appendix A: Literacy leader interview questions

This interview is part of an NZCER study about the ways in which parents help their children with reading at home and communicate with school staff about their children's reading progress. The main purpose of this interview is to find out the sorts of things you would like to see parents doing at home to support their children's reading, and the strategies used school-wide for engaging with parents in the area of reading.

This interview should take about forty minutes. You don't have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. I would like to tape this interview if that is alright with you? The interview is confidential and will only be seen by the researchers working on this study. You will not be named in any reports from this study, and we will send you a copy of the draft report to check. A copy of the final report will be sent to the school when it is published.
Do you have any questions before we start?

Roles of teachers in supporting children's reading development

I'll start by asking some questions about the reading skills and attitudes you consider important, and how you see the role of teachers in helping children develop as readers.

1) What reading strategies do you consider important for children to learn at the emergent-early, fluent, and independent stages of reading?

   Emergent-early

   _____

   _____

   Fluent

   _____

   _____

   Independent

   _____

   _____

2) What are the *attitudes* to reading that you consider important for children to develop at the emergent-early fluent and independent stages of reading?
   Emergent-early

   _____

   _____

Fluent

_____

_____

Independent

_____

_____

3) What do you see as being the role of teachers in assisting the reading development of children at the emergent-early, fluent, and independent stages of reading?

Emergent-early

_____

_____

Fluent

_____

_____

Independent

_____

_____

4) How important do you see the role of teachers to be in assisting children's reading development?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

5) Why is that?

_____

_____

6) In what ways is it important?

_____

_____

5) Research findings suggest that gains students make in reading while in the junior school are not always maintained in Year four and beyond. Do you have any ideas about why this might be the case?

_____

_____

Role of parents in supporting children's reading development

I am now going to ask some questions about the community of parents at your school and the role of parents in helping their children with reading at home.

6) Could you tell me about the strengths and needs the parents in this community have in supporting children to develop as readers?

_____

_____

7) What do you consider to be the role of parents or other family members in assisting their children's reading development at the emergent-early, fluent, and independent stages of reading?

Emergent-early

_____

_____

Fluent

_____

_____

Independent

_____

_____

10) How important do you see the role of parents or other family members to be in assisting their children's reading development?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

11) Why is that?

_____

_____

12) Do you think the importance of the role played by parents changes as their children move through different reading stages?

_____

_____

13a) Do you think the parents in this community value different aspects of their children's reading development than those valued by teachers? Yes No

13b) (If yes) Could you tell me how they differ and the possible reasons for these differences?

_____

_____

Teacher and school-wide communication with parents about reading

My next questions are about the ways in which teachers at this school communicate with the parents of the children in their class about reading, and about school-wide approaches for communicating with parents.

14a) Do you have a school-wide approach to communicating with parents on the topic of literacy in general or reading in particular? Yes No

14b) (If yes) Could you describe it?

_____

_____

15) Could you describe all the strategies your school uses to communicate with and support parents about reading, and the resources that you use? For example school- or syndicate-wide meetings that include information on the topic of reading, printed material sent home, parent training in reading tutoring, or any other approaches.

_____

_____

16) Could you describe the responses of parents to these strategies and the possible reasons for these responses?

_____

_____

17a) Does your school take part in any programmes that involve providing information to parents about reading, such as *Books in Homes, or The Home-School Partnership Programme?* Yes No

17b) (If yes) Could you describe your school's use of the programme(s), and your views of the programme(s) in terms of supporting home-school communication on the topic of reading?

_____

_____

17c) (If yes) Could you describe the responses to parents of these programmes and the possible reasons for these responses?

_____

_____

18) What are the challenges for teachers in communicating with parents about children's reading performance?

_____

_____

19) Are you aware of any challenges parents face when communicating with teachers about their children's reading?

_____

_____

19a) Do any misunderstandings between parents and teachers occur when communicating about reading? Yes No

19b) (If yes) Why do you think these misunderstandings occur?

_____

_____

20a) Does the approach to communicating with parents about reading at this school differ at different levels of the school? Yes No

20b) (If yes) How does it differ?

_____

_____

20c) (If yes) What do you think are the reasons for those differences?

_____

_____

21a) Are there any particular levels of the school at which you think parents could benefit from more information and support about helping their children with reading? Yes No

21b) (If yes) What level(s)?

_____

_____

21c) What information and support do you think is needed by parents of students at this/these level(s)?

_____

_____

22a) Of all the school- or syndicate-wide strategies your school uses for communicating with parents about reading are there any you consider particularly effective for informing parents about supporting their children's reading development? Yes No

22b) (If yes) which?

_____

_____

22c) What is it that makes this/these forms of communication so effective?

_____

_____

23a) Are there any strategies that, you consider have not worked so well for informing parents about supporting their children's reading development? Yes No

_____

_____

23b) (If yes) which?

_____

_____

23c) (If yes) Why do you think this has not been so effective?

_____

_____

23d) (If yes) What do you think would make this strategy more effective?

_____

_____

24a) How do teachers in this school learn about children's reading from parents?

_____

_____

24b) How do you think information from parents helps teachers' reading programmes?

_____

_____

25a) In the future would you like to make any changes to the way in which the school communicates with parents about reading? Yes No

25b) (If yes) What changes would you like to make and why?

_____

_____

The inclusion of parents and community members in class and school-wide reading activities

I am now going to ask you some questions about the involvement of family members in school reading activities.

26a) How important do you think it is to include family or community members in classroom reading activities?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

26b) Why is that?

_____

_____

27) Could you describe all the ways in which parents or other members of the community are involved in class or school-wide reading activities at the different levels of the school? For example by helping in classroom reading programmes, by involvement in reading tutoring, or by participating in school events such as Book Week.

_____

_____

28) Do you have any strategies for supporting parents' involvement, especially those who may feel unconfident to participate?

_____

_____

29) In your view, what are the benefits for students in including family or community members in school reading activities?

_____

_____

30) Can you think of an example of this from your classroom?

_____

_____

31) In your view, what are the benefits for the family or community members of being involved in school reading activities? (Probe for evidence of these benefits)

_____

_____

32) Can you think of an example of this?

_____

_____

33) In your view, what are the benefits for teachers in including family or community members in school reading activities? (Probe for evidence of these benefits)

_____

_____

34) Can you give an example of this from your own experience?

_____

_____

35) What are the challenges teachers face when family or community members are involved in class or school-wide reading activities?

_____

_____

36) What challenges do you think parents or community members face when participating in class reading programmes?

_____

_____

36a) Are there any differences in the amount of parental involvement in classroom reading programmes at different levels of the school? Yes No

36b) (If yes) what are those differences?

_____

_____

36c) (If yes) What do you think are the reasons for those differences?

_____

_____

37a) Are there any particular levels of the school at which you think parents and/or students could benefit from a greater level of parental involvement in class reading activities?
Yes No

37b) (If yes) which level(s)?

_____

_____

37c) Why is that?

_____

_____

Concluding questions

38) This is the last question in the interview. Are there any other things you would like to say about the communication that occurs between home and school on the topic of reading, or on the ways in which parents and teachers can support each other in helping students as readers?

_____

_____

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you for giving your time to do this interview.

Appendix B: Teacher interview questions

This interview is part of an NZCER study about the ways in which parents help their children with reading at home and communicate with school staff about their children's reading progress. The main purpose of this interview is to find out the sorts of things you would like the parents of the students in your class to be doing at home to support their children's reading, and the ways in which you communicate with parents about their children's reading. I am also interested in strategies used school-wide for engaging with parents in the area of reading.

This interview should take about one hour. You don't have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. I would like to tape this interview if that is alright with you? The interview is confidential and will only be seen by the researchers working on this study. You will not be named in any reports from this study, and we will send you a copy of the draft report to check. A copy of the final report will be sent to the school when it is published.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Roles of teachers in supporting children's reading development

I'll start by asking some questions about the reading strategies and attitudes you consider important, and how you see your role in helping the children in your class develop as readers.

1) What reading strategies do you consider important for the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class to learn?

_____

_____

2) What are the *attitudes* to reading that you consider important for the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class to develop?

_____

_____

3) What do you see as being *your* role in assisting the reading development of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent readers] in your class?

_____

_____

4) How important do you see the role of teachers to be in assisting children's reading development?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

5) Why is that?

_____

_____

6) (If ‘Essential’ or ‘Important’) In what ways is it important?

_____

_____

7) Research findings suggest that gains students make in reading while in the junior school are not always maintained in year four and beyond. Do you have any ideas about why this might be the case?

_____

_____

Role of parents in supporting children’s reading development

I am now going to ask some questions about the community of parents at your school and the role of parents in helping their children with reading at home.

8) Could you tell me about the strengths and needs of the parents in this school’s community in supporting children to develop as readers?

_____

_____

9) What do you consider to be the role of parents or other family members in assisting their children’s reading development at the [emergent-early, fluent, and independent] stage of reading?

_____

_____

10) How important do you consider the role of parents or other family members to be in assisting their children’s reading development?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

11) Why is that?

_____

_____

12a) Do you think the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers you teach value different aspects of their children's reading development than you do?
Yes No

12b) (If yes) Could you tell me how they differ and the possible reasons for these differences?

_____

_____

13) What sorts of things do you learn from parents’ about children’s reading?

_____

_____

14) Can you describe the ways in which this sort of information helps your reading programme?

_____

_____

15) Can you give me some specific examples of things you have learnt about children's reading from the parents and of the students in this study?

_____

_____

16) Can you think of some specific examples of how you have used this information in your programme?

_____

_____

The inclusion of parents and/or community members in class reading programmes

I am now going to ask you some questions about the inclusion of parents in class reading programmes.

17a) How important do you think it is to include family or community members in classroom reading programmes?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

17b) Why is that?

_____

_____

18a) Do you provide opportunities for family or community members to be involved in any part of your class reading programme? For example having parents in to listen to individual or groups of children read, help with reading activities, or read children stories. Yes No

18b) (If no) Could you tell me if there are any particular reasons why not? [Then go to XXX]

_____

_____

18c) (If yes) Could you describe how family or community members are involved?

_____

_____

18d) Are there any things you do to support parents' involvement, especially those who may feel unconfident to participate?

_____

_____

18e) In your view, what are the benefits for the students in your class, of including family or community members in your class reading programme?

_____

_____

18f) Can you think of an example of this from your classroom?

_____

_____

18g) In your view, what are the benefits for the family or community members of being involved in your class reading programme?

_____
_____

18h) Can you think of an example of this?

_____
_____

18i) What are the benefits for you of involving family or community members in your class reading programme?

_____
_____

18j) Can you give me an example of this from your own experience?

_____
_____

18k) What are the challenges you face when involving family or community members in your class reading programme?

_____
_____

18l) What do you think can be done to overcome these challenges?

_____
_____

18m) What challenges do you think parents or community members face when participating in class reading programmes?

_____
_____

Teacher communication with parents about reading

I am now going to ask you about the ways in which you provide information to parents about the particular reading skills and needs of their children. Later in the interview I will ask you about school- or syndicate-wide approaches to communicating with parents.

Do you provide parents with information about their children's reading:

19a) At parent-teacher interviews? Yes No

19b) (If yes) Could you describe the type of information you give to parents, and how you do this?

_____
_____

20a) During informal chats with parents before or after school? Yes No

20b) (If yes) Could you give me an example?

_____

_____

21a) In school reports? Yes No

21b) (If yes) Could you describe the type of information you provide?

_____

_____

22a) Through sending notes, or reading activities home? (Not general class notes) Yes No

22b) (If yes) Could you give me an example?

_____

_____

23a) By telephoning parents? Yes No

23b) (If yes) Could you give me an example?

_____

_____

24a) Through other means? Yes No

24b) (If yes) Please explain the type and format of this information?

_____

_____

25) Of all these formats for communicating with parents about the reading needs and abilities of their children, which do you find the most effective, and why?

_____

_____

26a) Do you ever provide parents with activities or suggestions of things they could do at home to target the specific reading needs of their child? Yes No

26b) (If yes) Could you give me an example?

_____

_____

(Probe for the process by which this occurred and teacher's views of parent's responses)

_____

_____

27a) Do you provide *general* information about reading to all parents of the children in your class, for example by sending home general notices or pamphlets about reading? Yes No

27b) (If yes) Could you describe the type and format of information you give to parents?

_____

_____

28) About how often this year have you been approached by parents to talk about their child's reading?

Once a week or more Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Once a year

29a) About how many of the parents of children in your class have approached you once or more this year to talk about their child's reading?

All Most About half Some None

29b) Could you describe the information or concerns parents of the [emergent/early/independent] readers in your class most frequently want to discuss, and how you respond? (For example, information or concerns about reading to children, hearing children read, choosing books for children, or supporting children's independent reading.)

_____

_____

30a) Do parents approach you in order to give you information about their child's reading?
Yes No

30b) (If yes) What sort of information do they give?

_____

_____

31a) Do you face any particular challenges in communicating with parents of the children in your class about reading? Yes No

31b) (If yes) Could you describe the challenges and how you dealt with it/them?

_____

_____

32) Are you aware of the sorts of challenges parents may face when communicating with you about their children's reading?

_____

_____

School-wide communication with families about reading

Now I'd like you to think about all of the school- or syndicate-wide approaches to communicating with parents about reading that happen at this school. Think of things like parent meetings, pamphlets or notices sent home, parent training in reading tutoring or any other form of communication with parents about reading.

33) Of all these school-wide ways of communicating with parents about reading which do you consider the most effective for informing parents of [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers about supporting their children's reading development, and why?

_____

_____

34) Of all these ways of communicating with parents about reading which do not work so well for informing parents of [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers about supporting their children's reading development, and why?

_____

_____

35a) Are there any changes to the way in which the school communicates with parents about reading that you would like to see made in the future?

_____

_____

35b) (If yes) What changes?

_____

_____

Reading to children

I am now going to ask you some questions about parents reading to their children.

36a) How important do you think it is for parents of [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers to read to their children?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

36b) Why is that?

_____

_____

37) What are the things you would like the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] children in your class to do to support their children's reading development when reading to them?

_____

_____

38) How confident are you that the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class do these things?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

39) Why is that?

_____

_____

Listening to children read aloud

I am now going to ask you some questions about the things you would like parents to do when their children take books home to read aloud.

40) How important is it for [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers to read aloud to someone at home?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

41) Why is that?

_____

_____

42) What are the things you would like the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class to do when listening to their children read aloud?

_____

_____

43) What would you like them to do when their child comes to a word they don't know?

_____

_____

44) In general how confident are you that the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class do these things?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

45) Why is that?

_____

_____

Independent reading

I am now going to ask you some questions about the things parents can do to support their children when their children are looking at, or reading books independently.

46) How important is it for emergent-early/fluent/independent readers to look at, or read books independently at home?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

47) Why is that?

_____

_____

48) What are the things you would like the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class to do to support their children when their children are looking at or reading books independently?

_____

_____

49a) How confident are you that parents do these things?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

49b) Why is that?

_____

_____

Choosing books

I am now going to ask you some questions about the things parents can do to help their children to choose books for listening to, looking at, or reading.

50) How important do you think it is for parents of [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers to take their children to the library?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

51) Why is that?

_____

_____

52a) How important is it for parents of [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers to help their children choose books from the library or other places?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

52b) Why is that?

_____

_____

53) What would you like the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class to think about or do when helping their children choose books, or choosing books for their children?

_____

_____

54) How confident are you that the parents of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class do these things?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

Other ways parents can support their children's reading development

So far we have talked about the importance of parents reading to their children, listening to them read, supporting their independent reading and helping them choose books.

55a) Can you describe any other things you consider important for the parents of the [emergent-5early/fluent/independent] readers in your class, to do to support their reading development? For example writing, talking, or any other things you consider important.

_____

_____

56) Of all the ways in which parents can help their children with reading that we have talked about in this interview, which do you consider the most important in supporting the development of the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class?

_____

_____

Communicating with children about reading at home

I will now ask you some questions about the ways in which you communicate with children about the importance of reading at home.

57a) Do you have any strategies for encouraging students to read at home? Yes No

57b) (If yes) please describe.

_____

_____

58a) Do you have any systems for monitoring the reading that goes on at home? For example, do you have checklists for parents to sign, or student forms for self-monitoring, such as reading logs? Yes No

58b) (If yes) Please describe.

_____

_____

59) What are the challenges you face in ensuring that the [emergent-early/fluent/independent] readers in your class are engaging in reading activities at home and how do you address these?

_____

_____

Concluding questions

60) This is the last question in the interview. Would you like to make a final summary comment about the communication that occurs between home and school on the topic of reading, or on the ways in which parents and teachers can support each other in helping students as readers?

_____

_____

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you for giving your time to do this interview.

Appendix C: Parent interview

This interview is part of an NZCER study about reading. The main purpose of this interview is to find out about any things you do at home that might help [child] with reading. I would like to know if you have any questions or worries about [child]'s reading and if you have any suggestions about how schools could give more support to parents of children learning to read. I am also interested in how the school gives you information about [child]'s reading progress, and about helping children become better readers.

This interview should take about fifty minutes. You don't have to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. The interview is confidential and will only be seen by the researchers working on this study. You will not be named in the report or any articles from this study. We will send a copy of the report to the school and a summary of the findings to you.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Role of parents in supporting children's reading development

I will start by asking you some questions about the reading skills, knowledge and attitudes you think are important for [child] to learn this year, and how you help [child] with reading.

1) In general what *attitudes* to reading would you like [child] to develop?

_____

_____

2) In general what reading *skills and knowledge* would you like [child] to learn this year?

_____

_____

3) Could you describe what you do to help [child] with reading?

_____

_____

4) Are there any things you do at home, other than reading, which you think might help your child to become a better reader? For example, writing, talking, or any other things you can think of.

_____

_____

5) How important do you think your help is for [child]'s reading development?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

6) Why is that?

_____

_____

7) How confident are you about helping [child] with reading at home?

Very confident Quite confident Not very confident Not sure

8) Why is that?

_____

_____

Role of teachers in supporting children's reading development

I am now going to ask you some questions about what you think [child]'s teacher this year should do to help [child] with reading.

9) What do you think [child]'s teacher this year needs to do to help [child]'s reading?

_____

_____

10) How important do you think the teacher is in helping [child] to learn about reading?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

11) Why is that?

_____

_____

12) Do you think [child]'s teacher has different goals for [child]'s reading than you have?

Yes No

13) Why is that?

_____

_____

14) How much do you know about the sorts of things [child]'s teacher does at school to help [child]'s reading?

A lot A bit Nothing

15) [If A lot or A bit] Could you describe the things you think [child]'s teacher does at school to help [child]'s reading.

_____

_____

16) How confident are you in the ability of [child]'s teacher to support his/her reading development?

Very confident Quite confident Not very confident Not sure

17) Why is that?

_____

_____

Information about [child]'s reading

I am now going to ask you some questions about the information you have received from school about [child]'s reading. Have you received information about [child]'s reading from:

18)	Parent-teacher interviews	Yes	No	Didn't attend
19)	Informal chats with the teacher	Yes	No	
20)	School reports	Yes	No	
21)	Notes or notices from the teacher	Yes	No	
22)	Other	Yes	No	

23) Of all these ways of getting information about [child]'s reading, which do you think is the most helpful, and why?

_____

_____

24) What level do you think your child is reading at?

_____

_____

25) Do you think [child] is reading at about the right level for his/her age?

Yes No Not sure

26) What makes you think that?

_____

_____

27a) This year, have you ever gone to talk to your child's teacher about an issue or concern about [child]'s reading that you have had? Yes No

27b) (If yes) Could you describe the ideas you talked about?

_____

_____

28) How confident do you feel about going to speak to [child]'s teacher about his/her reading?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

29) Why is that?

_____

_____

30a) Are there any times this year when you have worked with the teacher to help [child] with a particular need in reading?

Yes No

30b) (If yes) Could you describe what this involved?

_____

_____

Messages from the school about reading in general

We have just been talking about some of the ways in which you have received information about [child]'s reading.

31) Have you ever been to *general* school meetings for parents that included information on reading?

Yes No

32) Has the school ever sent you any written information with *general* ideas for helping children with reading at home?

Yes No

33a) Have you ever had any other information from the school about reading in *general*?

Yes No

33b) (If yes) What was that?

_____

_____

34) Which of these ways of getting general information about how to help children with reading would you like the most?

- ☐ Parent information evening run by teachers
- ☐ Written information such as notices, pamphlets, or booklets
- ☐ Seeing a demonstration of what to do when listening to a child read
- ☐ Other_____

35) Why is that?

_____

_____

Parent perceptions of school information about reading

36a) Of all the information you have got from the school about [child]'s reading or about helping children with reading, was there anything that you didn't understand very well?

_____

_____

36b) (If yes) What was that?

_____

_____

37) Of all the information you have got from the school about helping [child] with reading, which have you found the most useful?

_____

_____

38a) Has any of the information you have got from school changed the things you do at home to help [child] with reading?

_____

_____

38b) (If yes) What do you do differently?

_____

_____

39a) Would you like more information about what [child]'s teacher does at school to help children with reading?

Yes No

39b) (If yes) What information would you like?

_____

_____

40a) Would you like more information, now or in the future, about helping your child with reading? Yes No

40b) (If yes) What information would you like?

_____

_____

41a) In the past would you have liked more information about helping [child] with reading?

Yes No

41b) (If yes) What information would you have liked?

_____

_____

Opportunities for parent involvement in school reading programmes

Now I would like you to tell me about any opportunities the school has provided for parents to go in to school and contribute to school reading activities. This year have you ever helped in a class at school by:

42) Reading to children at school?

Yes No

43) Listening to children read to you?

Yes No

44) Helping with class reading activities?

Yes No

45a) Being involved in other school activities that include reading?

Yes No

45b) (If yes) Which activities?

_____

46) In the future do you plan to be involved in class reading activities like the ones we have been talking about?

Yes No Not sure

47) Why is that?

_____

_____

48a) Have any of the things you have seen happen at school, or heard about happening at school given you new ideas about reading or changed the things you do to help [child] with reading at home?

Yes No

48b) (If yes) Could you describe what you saw or heard and the new ideas you got?

_____

_____

49a) Has [child]'s teacher ever asked you for information about [child] to help her teach him to be better at reading? Yes No

49b) (If yes), what information did he/she ask for?

_____

_____

49c) (If yes) Do you know how she was planning on using it?

_____

_____

50a) Have you ever gone to [child]'s teacher to give him/her information or ideas about [child]'s reading? Yes No

50b) (If yes) What did you talk with [child]'s teacher about?

_____

_____

50c) (If no) Is there a reason why you have not done this?

_____

_____

Other sources of information about reading

I am now going to describe some other places from which you might have got information or ideas about reading.

51) Has [child] ever had extra help with reading from a reading tutor? For example, from Kit McGrath. Yes No

Have you ever got information or ideas about helping [child] with reading from:

52)	Friends	Yes	No
53)	Family	Yes	No
54)	TV	Yes	No
55)	Radio	Yes	No
56)	Internet	Yes	No
57)	Videos	Yes	No
58)	Books	Yes	No
59)	Posters or pamphlets	Yes	No
60)	Newspapers	Yes	No
61)	Other	Yes	No

62a) Has any of the information from any of these sources given you new ideas about reading or changed the things you do with [child] at home?

Yes No

62b) (If yes) Could you describe the new ideas or how you changed what you did?

_____

_____

63a) Has any of the information you got from any of these sources been different from the information you got from school?

Yes No

63b) (If yes) What was different?

_____

_____

63c) (If yes) Which information did you use?

_____

_____

63d) (If yes) How did you decide which information to use?

_____

_____

Reading to children

I am now going to ask some questions about reading activities you might do at home. I'll begin by asking you some questions about times when [child] *listens* to books being read aloud.

64) About how often would someone at home read aloud to [child]?

Every day	Every 2–3 days	Every 4–5 days	Once a week
Once a fortnight	Once a month	Hardly ever/never	

65) How confident do you feel reading to [child] at home?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

66) Why is that?

_____

_____

67) Now I would like you to think about when you last read aloud to [child].

_____

_____

68) What did you read?

_____

_____

69) How long ago was it that?

_____

_____

70a) Did you talk about what happens in the book, or about the ideas in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

70b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

71a) Did you talk about things in the book that link with [child]'s life or interests?

Yes No Can't remember

71b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

72a) Did you talk with [child] about what was happening in any of the pictures of the book?

Yes No Can't remember

72b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

73a) Did you talk about words in the book and what they mean?

Yes No Can't remember

73b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

74a) Did you ask [child] questions about the book?

Yes No Can't remember

74b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

75) How important do you think it is for [child] to listen to books being read aloud?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

76) Why is that?

_____

_____

Listening to children

I am now going to ask you some questions about times when [child] reads books aloud.

77) Has [child] brought books home from school to read aloud in the last two weeks?

Yes No (If no, go to q.73)

78a) Are the books [child] brings home from school?

Too easy Too hard About right Not sure

78b) (If "too easy/hard)What makes you think they are too easy/hard?

_____

_____

79) What would you do if [child] brought a book home that was too easy or too hard?

_____

_____

80a) How interesting is the reading material [child] brings home from school?

Very interesting Moderately interesting Not very interesting

80b) Why is that?

_____

_____

81) Does [child] bring home?

Too much to read Not enough to read About the right amount
Not sure

82) About how often do you listen to your child read aloud?

Every day Every 2–3 days Every 4–5 days Once a week
Once a fortnight Once a month Hardly ever/never

83a) How confident are you in knowing what to do when [child] reads aloud to you?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

83b) Why is that?

_____

_____

84) I would like you to think back to the last time you listened to [child] read aloud. What book did [child] read?

_____

_____

85) How long ago was that?

_____

_____

86a) When [child] got out his/her reading book, did you talk about what the book might be about before he/she started reading?

Yes No Can't remember

86b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

87a) Did you talk about any of the pictures of the book?

Yes No Can't remember

87b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

88a) Did you talk about what happens in the book, or about the ideas in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

88b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

89a) Did you talk about things in the book that link with [child]'s experiences or interests?

Yes No Can't remember

89b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

90a) Did you talk about any of the words in the book and what they mean?

Yes No Can't remember

90b) (If yes) Could you give an example?

_____

_____

91a) Were there any words [child] did not know?

Yes No Can't remember

91b) (If yes) What were the words?

_____

_____

91c) (If yes) When [child] came to the word he/she did not know, what did he/she do?

_____

_____

91d) What happened after that? (Prompt, And then what happened?)

_____

_____

92) What does [child] usually do when he/she comes to an unknown word?

_____

_____

93) What sorts of things do you usually say or do when [child] comes to a word that he/she doesn't know?

_____

_____

94) Could you tell me why you do those things?

_____

_____

95a) Do you ever have difficulties or problems when you are listening to [child] read aloud?

Yes No

95b) (If yes) Could you describe the difficulties you have?

_____

_____

96a) How important do you think it is for [child] to read books aloud at home?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

96b) Why is that?

_____

_____

Independent reading

I am now going to ask you some questions about the times [child] might look at books or read by him/herself. When you are answering these questions, keep in mind all types of reading material like library books, comics, CDs or the internet.

97) About how often does [child] look at reading material or read quietly by him/herself?

Every day	Every 2–3 days	Every 4–5 days	Once a week
Once a fortnight	Once a month	Hardly ever/never	

98a) How confident do you feel in supporting [child] when he/she is reading by him/herself?

Very confident Moderately confident Not very confident Not sure

98b) Why is that?

_____

_____

99a) Do you have any concerns about the reading material [child] chooses? Yes No

99b) (If yes) Why is that?

_____

_____

100a) Do you ever talk with [child] about books he/she has been reading or looking at by him/herself?

_____

_____

100b) (If yes) About how often?

Every day Every 2–3 days Every 4–5 days Once a week
Once a fortnight Once a month Hardly ever/never

101) I'd like you to think back to the last time you and [child] talked about something he/she had been reading. What was he/she reading?

_____

_____

102) How long ago did you have this talk?

_____

_____

103) Could you describe to me what you talked about?

_____

_____

104a) How important do you think it is for [child] to spend time looking at books, or reading by him/herself?

Essential Important Not very important Not sure

104b) Why is that?

_____

_____

Choosing books

My next questions are about going to the library and choosing books.

105) About how often would you, or someone from your family, go to a library (either public, or school) with [child]?

Once a week Once a month Once a term Once or twice a year Hardly ever/Never

106) Who usually chooses the library books?

You/Family member Child Both

107) (If child) How does [child] usually choose books?

_____

_____

108) How confident are you in helping [child] choose books?

Very confident Quite confident Not very confident Not at all confident

109) What do you look for when you are choosing books for [child] or helping [child] choose books?

_____

_____

Background

I would now like to ask you some questions about your background and educational qualifications. Please let me know if there are any of these questions you do not wish to answer.

110) What is your relationship to child?

- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Step-mother
- ☐ Step-father
- ☐ Other

111) Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to? (Tick as many as needed.)

- ☐ a) Mäori
- ☐ b) Päkehä/European
- ☐ c) Pacific
- ☐ d) Asian
- ☐ e) Other _____

112) (If more than one box is ticked in question 35) Is there one group you mainly identify with?
Yes No Not sure

- ☐ a) Mäori
- ☐ b) Päkehä/European
- ☐ c) Pacific
- ☐ d) Asian
- ☐ e) Other _____

113) What is your first language? (WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER)
_____

- ☐ English
- ☐ Mäori
- ☐ Pacific
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other European

114) In what languages do you speak with [child] at home? (WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER)
_____

- ☐ English
- ☐ Mäori
- ☐ Pacific
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other European

115) In which country did you go to primary school? (WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER)

- ☐ New Zealand
- ☐ Pacific
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Other European

116) What is your highest educational qualification? (WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER)

Name of qualification: _____

1) No formal qualification
2) School qualification
3) Vocational/trades (e.g., hairdresser, apprenticeship)
4) Degree or higher
5) Tertiary other than trades or degree (such as polytechnic diplomas, e.g., journalism)
6) Can't remember/Chose not to answer

117) If you are living with a partner, what is your partner's highest educational qualification? (WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER)

Name of qualification: _____

1) No formal qualification
2) School qualification
3) Vocational/trades (e.g., hairdresser, apprenticeship)
4) Degree or higher
5) Tertiary other than trades or degree (such as polytechnic diplomas, e.g., journalism)
6) Can't remember/Chose not to answer

118) What place in the family does your child who is in this study come?

1) Oldest
2) Second
3) Third
4) Fourth
5) Fifth
6) Sixth or younger

Concluding questions

119) This is the last question in the interview. Would you like to make a final comment about helping children with reading or about the ways teachers and parents share ideas about reading?

_____

_____

120) Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

_____

_____

Thank you for giving your time to do this interview. We will be sending you a ten dollar voucher to thank you for giving up your time to do this interview. Would you prefer:

A Whitcoulls voucher? A Music voucher? A Grocery voucher?

Please could you give me the address to send this voucher to?

Appendix D: Student interview questions

Student number _____ School code _____ Date_____

This interview is part of a project I am doing about reading. I would like to learn about the reading you do at school and at home. I am really interested in finding out about what you think. I would like to ask you some questions about the reading you do. I am going to ask some other children from your school for their ideas too.

My questions will take about thirty minutes. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. No one else will see the things I write down. I am going to use your ideas to help me write my report but I will not put your name in it. Do you have any questions you want to ask me before we start?

Listening to texts

I am going to start by asking you some questions about the times people read things to you.

1) I would like you to think about the last time someone at home read to you.
Who was the person who read to you?

Mum Dad Sibling Extended family Other_____

2) When was that? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER]
_____

a) Today or yesterday
b) 2–3 days ago
c) 4–5 days ago
d) A week ago
e) Two weeks ago
f) More than two weeks
g) Can't remember

3) What did [family member] read to you?
_____
_____

4) What sort of book is that? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) A reading book from school
b) A story book
c) A book about true things
d) A comic book
e) Other _____

5a) Did you talk together about any of the pictures in the book or on the cover?

Yes No There were no pictures Can't remember

5b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____

_____

6a) Did you talk together about what happens in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

6b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____

_____

7a) Did you talk together about any of the words in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

7b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____

_____

8a) Did [family member] ask you any questions about what happens in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

8b) (If yes) Can you tell me what the questions were?

_____

_____

9a) How much do you like it when someone at home reads to you?

 Not sure

9b) Why is that? (Prompt: What are the things you like/don't like?)

_____

_____

10) Is listening to a story at home different from listening to a story at school? Yes No

(If yes) In what way is it different?

_____

_____

Reading aloud

I am now going to ask you some questions about the times you read books from school *aloud* to someone at home.

11) This year have you done any reading aloud to someone at home? Yes No

(If "No") Go to question X.

12) I would like you to think about the last time you read *aloud* to someone at home. Who was the person you read to?

Mum Dad Sibling Extended Family Other

13) When did you read to them? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) Today or yesterday
b) 2–3 days ago
c) 4–5 days ago
d) A week ago
e) Two weeks ago
f) More than two weeks
g) Can't remember

14) What did you read?

_____
_____

15) What sort of book is that? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) A reading book from school
b) A story book
c) A book about true things
d) A comic book
e) Other _____

16a) Did you and [family member] talk together about any of the pictures in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

16b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____
_____

17a) Did you talk together about what happens in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

17b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____

_____

18a) Did your [family member] ask you any questions about the book?

Yes No Can't remember

18b) (If yes) Can you tell me what the questions were about?

_____

_____

19a) Did you talk together about any of the words in the book?

Yes No Can't remember

19b) (If yes) Can you tell me what you talked about?

_____

_____

20a) Did you come to any hard words when you were reading aloud?

Yes No Can't remember

20b) (If no or can't remember) What do you usually do when you are reading and you come to a hard word?

_____

_____

21a) (If no or can't remember) What does your [family member] usually say when you come to a hard word?

_____

_____

21b) (If yes) Can you tell me what the word(s) was?

_____

_____

21c) When you came to the hard word what did you do?

_____

_____

21d) What did your [family member] say?

_____

_____

21e) And then what happened next?

_____

_____

22) What does your teacher tell you to do when you come to a hard word?

_____

_____

23a) How much do you like reading a school book out loud at home?

     Not sure

23b) Why is that? (Prompt: What are the things you like/don't like?)

_____

_____

24a) Is reading aloud at home different from reading to the teacher at school? Yes No

24b) (If yes) How is it different?

_____

_____

Independent reading

I am now going to ask you some questions about any times you might look at books or read quietly by *yourself* at home.

25) This year have you looked at any books or read by yourself at home? I want you to think of all the things you might look at or read by yourself, like school reading books, library books, comics, the bible, CDs, or the internet. Yes No

(If No) Go to Question XX

I want you to think about the last time you read or looked at something by *yourself* at home.

26) When was that? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) Today or yesterday
b) 2–3 days ago
c) 4–5 days ago
d) A week ago
e) Two weeks ago
f) More than two weeks
g) Can't remember

27) What were you reading or looking at? _____

28) What sort of book is that? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) A reading book from school
b) A story book
c) A book about true things
d) The bible
e) A comic book
f) Other _____

(For NE/Y1 Go to 30a)

29a) Did you come to any words that you did not know? Yes No Can't remember

29b) (If no or can't remember) What do you usually do when you are reading by yourself and you come to a word you don't know?

_____
_____

29c) (If yes) What did you do when you came to the word(s) you did not know?

_____
_____

30a) Did you talk to anyone at home about the reading you have been telling me about?
Yes No

30b) (If Yes) Who did you talk to?

Mum Dad Sibling Extended Family Other

30c) What did you talk about?

_____
_____

31a) How much do you like reading or looking at books by yourself at home?






Not sure

31b) Why is that? (Prompt: What are the things you like/don't like?)

_____
_____

32a) Is reading by yourself at home different from reading by yourself at school? Yes No

32b) (If yes) How is it different?

_____
_____

Choosing books

I am now going to ask you some questions about choosing books.

33) When you are by yourself, how do you choose which books to read?

_____

_____

34a) **(For Y2 and Y4 only)** Do you have any way of working out if books are too hard, too easy, or about right to read? Yes No

34b) (If Yes) How do you work that out?

_____

_____

35) Do you ever go to the library with someone from your family? Yes No
(If No) Go to q38.

36a) I'd like you to think about the last time you went to the library with someone from your family. It could be a library in town, or the school library. Who did you go with?

Mum Dad Sibling Extended Family
Other_____

36b) When was this trip to the library you have been telling me about? [WRITE ANSWER AND CODE ANSWER] _____

a) This week
b) Last week
c) More than two weeks ago

37a) Who chose which books to get out?

You [Family member/s] Both

37b) (If child) Did you get help choosing books? Yes No

37c) (If yes) What help did you get?

_____

_____

38a) How much do you like going to the library with someone from home?

Not sure

38b) Why is that? (Prompt: What are the things you like/don't like?)

_____

_____

39a) Is going to the library with [family member] different from going to the school library with your class? Yes No

39b) (If yes) How is it different?

_____

_____

Ideas about reading

Now I am going to ask you what you think about reading.

40a) How much do you like looking at books and reading things?

 Not sure

40b) Can you tell me why?

_____

_____

41a) How good do you think you are at learning to read?

 Not sure

41b) Why is that?

_____

_____

42) People have all sorts of different ideas about how to get better at reading. What things do *you* think you need to do to be a good reader?

_____

_____

43) What do you think teachers should do to help children get better at reading?

_____

_____

44) What do you think parents should do to help children get better at reading?

_____

_____

Concluding questions

45) This is the last question in the interview. Are there any other things you would like to say about reading?

_____

_____

Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you for doing this interview with me.