School leadership in a school-home partnership:

Reading Together at St Joseph's School Otahuhu

Bryan Tuck, Liz Horgan, Cathy Franich, Marian Wards, St Joseph's School Otahuhu 2007

BES

ITERATIVE BEST EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS PROGRAMME
HEI KETE RAUKURA
http://educationcounts.govt.nz/goto/BES
New Zealand

▲▲▲
≈≈≈≈≈≈
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Contents

In acknowledgement of the commitment of the families
and teachers of St Joseph's to the education of their children

Executive summary

St Joseph's School Otahuhu is a state integrated Catholic primary school, with a roll of 314, classified for funding purposes as decile one, and nearly 90% of the children identify themselves as either Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands, Tokelauan or Niuean. The school has a very stable staff and senior management team. The distribution of the students on standardised measures of achievement in language tends to be positively skewed, e.g. in 2007, only 12% of the students in St Joseph's, compared with 23% in the normal population, fell in the lowest three stanines on STAR, 59% are stanine five or higher on PAT Reading Comprehension, and 80% are stanine five or higher on PRETOS. The school is regarded by ERO (2004, 2007) as providing education of a very high standard, with effective leadership and quality teaching.

Reading Together is a programme, consisting of four workshops over seven weeks that focuses on teaching parents specific skills to support the development of reading, and stresses collaborative and non-threatening partnerships between parents, teachers, and children. The early research indicated that it had a significant impact on children's reading comprehension, and observations since then have identified improvements in achievement, and more positive relationships between parents and their children and between parents and teachers.

The implementation of *Reading Together* at St Joseph's Primary School facilitated the alignment of school-home links with effective teaching and learning. Positive outcomes included recorded improvements in students' levels of reading comprehension, reports by parents of positive and constructive changes in relationships with their children, and observations by teachers of positive shifts in children's independent reading and relationships between teachers and parents.

Before introducing the programme for consideration to the senior management team the Principal evaluated the evidence for its effectiveness, determined the resources required, identified its alignment with the school's language curriculum, and assured herself of its coherence with her perceptions of constructive school-home links.

The senior management team - the Principal, Deputy Principal and Associate Principal - reviewed the evidence for effectiveness, demands on resources and curriculum alignment, and then arranged a meeting with the programme's developer in order to further their understanding of the programme's rationale. Following this a collaborative decision was made to implement the programme, with the Deputy and Associate Principals as leaders.

It was of critical importance to the Principal that she had a "*deep understanding*" of *Reading Together.* One of the reasons for this was to ensure that she and her senior management team (two of whom had critical roles as syndicate leaders in the school's leadership) could engage in intelligent discourse with each other and teachers about the process and outcomes.

The teachers and senior management team regard themselves as part of a community that has collective responsibility for children's learning and welfare. Care was taken to ensure staff was informed of the nature of the programme. Initially this was done

through two staff meetings: the first, involving the programme developer, was facilitated by the Deputy Principal and Associate Principal; the second was lead by the Principal.

The Principal, and the Deputy and Associate Principal, are regarded by staff as having a very good knowledge of the families and children. The families for the first evening workshops were carefully chosen to ensure they would be good ambassadors for future runs of the programme. They were personally invited by the Principal.

In the workshops, parents were regarded as co-participants and the nature of the interactions and the physical context were designed to empower them and affirm the value of their contributions.

There was a network of feedback on the consequences of the programme. Parents provided structured feedback on the impact of the programme, the school had in place a well developed system for monitoring students' progress in reading and a context was created by the senior management team that facilitated conversations between them and classroom teachers. These "con*versations on the run*" or "*teacher talk*" were very important in that they facilitated the development of an informed community and provided feedback to the senior management team on the impact of the programme on students and families.

There was a high degree of trust and professional respect among the senior management team, and between them and teachers. The leadership was both instructional and distributed. At times decisions were made collaboratively; at other times decisions and tasks were aligned with administrative roles. The Principal and the senior management team were directly involved in the programme and this involvement was associated with goal setting, monitoring of processes and outcomes, and professional learning, which was an important aspect for the leaders and some teachers. The role of the Principal was akin to that of a "*top leader*" or "*leading learner*".

Introduction and Research Aims

Reading Together was first designed (Biddulph, 1983) to enable parents to provide effective help at home for children who were experiencing difficulty with reading. Parents are taught strategies in small groups during four workshops over seven weeks to support the development of reading. The process, as well as focussing on teaching parents specific skills, fosters collaborative and non-threatening partnerships between parents, teachers, children and libraries. The intention is to create a community that sustains a commitment to the development of literacy. An initial randomised controlled experimental trial (Biddulph, 1983) of the *Reading Together* workshops indicated that the four evening workshops spread across seven weeks had a marked impact on children's levels of reading comprehension. In the original study students whose reading ages were 18 months behind their chronological reading age made substantial gains over the period of the workshop and were 15 months later reading at almost their chronological age. A control group over the same period continued to fall behind. The effect size for the immediate impact of the four workshops was .44. Positive outcomes for children, parents and teachers have been reported in a recent implementation of *Reading Together* in two low decile schools in Waikato (Biddulph, 2004, Biddulph & Allott, 2006). Initially the programme focussed on providing support for parents of children struggling with reading, but it has since been concluded that it has general merit regardless of the reading level of the children.

St Joseph's School is an integrated decile one school[1], with a roll of 314 pupils, located within a well established South Auckland community. The Principal contacted the developer of *Reading Together* early in 2005. The Principal and her Deputy and Associate Principal then invited Jeanne Biddulph to discuss the programme with them at the school. This meeting was after they had read the *Reading Together: Workshop Leader's Handbook* (Biddulph, 2004). This meeting was described by Biddulph (private communication, 2007) as notable for the following two reasons:

a) the participants focussed on exploring the nature of a pedagogical partnership between the school and its communities and the potential of *Reading Together* to transform the nature of the relationship between the school and community,

b) they clearly understood the underlying rationale of the programme, e.g. the construction of a community committed to literacy development and the implications for how they engaged parents and children in the programme.

Following this meeting the Deputy and Associate Principals implemented the programme and at the writing of this report have run five series of workshops that have covered over 60 parents and 120 children.

Reading Together is of particular interest in current climes because it has as its focus the alignment of the school and the home in the education of children; the school accepts responsibility for initiating a partnership in which parents become constructively involved in their children learning to read. The aim of the current research is however not to evaluate the impact of the programme on parents, pupils and teachers but to explore its implementation from a leadership perspective in order to deepen our understanding of how leadership mediates positive changes in students' achievements within a New Zealand context. Hopefully this will assist other NZ school leaders in activating effective school-home partnerships.

_____

[1] Decile one schools draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage.

The principle aims of the proposed research are to identify the leadership and administrative processes, critical incidents and rationales associated with the

decision to implement the *Reading Together* programme at St Joseph's Primary School,

successful implementation of the programme including modifications, if any, to the programme as presented in the "*Workshop Leader's Handbook*",

decision to continue with its implementation

diffusion of the programme across other curriculum activities.

Methodology

The nature of inquiry

The approach to the use of a case in this study bridges two of Stake's typology, instrumental and collective (Stake, 2000). The research is participatory in nature, with the contractor being the primary researcher, and interpretive (Denzin, 1997) in orientation, in that it involves the interpretation in the first instance of informants' beliefs, perceptions and recollections. Participatory research in education has a long tradition in New Zealand, with one of the earliest being the participatory action research reported by Baird, Courtney and Tuck (1981). Participatory research blurs the distinction between the researcher and the researched. The intention is not just to provide a report to an external agency on the processes, but to also provide the participants with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences from different standpoints. In this research the first author, who is also the primary researcher, has no role in the school, and in contrast to the other authors has little direct experience of successful teaching or leadership within a primary school setting. His recent history has been research and teaching at a tertiary level, particularly in the area of teacher education. Thus he brings a different perspective to the study from the leaders and teachers in the school, but all of the authors contributed actively to the research and the report, and were involved directly in processes establishing its credibility, e.g. host verification (see Appendix A). The publication of the report reflects the confidence of all of the authors in its credibility.

.A major problem for this research is that the primary researcher was unable to be either an observer participant or participant observer in a complete cycle of the *Reading Together* programme. Thus a significant proportion of the analyses had to be based on participants' recollections. This threat to credibility is countered to some extent by triangulation (Denzin, 1970; 1994) across the recollections of different informants, and the data provided through document analysis provides a further test of the consistency of findings across different data sources.

The final report will include an analysis of changes in pupil achievement that can be attributed to the programme. The school leadership monitored the progress of students within the programme on an individual basis, and there were numerous observations of positive shifts in achievement, attitudes and relationships, but this does not in itself provide strong evidence of the impact of the programme on achievement. These changes could have equally been the result of the strong programme run by the school in literacy and language. Appendix D provides analyses of changes that can be attributed to the programme. These analyses are placed in the appendices because a careful analysis of programme impact, although initiated by the Principal, was not the critical information on its effects for the leaders and teachers; they focussed on positive changes in individual children and families.

The primary researcher is not unaware of the literature in professional learning and educational change (Grudnoff & Tuck, 2003; 2005; Grudnoff, Hawe & Tuck, 2004) and because of an earlier role in a committee setting up standards for BES syntheses is familiar with the assumptions and hopes underlying BES (Alton-Lee, 2003; Alton-Lee, 2004). However he has attempted to bracket this knowledge, and deliberately not read either the current relevant BES syntheses on professional learning and leadership or the recent writings on educational leadership related to positive student outcomes before gathering the data and constructing the narratives. The concern was that by reading these writings prior to the writing of the narratives we could bias ourselves to look for evidence that confirmed particular constructs, and be less sensitive to alternative and contrary constructs. Thus the reading of the relevant current literature occurred after the narratives had been written. This increased the possibility of theoretical triangulation, e.g. other explanations other than those indicated by BES could be examined. This is not to argue that the initial observations of the current research are theory free. As Popper argued some time ago, without prior theory we cannot observe! The hope is that in the current research the observations and construction of codes is not driven by an overly narrow range of prior theory, as is the case in critical ethnography.

Gathering information

Data will in the first instance be gathered through a series of interviews by the first author with the following:

the Principal of St Joseph's Primary School,

the Deputy Principal and Associate Principal of St Joseph's Primary School, who were the workshop leaders,

a sample of six school teachers; chosen because of their range of experience in the school and contact with the programme: they include a Beginning Teacher and a very experienced senior tutor teacher and two of the six provided support in workshops,

Jeanne Biddulph (the developer of *Reading Together*),

Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee (Chief Education Adviser, Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programmme, Ministry of Education),

and the community librarian at Otahuhu Community Library.

The interviews (see Appendix B) with all informants are structured around a series of open questions. At times during the interview a summary of what the interviewer understood had been said will be presented to the interviewee to check for accuracy. Pseudonyms are used throughout the report where possible, but using pseudonyms for Jeanne Biddulph (the developer of *Reading Together*), Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee, the Principal, Deputy Principal and Associate Principal does nothing to preserve anonymity; so their first names are used throughout the report. Tape recordings will be made of the interviews and transcripts of these interviews analysed for the construction of narratives. Those interviewed will be provided with the relevant narratives to check for anonymity, accuracy and credibility.

Two workshops will also be observed by the first author, who will also undertake field work, focussing on the nature of the leadership, while visiting the school.

Relevant documents will also be examined, e.g. records of children's progress in reading, feedback provided by parents in the programme, written communications between the Principal, Deputy Principal,

Associate Principal and teachers, communications of the school with parents, relevant written communications between Jeanne Biddulph and the School, and relevant written communications between Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee and the school and Jeanne Biddulph.

The school

Otahuhu is a well established suburb in south Auckland and has a Maori history dating back hundreds of years where its geographical location and the portage between the Waitemata and Manukau ensured its strategic importance. Its Pakeha history dates back before 1850, being an early Fencible settlement. The Pakeha history also includes early industry, e.g. breweries, freezing works and railway workshops. It has been a traditional labour stronghold and includes the family home of the late David Lange. The population is made up of significant numbers of Pasifika families and this is reflected in the role of St Joseph's school, where nearly 90% of the children identify themselves as Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands or Niuean.

St Joseph's was founded in 1862, five years after the first Catholic Church was built in Otahuhu. It thus has a tradition going back nearly 150 years and for most of that period has been linked with the Sisters of Mercy. The current school is a state integrated Catholic primary school, with a roll of 314, and classified for funding purposes as decile one. However as the review of the Education Review Office (ERO) noted in 2004, attending rates are very high, consistently better than most decile one schools, there is little evidence of truanting, and the median level of achievement in most curriculum areas in which national norms exist is around stannine five. The 2004 ERO report noted the high expectations that teachers have of students, the professionally directed leadership and the school's strong values base. In 2007 a similar picture emerges with the ERO evaluation of the school noting "that the quality of education continues to be of a very high standard with significant positive outcomes for students…Through skilled analysis of assessment information across the school, the principal and teachers are setting useful achievement targets that are strongly focussed on further enhancing student achievement." Both the 2004 and 2007 evaluations refer to the achievement focussed leadership provided by the principal, Liz Horgan, who has been in the role for over 12 years. In addition she has had an association with the school going back over three decades. She is well respected within the profession being a Fellow of NZEI and the immediate past chairperson of the NZEI Principals' Council. Her Deputy (Cathy Franich) and Associate Principal (Marian Wards) have been at the school for two decades and the 2007 ERO evaluation refers to them as "competent and credible leaders". The three constitute a strong *senior management team* that has been involved in successful innovations in curricula and professional development over a number of years (see ERO reviews of the school for 2004 and 2007).

Establishing the credibility, trustworthiness and plausibility of analyses

The reader familiar with the early writing of Glaser and Strauss (1967) will recognise the categories of credibility, trustworthiness and plausibility. In the first instance this is determined by the systematic nature of the analyses of the interviews and observations and the provision of a cross section of sources of quotes and exemplars. The approach is consistent with that used by grounded theorists to establish open, axial and selective codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Alongside this is a systematic set of triangulations across different sources of data and different informants, including different levels of leadership. Another significant element is host verification, in which the participants are provided with the relevant narratives and asked to judge the plausibility and credibility of the analyses of their experiences, perceptions and theoretical standpoints. Along the way it is hoped that the participant's voices are presented vividly; so that the reader can gain insight into the meanings participants actions have for them. Finally, the reader will have the opportunity to examine the findings in terns of their consistency with contemporary writings in leadership.

The Findings

The Principal's Narrative

In 2004 Liz was interviewed for an article in NZEI Rourou (*Education motherhood and apple pie*, 2005). She expressed concern over the demands placed on schools by the priorities in the document *Making a Bigger Difference for all Students: Directions for a Schooling Strategy*. In particular she argued that given the present high level of demands on schools and their current levels of resourcing, it was unrealistic to expect them to become more involved in educating families and whanau. Rather than expanding the scope of school leadership, she argued that in the current situation it made more sense for schools to focus on their "*core business*", i.e. the "*education of their students*". Schools needed to be realistically resourced and leaders freed from distractions, such as sorting out parking problems with a city council, to enable them to focus on this core function. Not long after this interview she had a discussion with Dr Adrienne Alton-Lee who brought to her notice the *Reading Together* programme developed by Jeanne Biddulph. The core of this programme involves schools accepting responsibility for educating of parents, albeit within strict parameters; the focus is on providing parents with a set of specific skills that have been demonstrated to improve reading comprehension and to foster positive partnerships between parents, their children and teachers. Liz became interested in the programme, despite the earlier concerns expressed in Rourou, because it had proven effectiveness, and the demands on resourcing were identified and reasonable given the potential gains:

> "*The research base…a lot of base work had been done on the basis of very good information…this was a significant factor…I have to be able to justify (teachers commitment)*"

> "*It is an efficient use of time*"

> "*Resourcing (financial) wasn't a major issue*"

In addition it was consistent with the crystallization of her thoughts about what was important in working with parents and her concerns with the need for pupils to become more proficient at extracting meaning from text. She came away from the discussion with Adrienne reflecting on school-home links.

> "*It made me think about what our responsibility as a school is in terms of those home-school-links…I guess I felt although that while they were good, in some ways they did not lead …I did not feel there was a substantial outcome…always seemed to be just like scratching the surface…they didn't lead anywhere…this programme seemed to be (different)*"

This reflection is interesting on two counts: first, on the surface it cuts across her earlier comments in Rourou, and second this is a school in which ERO has praised the relationship with parents. This apparent contradiction is at a surface level only, because a number of key features of the programme addressed many of Liz's concerns with the Ministry of Education's policy document "*Making a Bigger Difference for All Students*". She was particularly critical of the relatively open ended expectations for schools to become engaged with whanau and family in the absence of resources. The *Reading Together* programme on the other hand was research proven, it included a well developed manual with teaching resources, it provided specific strategies enabling parents to be constructively involved with teachers, the evidence indicated that it was cost effective, and the personnel demands, although not insubstantial, looked manageable. In addition it was aligned with her view of where school-home links could productively move, "*…it was actually a way of giving parents strategies*" and the emphasis on extracting meaning from text complemented the existing school programmes in reading. However it is important to note that at this stage she was not committed to

implementing the programme. That decision was left until she and the potential workshop leaders together had assessed its demands and were better informed on its content and outcomes.

On returning to her school Liz obtained more information on the programme in a series of emails and conversations with its architect, Jeanne Biddulph. The early emails and phone conversations between Liz and Jeanne, discussed the appropriateness of the programme for the communities of St Joseph's, the nature of the resources required, the skills and training required by the workshop leaders, and the manageability and effectiveness of the programme. Alongside this interchange with Jeanne, which continued across March and April in 2005, she initiated discussions with Cathy and Marian, who with herself constitute the *senior management team* in the school. At this stage Liz said she was committed to the programme; perceiving that it was aligned with her beliefs about constructive school-home relationships and that it complemented their existing language programme. Moreover it was *"user friendly (for teachers and parents) …manageable… practical"* (Address to workshop with Resource Teachers: Literacy in Auckland, 2006), and the resources were either included with the package or relatively easily arranged.

But any final decision to go ahead was still dependent on it being valued and perceived as worthwhile, given the stretched resources, by Cathy and Marian whom Liz perceived as being the potential team leaders of workshops.

> *"You respect (their judgement) If they had come back to me and said this is far too difficult or is not actually going to work-I would have certainly taken that on board."*

Cathy and Marian also had similar perceptions to Liz of the programme and *"It resonated with what they thought was important about working with parents."*

> *"**We** thought **we** would give it a go"*

When asked later for the reasons for deciding that the programme should be lead by Cathy and Marian, Liz responded by email, saying that on recollection she could not remember giving it a lot of thought, but it seemed an obvious choice given that they had been part of the initial discussions and

- *"They both were very interested in the possibility and very keen and willing to do it so: I didn't consciously consider that it wouldn't be Cathy and Marian."*

- *"Subsequently it was the three of us who met with Jeanne and I felt the understanding that we all gained from meeting with the 'author' of the programme was in a sense 'professional development' that was important for the leaders."*

- *"They were both very competent and experienced teachers whom I knew would do it well and would work well together and complement each other. Also because of their time at St Joseph's they were both well known to our parents. This is important with Pasifika parents."*

- *"I guess I work from a theory of the importance of leaders 'leading by example' and that it is really important that the 'designated' leaders have a deep understanding of process ……so that if others teachers were to lead the workshops in the future then those responsible for the syndicates (Cathy and Marian) should had a deep working knowledge of it themselves."*

- *"It (The involvement of Cathy and Marian) and our commitment gave the programme real status both with staff and parents."*

Liz then contacted Jeanne and asked if she would be willing to discuss the programme with the senior *management team.* Prior to this meeting with Jeanne they had all read the *Leader's Workshop Handbook.* Liz regarded this meeting with Jeanne as very important because it provided them with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the programme, its demands, and its underlying rationale. After this meeting, which lasted 2 hours (personal communication from Jeanne) Liz recalled,

> *"We felt very enthusiastic about it when I think back and quite excited about implementing it…good outcomes…efficient use of time".*

The use of '**we**' in the above quote has been emphasised because very early in the interview Liz dropped the use of the first person and discusses what happened in terms of the three members of the senior management team reaching consensus. This inclusive perception of the process is consistent with her high regard for Cathy and Marian:

> *"They know…you know their responses are a good indicator…people like that you respect…"*

The next stage involved informing the Board of Trustees and the staff. The latter was facilitated by inviting Jeanne to address a staff meeting. Liz regarded this opportunity for staff to meet Jeanne as particularly important:

> *"It was good to get Jeanne to come to talk with staff…that was a really good time when someone who knew it inside out , had worked with it, knew the research underpinning it, what it was aiming to do, could talk to the whole staff…she could talk from a basis of knowledge"*

The nature of the programme, who would be leading the workshops and how children and families were to be selected, was then discussed in later meetings with staff. In addition Liz *recalls," lots of conversations on the run or on the hop…and not just (with the senior management team)…there are always key people on your staff who are really interested in such initiatives"* and a list of families and children involved in the programme was circulated to all teachers. The intention being to create

> *"…a whole school kind of commitment and understanding"*

Another facet of this process of creating understanding and commitment among staff was the invitation to teachers to support the actual workshops.

> *'We told the teachers that anyone who wanted to come along and just be part of it (the programme) could…but we did bear in mind Jeanne's' caution about it not being teacher dominated. 'D' I think came to the first one…'N' came…they had two from Cathy's syndicate, two from the junior school and the RTLB and B. If we had had four teachers we probably would have said just a couple this times".*

One of the advantages of having an informed staff is that it makes possible informal interactions between workshop leaders and their colleagues who are not directly involved in the programme. These interactions, for Liz, had two important outcomes: the programme became part of the everyday life of the school and they provided opportunities for the affirmation and recognition of the workshop leaders' contributions:

"Yes, it is as much for the people (running the programme)...it is nice if other people...if you are engaged in something in a school and others know about it and are interested enough to say, how did it go...even if they are not directly involved, its nice. I think its part of a school working well together"

Cathy and Marian as syndicate leaders of the senior/middle and junior school were also in a key location for these informal conversations.

It is informative to consider the nature of some of the decisions made by the senior management team prior to the first workshop. These decisions were deliberate attempts to enhance the probability of the programme succeeding on the first run and to facilitate the development of the parents as active co-participants:

1. *"We looked at data like reading comprehension...data the teachers had...talked with some teachers. We don't want families to feel you only get in the programme if your children are not doing well...we didn't ever want that to be...."*

2. *"We also deliberately, the first time around, chose families that we knew would be, I guess, kind of good ambassadors for the programme...families that I know would have implemented the strategies...these parents would talk about some of the things they were doing (with other parents)...(they would be seen) taking their children to the library...parent to parent...far more powerful than us saying it is good to take them to the library"*

3. *"We looked at families that had say four or five children...added value.* (The hope was that the parents would also read to other siblings*) It would have a spin off effect"*

4. In order to encourage parents involvement, and to ensure that the status of the programme was recognised, a personal approach was made by Liz to every family: *"I tried to make it as personal as possible...I talked to them about the programme... (Made them aware) that I was asking them because I knew they were interested in their children".*

   The initial personal contact was followed up with a letter and then a reminder closer to the first workshop session.

5. There was considerable focus on the creation of a co-operative participant relationship among staff and parents at the workshops. It was decided to hold the sessions in the staffroom rather than a classroom and the seating was around two coffee tables. On the two workshop sessions the writer observed, Cathy, Marian, Liz and in one case a supporting teacher was present at least forty minutes before the workshop began at 7pm. The parents were welcomed by their first names and engaged in conversation over tea and biscuits. Both of these sessions began with a prayer, part of which was in Samoan.

6. It was decided to take photographs of the interactions between a parent and their child in one of the workshops and give copies to parents and place others on an information board in the school foyer. These provided recognition and affirmation for the parents, the participating staff and the children.

Liz is still at this stage concerned with the extra load the programme places on Cathy and Marian and saw the creation of time in their busy schedule the biggest challenge she and they faced:

"You know it took them a lot of time…reading…getting prepared…they were happy to do it but...they are both teaching classes…this was an add on…I knew they had a class the next day"

In order to ease the extra load Liz took on some of the administrative tasks for the programme, e.g. the initial personal contact, follow-up letter and reminder, and then collated all of the feedback information. However even so she was still concerned over the extra demands made on Marian and Cathy and wanted to do everything she could to ensure it is a success, as much for them as for the families and the children:

"If you are asking teachers on your staff to do something, you want to set it up so that it goes well…If you are going to put in time and energy and you are asking others to put in time and energy then you want to set it up for success…so it is not disappointing for them."

"Parents are coming out of busy schedules…so you want it to be a good experience and a helpful experience for them"

Liz "*deliberately went in and out of the workshops quite often*". Such involvement could be perceived as intrusive and even threatening under some circumstances, but there is evidence that the opposite was the case: Marian approaches Liz, "*Liz you must come and see this*". Liz is part of the team, e.g. she is actively involved with the workshop leaders in planning and discussing general strategies, she provides administrative and collegial support including collating feedback, and she welcomes parents, and engages in conversations with them before and after the programme. In part this engagement was *because "I was interested and I enjoyed it"."*

This level of engagement had for her as Principal a number of spin offs:

It stimulated in her a *"reflective process"*.

It meant discussions with Cathy and Marian "*were from the basis of knowledge (personal)"*.

It signalled to parents her interest in them and their children: "*Parents like to know I am interested; so it was that relationship."*

It provided *"support for Cathy and Marian"*.

And it gave her a "*feel for how it was going"*.

The observations provided further confirmation of the skills of Cathy and Marian:

"They were very skilled...and very quick to pick up on (parents concerns)… made parents feel at ease…"

Liz also noted that during the workshops she became very aware of quite dramatic changes in the nature of the interactions between parents and their children:

"Children read <u>with</u> parents…it is lovely…parents and children actually *enjoying it…I remember Marian coming in…Liz you just have to come in…"*

The move was from parents correcting and children getting it right to sharing and talking and reading together about the story. A series of photographs of children and parents reading together in later sessions provided compelling evidence of the new relationship. She described a young father capturing this change in the second workshop:

> *"You have shown us how to read with our children because we knew only one way before, and that was the PI was…And they all laughed"*

There are numerous examples of written feedback from parents (see Appendix C), collated by Liz, which signifies the significance of this change for them and for her:

> *"It helped me and my husband…closer to my kids"*

> *"It helped me to know how to calm down when my child made a mistake. It brings that mother/daughter bond. Now reading is fun time not shouting time, and what I really like now is that my daughter likes to read"*

> *"I have a better relationship with my kids"*

> *"It's helped me a lot this programme, we can sit and lie on the bed with my kids and read. I have a better relationship with my kids when we read together. I don't need to remind my kids when to read – they get their books prepared for me"*

These changes are very significant outcomes for Liz; at least as important as observations by a classroom teacher that a child has suddenly began to read more, that another has begun to use the library, that another has made *"quite substantial movements (in reading comprehension)"*, and that another has been observed reading with his mother before school. As mentioned earlier the photographs taken of children and parents reading in later sessions provided compelling reminders for her of the nature of these shifts. Marian and Cathy also experienced directly the magnitude of these shifts and thus the fostering of positive and constructive parent-child relationships became an important reason for the programme, which is now in its fifth run.

Liz commented that she observed parents begin to use the language of the programme when discussing reading with their children in the workshops. Again this observation is consistent with written feedback from parents (see Appendix C) that she collated:

> *"Has given me an understanding on how to read with my child and able to choose the appropriate level of book to read.*

> *"When it's 5 mistakes out of 50 words, then that book is too hard for your child"*

> *"When your child makes a mistake give them time to self correct"*

> *"…go back when they miss…"*

Other information was obtained that enabled judgements to be made about the programmes effectiveness, e.g. library usage lists and a review of the relevant records of achievement in reading for children, which included standardised measures and running records. However it still appears that the most persuasive feedback seemed to be what teachers and the workshop leaders observed directly, e.g. changes in the behaviour and attitudes of parents and children including the interactions between them. There was also

feedback to Liz in "*conversations on the run*", e.g. a teacher mentioning observing a child reading with a mother before school or another expressing pleasure over the change in a student's attitude towards reading. These interactions are in themselves evidence of Liz succeeding in her intention of creating an environment in which the school is working together and sharing information. Also important was the decision by Cathy and Marian to continue with the programme:

> "*Cathy and Marian...this is basically above the call of duty...it is in the evening...they are happy to do it next year...a professional judgement*".

Thus the critical information on programme outcomes for the Principal is a mix of the following: permanent records for individual students, such as performance on standardised measures of achievement, progress through reading levels, and library usage; written responses of parents to the post programme questionnaire; direct observations of changes in parents and children by Liz and Cathy and Marian; and "*on the run conversations*" between Liz and teachers about children involved in the programme. This feedback is all aligned with the programme intentions and was overwhelmingly positive in nature.

During the interview I pushed Liz on two occasions about the completeness and appropriateness of the *Reading Together* package. Her responses were that

> "*Marian and Cathy had been very faithful to the programme. They have no reason to change it*"

> "*It is just something that you keep thinking about...Is this the best way of doing it or are there refinements. But the core of the actual structure of the workshops and the actual (sessions) Cathy and Marian haven't seen any reason to substantially (revise or replace)...that's worked, they've worked certainly*"

Nothing in the actual running of the programme caused her to revise her original judgement of the relevance of the programme and its resources for the parents and their children. Perhaps this is not surprising given the depth of examination of the programme prior to the decision to implement it in the school. The *senior management team* had read the manual and reviewed resources, there had been two face to face meetings with Jeanne Biddulph and a number of emails and phone conversations between Jeanne and Liz with specific questions about aspects of the programme and its rationale. Moreover Cathy and Marian, two very competent and experienced teachers, worked collaboratively in setting up and leading the initial workshop. Liz had satisfied herself that the programme was aligned with her notion of constructive school-home interactions, it was aligned with their reading programme and addressed a need that they had identified, the resources were aligned with the programme objectives, and the senior management team judged the teaching strategies to be user friendly for teachers and parents. Alongside her own judgements were the affirmations of the programme by Cathy and Marian, whom she regarded very highly. In view of all of this one suspects Liz would have been surprised if there had been a need to make significant changes during the programme.

It would be quite wrong to conclude that Liz would argue that this programme should be mandated across schools. Even though she believes that

> "*It is probably I think the most effective parent-school programme we have done*"

She is strongly commitment to schools having the autonomy and with it the responsibility for the decision to implement such a programme:

> *"I strongly belief that 'mandating' such programmes is not a good path to go down. This in no way lessens my commitment to or belief in the programme. You have to look and make a choice… (A Principal has) to make an informed choice. They have to go through what we went through. They have to engage with it and work through the outcomes. They have to make sure they have good people to lead the programmes, because the two leaders are critical. Their relationships with parents, other staff and school, and with kids, and with you (the Principal), that working relationship. The Principal must take an active role…cant sit back passively…you have to have people informed as to why you are doing it…we did the groundwork here beforehand and people were committed to it as a result."*

Finally there has been an important outcome for the senior management team, which Liz touched upon in a comment on the early interactions with Jeanne:

> *"I felt the understanding that we all gained from meeting with the 'author' or the programme was in a sense 'professional development' that was important for the leaders. "*

This professional learning has been an ongoing and organic process over the two years the programme has been run. To quote Liz:

> *If one considers professional learning in the broader dimension, of being able to engage more effectively in the educative role (especially in this case with developing readers), then the reflections, discussions and the conversations (both incidental and more structured) that we have had in the course of both preparing for and delivering the programme are in themselves very valuable forms of professional learning. It has certainly given us a deeper insight and understanding into the contexts within which we work and teach and within which our students operate.*

Even a cursory reading of the emails interchanged between Liz, Marian and Cathy and Jeanne and Adrienne before and during the workshops provide evidence of the extent of the reflective conversations on school-home alignment. Liz has also provided Jeanne with regular feedback on the outcomes of the workshops, including collated feedback from parents and photographs, and consequently Jeanne has been incorporated in a wider reference group. Members of the *senior management team* have also published a paper (Reading Forum, 2007), presented another paper at a conference (Manukau Educational Conference, 2006), and contributed to a workshop for Resource Teachers: Literacy. They have also been co-participants in this report. Thus professional learning has been and continues to be an integral feature of the implementation of *Reading Together.*

The Deputy and Associate Principal's Narrative

On return from Wellington, where she learnt about the *Reading Together* programme, Liz discussed it with Cathy and Marian. This initial discussion occurred on a weekend when Cathy, Marian and Liz were all at school:

> *"It was one weekend when we were out here…a very casual talk, when Liz said I think this might be worthwhile."*

They also recalled that an important element for Liz was that the programme was research based:

> *"Jeanne had trialled it"*

> *"Yes that was important to her* (Liz*)"*

Following this conversation Liz obtained the Leader's Workshop Handbook. Liz then invited Jeanne to visit the school and discuss the programme with the *Senior Management* after they had studied the *Handbook*:

> *"We had become familiar with the handbook…read it through."*

> *"We sat around the table and Jeanne went through the programme with us…we got a real feel for the programme…and what it entailed."*

At the conclusion of that meeting Cathy and Marian made a joint commitment to implement the programme:

> *"And then we decided, between Marian and myself…to give the programme a go…and that we would run it"*

Marian and Cathy recalled this as being very much their decision with no pressure from Liz:

> *"I can remember thinking what a good idea it was…far more effective than I would have been doing."*

> *"And we were confident really of the outcome, that we thought it would be so successful…the benefits for parents."*

The nature of this process illustrates the relationship that exists among the three members of the senior management team. Jeanne Biddulph noted the confident and open exchanges among Liz, Cathy and Marian in the meeting she had with them, and the same relationship was observed when Adrienne, Claire and Bryan first met with the senior management team. Cathy and Marian understand that Liz will involve them early on in the process,

> (Q) *So quite early on in her process of working through the programme she brings you in as senior staff. Is this typical of the way she works? She involves you quite quickly in this sort of process?*
> (A, C) *"Yes it is"*
> (A, M) *"Very much"*

_____

Neither names nor pseudonyms are used in this narrative because with only two cases it would be rather precious. If two quotes are provided as exemplars of a theme then one is from Cathy and the other from Marian. On occasions the first quote will be Marian's on another it will be Cathy's.

but they also "*know*" that Liz does not raise these issues "*on a whim*":

> "*Liz wouldn't waste our time…that is the trust we have…we know she would have researched things*"

> "*She would have thought about it…seen the value*"

Liz also commented in her interview that she had to be reasonably confident about the programme before raising it as a possibility with Cathy and Marian, because she did not want to waste their time. The process is succinctly summarised in the following excerpts from Cathy and Marian's interview:

> "*That informal thing, like what do you think of this? I have read this, what do you think? That's the way Liz works…collegial in the sense consultative…collective discussion then decision*"

> "*…trust (on Liz's part) and …trust we give to her*"

> "*…sense of empowerment!*"

> (Q) "*…the process empowered you as senior staff?*"

> (A) "*Oh yes she does that in a lot of areas too*"

> (A) "*Liz knew we would be able to do it*"

A meeting was then arranged with the staff, facilitated by Cathy and Marian, in which Jeanne spoke and another staff meeting run by Liz in which she

> "*…mentioned the research base, how long it had been going…basically the structure of the programme, how many workshops, how long*"

And she presented some of the specific activities in the workshops:

> " *…and she gave the staff some of the activities that parents would do…Brock*"

> "*The Three Little Pigs (e.g.)…and she talked about good literature for children*"

Thus before the workshops were implemented Cathy and Marian had reason to assume that the staff knew who would be leading the programme and that they had insights into the rationale, structure and activities in the workshops, provided initially by Jeanne then Liz.

Considerable preparation was needed before Cathy and Marian were confident that the outcomes could be achieved. This work, that was additional to their normal load, was justified by the potential outcomes:

> "*Preparation for the workshops was challenging…deciding who would do what*"

> "*Reading the material…we still met every night before…and there was a good weekends commitment…We were really confident of the outcomes…we thought it would be successful…the benefits…looked great for parents*"

A particular feature of the programme that they liked was its structure, its clarity, specified resources, its user friendliness, and the specific nature of the strategies offered to parents:

> *"The programme is organised (e.g.) workshop four...this is what you had to set up three weeks ahead...you sent this letter home two weeks before...it is very well set out...it is comprehensive (including availability of the resources)...teacher friendly, user friendly"*

> *"You have a timeline and you work with that (e.g.) you have to make up a tape, you had to get samples of reading ages...then the letter...it is very clear, very user friendly...good suggestions...the manual has things to look out for"*

> (Q) *"Did you change (the nature) of any resources?"*

> (A) *"No. Well I mean we had to get our own journal stories and reading ages.*

> (A) *"No. We kept most of it the same"*

> *"It has strategies that look great for parents"*

> *"I think the essence of actually giving strategies that they can be pro-active...if nothing else that has to be a plus"*

The outcomes for parents, although important, were only part of the reason for the commitment; manageability, achievability, cost effectiveness, and alignment with the current literacy programmes, were all plusses:

> *"It looked manageable...the steps looked achievable...it had strategies for parents...the push for comprehension and meaning (aligned with identification of this as a need in existing programmes)"*

> *""...parents...can be pro-active and positive with their children...definitely achievable...cost effective...with the philosophy of our reading programmes, it fitted in very well...our children take home a home reader a night but if this all comes together Mum and Dad will be modelling...promoting.."*

When selecting the children they recalled considering family size, to facilitate diffusion-parents reading with other siblings- and the level of schooling:

> *"...on the first workshop we just went for middle school. We just aimed at one group."*

> *"Larger families...We were after how many children covered in the programme"*

The parents were <u>not</u> chosen at random. Rather they were deliberately chosen for the initial workshop to ensure its success,

> *"We had some parents strategically picked out so they would be able to be outspoken and chat away at the first meeting"*

> *"...so and so (chosen because) would contribute, wouldn't be too shy."*

and to ensure its status within the community:

"Our community is quite close…at the end of each workshop we encouraged parents…is there anyone else out there you know who you think could benefit?"
"When they thanked us at the end of each workshop…Kath and I made the point of saying, look there is something you can do, you can go out into the community and you can tell people how successful this has been, how much you enjoyed it, and that we would be running more"

An initial concern was to ensure the parents were at ease and were confident enough to engage and share with the others in the workshop.

"The first meeting is always very shy…there is a lot of talk at the first meeting to get things going, setting things up, some are very shy. We are also conscious that for many English is their second language…sometimes they like to say what you want them to hear"

(Q) *"You are not doing that to me?"*

(A) *"No! No! We're telling you this is what happened. No! No! No! (laughter). It was essential that we got them talking and relaxed and prepared to share because it is very much a two way thing"*

The relationship between Cathy and Marian in itself helped:

"…and I acted the goat at times. They enjoyed having a bit of a joke and fooling around"

"…occasionally I would get a word in…(laughter)"

"The parents enjoyed the interchanges"

As did the use of first names, the informality of the initial few minutes when Cathy, Marian and Liz engaged in conversations over a cup of tea with individual parents, the decision to not use technological aids and jargon that would infer teacher control, and openness on the part of the leaders:

"We told them it was our first time and we were nervous!"

""Parents liked the use of Christian names… They (came) to view the school as quite different…and to be in the staffroom was another thing for them"

"We were conscious not to make it too schooly…we didn't want OHPs and teacher jargon. I'm sitting down … together…we don't know what sort of experiences they had at school…we didn't want to bring back those old emotions."

"Or overawed by it…It was all part of setting the scene"

"That's right, and we had a cup of tea"

"And welcomed them."

The above interchange is also a good example of how in their conversations they listen to each other and run ideas one off the other. They are aware that they do this:

"You are walking alongside each other…When you are talking, like, I am gathering my thoughts…and then it is your turn my turn."

As mentioned earlier, this easy confidence was evident in the first meeting with the senior management team. The focus on constructing participatory co-operative relationships among teachers and parents spilt over into other contexts:

"We do have parents now who will come in and very shy parents who wouldn't ever come into the classroom and they will say-oh Marian"

When they came in they remembered your name…and…in the playground…at sports"

"Parent teacher interviews…we were sharing ideas about what happened"

Parents were presented with graduating certificates and pictures of them and their child reading together as part of affirming parent's involvement. Photos were also displayed in the entrance foyer for the children. In addition Cathy and Marian ran additional sessions for parents who were unable to attend a particular night:

"I mean it (photos and certificates) did put status on it, and a recognition…"

"They loved them (photographs) they all got copies"

"It was more for the children (display in foyer)…like the sports displays…they will stop and look at them"

"We had a group photo to…Liz sat in on…and took photos"

Although having substantial prior knowledge of the parents, Cathy and Marian gained further insight during the sessions:

"It gave us incredible insight into what was going on in the homes in terms of (discipline). …As one father said we only know the PI way…That was discussed in every workshop".

"We told them as parents we understand. I know how difficult it is at the end of the day. They talked about …it (aversive reactions to children's errors while reading)".

"It was interesting to watch (an interaction between the mothers and a father)-we are learning all the time"

"the cultural protocols…understand (better)"

One of the challenges for Marian and Cathy was to sustain the reading together outside the workshops. As part of this they, with Liz , would enquire about progress with parents whenever the opportunity arose.

"How are the reading together workshops going?"

"Have you managed to get to the library?"

They hoped that the changes that parents observed would in themselves be a positive contingency:

"The parents seeing the benefits…sustaining it"

Although they both reported positive changes in individual children's reading comprehension levels and in the school and community library usage, what appeared to be of more immediate impact was the observed and reported changes in the interactions between parents and their children while reading together:

"One mother was able to say how very quickly she changed her complete attitude towards her little boy reading. He had been a very nervous reader, very hesitant. He wasn't keen to read at home. After the first reading workshop she came back, she said, "I can't believe the difference"…She had stopped putting pressure on him. She sat back, she praised, she did all of the things suggested. In the next workshops she said, "He is reading more. He's reading and reading. He's reading before school. He's reading at night." She is not making this up"

Cathy and Marian felt "humbled" by parents facing up to the notion that they were instrumental in creating negative and aversive contexts for reading:

"The (parent) who said, "I went home and said we are doing it the wrong way". Someone brave enough to say that they have been doing it wrong"

The observations of changes in parents reading with children in workshops and parents reports on changes in parenting were powerful justifications for the considerable time and energy Cathy and Marian expended on running the workshops. However there were other payoffs for the workshop leaders that arose from their professional relationship and interactions with colleagues:

"We worked well together…we supported each other…we bounced ideas off each other"

"We did have some laughs…and the moments we talked about it made it worthwhile"

"Teachers were interested enough to ask, "How did it go last night?""

Cathy and Marian on a number of occasions mentioned Liz's continued support:

"all the photocopying…all the bookwork (including collating feedback)…Liz did that for us."

"And she is here when we are running it… and that is all support she is not like gone home and left us to it. She could have gone home, she did not have to stay here…"

"But Liz would never have done that"

"I cant remember any night she wasn't here working"

"She'd be about. She came in and out"

"She was here to greet them…and she might want to see them on another issue"

(Q) *"So she was there providing support for you?"*

(A) *"Always. Definitely"*

They reported, considerable "*informal discussions*" with staff about the programme, in addition to the more formal presentations of information in staff meetings, morning notices, assemblies, newsletters, reminders to children, and lists circulated to teachers of children involved:

> *"Teachers were interested enough to ask us"*

> *"Informal discussions…nothing documented…everything connected with the parent workshops…"*

Both believe the workshops have the potential to become a continuing catalyst in the forging of constructive school-home relationships:

> *"We would envisage wouldn't we, that once we got most of the parents and touched most of them, then it would be the sort of thing you would start with new parents".*

> *"I think it would be ongoing"*

> *"It spills over into other areas and other interactions"*

> *"Yes, you have forged a new relationship with the parent at another level and I think it is going to continue"*

> *(Q) It has changed the relationship between parents and children?"*

> (A) *Yes and also parents and school generally. The whole thing of school"*

They would recommend the programme to other schools, because not only does it create constructive relationships between parents and their children that have the potential to enhance children's achievement, but also important is

> *"Making those links between home and school, and both working together on it"*

In conclusion, not mentioned by Cathy and Marian is the reflective nature of their involvement, e.g. the publication with Liz in Reading Forum, the trial of a minor restructuring, and the consideration being given to a more systematic evaluation of changes in children's achievement associated with the programme.

The Teachers' Narrative

> *There is a sort of a culture of community based ownership of children's progress. We don't see a teacher in a classroom as being…just solely responsible for that child's progress. It is a much broader issue than that and there is a lot of consultation around all kinds of issues to progress and facilitate children's learning…within the staff there is a collective responsibility for children's learning, and that is paramount. It's not just seen as a teacher trying to advance a child's learning. We are a team.*
>
> (Eleanor)

Becoming an informed collective

A significant element in the Principal's narrative was the focus on developing an informed community within the school. Six teachers were interviewed and their knowledge of the programme probed. Four of the teachers interviewed had attended either or both of the initial discussions with staff by Jeanne and two of these had also directly supported the implementation of the programme.

Recognising relevant outcomes: Of particular interest in educational programmes is the participants' awareness of the expected outcomes. The teachers are not as directly involved as either the families or the senior management team in *Reading Together*, but, given the construction of the school as a community with collective responsibility, they are definitely participants. All of the six teachers interviewed were able to discuss positive changes in children and families in terms of expected programme outcomes:

> *"I saw the effects on children and some families….Parents more willing to come into classroom-one is coming in morning and reading with child in library…Children have a more positive approach-go to the library-more independent reading-add more detail when reading text…One thing surprised me 'R' is still quite behind and his family has been involved…he said Dad yells at me…quite surprised…wondered if just the mother had gone through…quite surprised"*
>
> (Emma)

> *I actually have noticed, parents who have been involved in the workshop, they are more willing now to actually come into the classroom. I notice probably two or three families or parents that did that, and one parent actually would come in, in the morning now most times and would sit with their child in our class library and read books with them. A couple of parents would be more interested in how their child was doing at school with their reading…they have a more positive approach to their reading. They are wanting to extend their own learning by going to the library independently, by themselves. They come in, in the morning and sit down and read their books independently by themselves.*
>
> (Maria)

> *"…it is productive, I have noticed the changes…changes in parents' attitudes towards reading (with children) more confident…more confident with teachers they are more knowledgeable about what is going on"*
>
> (Chris)

> *"I had a particular child from my class and his father-thought it would be beneficial for Dad for both of them-his patience grew-father understood its not a test-reading should be enjoyable…He was a lot more receptive to feedback on child-didn't take it on as his own failure…child changed-he was much more relaxed - kind of filtered through with all his work-maths-he made progress-visited library more-that happens with quite a few of them-enthused about reading"*
>
> (Ruth)

"Some children have made good gains" (on reading survey undertaken at end of year) Parents-swing to positive feedback-staying away from the negative-good try-something to be affirmed rather than having to get it 100% right all the time"

(Eleanor)

"Very positive for parents... relaxed and enjoyed it-one child definitely improved - reading comprehension"

(Amelie)

<u>Awareness of structure and content:</u> All of the six teachers were aware of the general structure of the programme, including the content of some of the individual workshop sessions, who was leading the workshops, and when they were being held:

"Marion, Cathy and worked together and they had an evening about 7pm and they would see the families once a week and ...the first meeting was a get together for the parents. Then, parents with children practicing reading, and reading techniques. And then..."

(Amelie)

"...targeted families; they were sort of bigger families so, in other words if we got one parent in that meant we were covering maybe 6 children in the school – if you can sort of understand what I mean there.. The next process was ...targeted reading comprehension... it was also put out in the newsletter that if anybody was wanting to come along to learn these strategies, and how to help their child and support them with their reading they were more than welcome to come along"

"I can remember (the explanation by Liz in the staff meeting)...she explained the programme and how it would be run and hopefully the basic outcomes that would be achieved through it.. Marion and Cathy, the AP and DP they would be running a junior side and a senior side to it and they would be running it, and if any teachers would like to come along to sort of observe how it would be run they are more than welcome to."

(Maria)

'We are doing 199 things-monitor children...review progress-have strategies for addressing children's needs-this is part of a multi-disciplinary approach-it fits in our school. It is not a stand alone programme...reading for meaning a driver in our school programme-it complements what we are doing-what learning with your child is."

(Eleanor)

Not surprisingly, the two teachers interviewed who had been involved in supporting the workshops had a very good understanding of the underlying rationales and intended outcomes, gained while preparing for workshops with the programme leaders:

"We (did) a mock session with Cath the DP, you know before we went out and did it in front of the parents"

**

However, even the two teachers who had not attended the initial staff meetings still had a working knowledge of the programme; important sources being notices at morning break, lists of children and families involved, reminders to parents and informal conversations with Liz and Cathy and Marian:

> *"Just talking with Marion or say for example the child had been in my class and I was like – his reading or his attitude to reading has completely changed"*
>
> **

> *"I've put forward 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D'…'A' hasn't turned up to the first one.*
>
> (Q) *How did you know that?*
>
> (A) *Because Cathy let me know, and she was also sick every day last week, and Cathy made a meeting to catch up with mum…"*
>
> **

A pivotal feature in these conversations is the dual roles held by the three key personnel: Cathy and Marian, workshop and syndicate leaders, and, Liz as Principal and an active participant in the programme. Thus an issue about the programme could be addressed knowledgeably in a syndicate meeting, in conversations with a colleague in a morning break over a cup of tea/coffee, and by in casual conversations with teachers:

> *"Oh I might be casually talking to about it and she goes, 'Oh well that family has actually been through the reading workshop"*
>
> (Emma)

The teachers who actively participated in the workshops also acted as key conduits of information, and with, Liz, Cathy and Marian constituted a significant information network. There appeared to be two general forms of conveying information: "formal messages" and "informal conversations".

<u>Formal messages</u>: Formal messages took different forms: initially Cathy and Marian facilitated a staff meeting with Jeanne and then Liz led meetings for the whole staff, in which the rationale and programme structure and activities were outlined. Then there were notices about particular workshops to teachers at morning break, reminders to parents that went through teachers, notices in the newsletter, lists of the families and children involved provided to teachers, and discussions about aspects of the programme at a syndicate meeting. These "formal messages" created a baseline of background information for all teachers.

> *"Liz raised the concept of using it as a programme in the school- in a staff meeting, raised it a general outline then Jeanne, is it, came and talked to us further, at a staff meeting"*
>
> (Maria)

> *"Morning tea notice-asked for recommendations for children that would benefit…then letters to parents…reminders to children"*
>
> (Amelie)

_____

** Pseudonyms have not been used for these quotes, as with only two cases they may enable teachers to be identified.

"- in staff meeting-explained-programme-told Marian and Cathy running it-understood selection procedures-teachers more than welcome to come along-knew they would select teachers to support-bigger families to increase cover"

(Eleanor)

"At syndicate level asked to identify kids and families"

(Chris)

"We were given a list…which families had been through the programme and there were family names with stars by them who were more than likely to be in the next workshop. So we are very well aware of families who have been through the workshop."

(There were numerous references by teachers to these lists.)

Informal conversations on the run: In addition to the "formal messages" there were numerous conversations among teachers about specific children on the programme or aspects of the programme. These "informal conversations", sometimes referred to by the teachers as *"casual conversations"* or *"teacher talk",* frequently involved Cathy and Marian, and frequently they initiated the conversations:

"Cathy and Marion and Liz – keep giving us feedback about how parents didn't know how to react when the children got stuck. The things that parents used to do and how they changed through the workshop"

(Chris)

"Casual chats with Cathy, Marian-changes in the workshop that night-with Liz how workshop went…"Just teacher talk"

(Ruth)

"We had a few laughs (Liz and I) about (something that occurred during a workshop)… while clearing up"

(Maria)

"Communication is very easy…chat with someone in corridor after school…talked to 'Y'…. about it"

(Amelie)

It must be stressed that the context for these conversations has not arisen by chance, rather it is the outcome of a deliberate attempt by the senior management team to create an environment that makes such conversations highly likely. Liz, Cathy and Marian are often proactive in many of the examples provided by the teachers, e.g. asking how a child whose family is in the programme is progressing or mentioning that the family of a child being discussed is in the programme.

Empowering parents

Teachers referred to the programme as one that empowered parents:

"Empowers parents…it is much more broader than just reading"

(Eleanor)

"*Parents … more empowered"* (Emma)

"I think they feel more at ease about approaching us with any questions, and they feel more knowledgeable, and they feel that they know what is going on."

(Chris)

It did this in part because it provided them with specific useable/practical skills:

"Covers a whole range of skills-Very practical for parents" (Ruth)

"I know it gives the parents very specific skills and tools…helping children develop comprehension skills"

(Chris)

"Strategies quite specifically laid out…specific steps modelled for them… for the parents and they do need that and they want that."

(Emma)

But it also fostered positive attitudes towards reading together:

"(Parents learn) to ensure it is a positive activity-avoid negative and aversive" (Emma)

"(Parents learn) a mistake is not a problem" (Eleanor)

". I think one of the biggest underlying factors was to teach the parents to enjoy the experience of reading with their children and I think they really grasped that. It is not a test"

(Ruth)

The two teachers who had directly supported the programme attributed the achievement of these outcomes to features of the programme (its structure, its user friendliness, and the relevance for parents of the procedures and strategies) and the skills and attitudes of the programme leaders:

"It is a very friendly programme; it is very easy to deliver and covers a whole lot of ready strategies that are very practical and very easy for the parents get on board with. There was nothing scary about it…Marion or Cathy has already has quite a bit of contact with the family, the family is then, they don't feel embarrassed about coming to the school and going to the workshop"

**

"Teacher friendly…Very positive for parents…Cathy Liz and Marian first name basis…group small, cozy, informal...knew each other" **

Even the teachers not involved in directly supporting the programme assume that Marian and Cathy would be very competent leaders and construct a context in which the parents were co-participants:

"There would be clear specific steps modelled to them, because I just know that Marion would do that, and Cathy.'

(Emma)

"They (Cathy and Marian) do have good people skills and parents would feel … comfortable, I know that, and it makes a big difference. Of course getting organised for the workshop is probably paramount to the success…I think they are very good teachers of reading themselves, they are using all those years of experience."

(Amelie)

"I think also the actual environment of how the workshop is run as well, particularly with the teachers that lead it. It's not a confrontational thing, it's not as if we are telling you off, it's all about supporting the parent and suggesting maybe you could do this instead of that and I think that relaxed environment, the parents – from what I heard – were quite truthful about how they did listen to their child read."

(Q*) "How did you hear these things?*

(A) "*Oh, through our syndicate meetings, just talking with staff, Marion or say for example the child had been in my class and I was like – his reading or his attitude to reading has completely changed – I might be casually talking to Liz Horgan about it and she goes, 'Oh well that family has actually been through the reading workshop."*

<div align="right">(Maria)</div>

Perceptions of leadership

In general the teachers perceive themselves as members of a community with strong leadership from the top, initially from Liz and then from the other members of the school's senior management team. Some characterise the leadership as "*top-down*" and "*driven*" by Liz, but within a context where staff has a collective responsibility for the education of children. Others conceive Liz as a mentor who facilitates change.

"Liz is very competent, very confident, very clear with what she wants to achieve and I think she has very high standards and you feel, well I feel that I need to meet those standards... I think it is a very top-down school...I think there is very strong leadership...I think that there is opportunity for people to put forward and share ideas and come up with, well why aren't we doing this..."

<div align="right">(Amelie)</div>

"The drive and the leadership comes from Liz at that level. From there I think there are a whole range of ... there are some very competent, able professional staff here who then facilitate at a number of levels... Yeah I think so, and I think, I really do think we have a very strong layer of leadership for them to grow they need to be really well supported and that does happen. Liz is a true mentor and I have always said that for people in leadership there needs to be the leader, but there (also needs to be the people) at the next level."

<div align="right">(Maria)</div>

"There is a sort of a culture of community based ownership of children's progress. We don't see a teacher in a classroom as being responsible, just solely responsible for that child's progress. It is a much broader issue than that and there is a lot of consultation around all kinds of issues to progress and facilitate children's learning...I think there is a real sincere desire among the staff to make a difference and to kind of progress and I think there at the heart of that and then we look at ways that how we are best going to achieve that, probably. To be honest I think that Liz does drive a lot of it."

<div align="right">(Eleanor)</div>

"The underlying factors ... it does come from the top and it is that desire for all children to be able to succeed and really just wanting them to do well ... and wanting their parents to help to be better parents and we all want it, but it has to be driven from somewhere."

<div align="right">(Ruth)</div>

> *"I would probably say that even though we have a hundred million things happening there is always time for the three leaders to find the time to organise it and start it. I am surprised every time… Cathy and Marion and Liz – keep giving us feedback about how parents didn't know how to react when the children got stuck. The things that parents used to do and how they changed through the workshop."*
>
> (Chris)

Irrespective of the notion of leadership, the teachers often mention members of the senior management team involving them in informal teacher talk, and they believe there is considerable and easy interaction among staff on educational issues across all levels:

> *"It's down to our staff and the way we communicate with each other. I mean I have actually been … only working at St Joseph's for probably …years now, but …it's like a community. We know a lot of the families and we always try and engage with the parents, and even it is just a quick hello every morning…and because I am a year 1 teacher I still communicate with the year 8 teacher and how their …. I have noticed this child's brother or sister is in this class, but I am finding them a little bit off at the moment, do you …"*
>
> (Emma)

A frequently mentioned strength of the senior management team was its knowledge of the community of parents and children in the school:

> *"Liz (is) involved with the families-knows every child, every parent…Marian also and Cathy…"*
>
> (Eleanor)

> *"She Liz knows all families well…possibly better than some of us-she will have taught some of the parents"*
>
> (Ruth)

> *"And they have come through the school and they know them and they know what happens at home, and they know about incidences and they keep in contact with social workers. Liz does a lot for the parents if there is something that they are … like there was an example of insulating older homes and encouraging use of the school nurse and all sorts of things like that, so it's quite holistic as well. If I have a concern about one of my children I will go and ask and I find so much about the history and background."*
>
> (Amelie)

> *"Cathy, Marion and Liz have been here for a long time and they would have taught many of the parents of these children, so they do know some families inside out."*
>
> (Chris).

This knowledge of parents, children and family is regarded as a considerable strength when setting up and running the *Reading Together* programme, e.g. it is critical when considering whom to invite for the workshops, when considering how to approach parents and how to work with them in a constructive supportive manner:

> *"I think a lot of it has to do with the way the Principal (approached) the parents, kept at it, chased them up and made them realise how good it would be for their children."*
>
> (Ruth)

"I really believe that the people that were running the workshops, they had a very good understanding where the families were at and coming from…"

(Emma)

Perhaps the last word should reside with Eleanor who in an email reminded the writer that *"I wouldn't want people to gain the impression that the Workshop is a stand-alone programme…underpinning all of this is the professional expertise and support of the classroom teacher."* She wanted to emphasis a point made in an earlier interview that the school has in place a robust programme in literacy, with capable committed teachers and where students' progress is systematically monitored across the school. *Reading Together* is a part of this greater whole.

Jeanne's Narrative

On reviewing her diary Jeanne noted that the first contact she had with St Joseph's School was when Adrienne phoned on the 11th of March 2005 to tell her that Liz was having trouble using the link to *Reading Together* on the website. Adrienne mentioned Liz's paper in NZEI Rourou (2005), where she expressed disquiet with the requirements in the Ministry Of Education's policy document *Making a Bigger Difference for all Students: Directions for a Schooling Strategy* for schools to accept responsibility for everything from *"affirming and developing student identity"* to *"developing more integrated social services for families and whanau".* Liz was concerned that, given the existing level of financing and resourcing and the lack of understanding of the significance of the role of the principal, such demands were unrealistic and would detract from the core business of educating students. Adrienne mentioned to Jeanne that she had referred Liz to *Reading Together* as a programme that was research based and had the capability to improve pupil achievement, to facilitate more positive interactions between parent and child and to develop a constructive school-home partnership. Jeanne then contacted Liz to give her the link on the website and the next day Liz responded to Jeanne with the following email:

> *I am very interested in the programme as it does seem to be a very significant outcome for what appears to be a manageable input of time from the school especially for that group of children who are struggling with reading. I would like to know more about it e.g.*
>
> *1. Is there specific training required for the facilitators?*
>
> *2. Should the facilitator be a member of the school staff or do you have a pool of facilitators who can deliver in conjunction with school staff?*
>
> *3. Our student base is mainly Pasifika children whose home language is frequently not English and we are a decile one school. Can the programme be delivered in the same way?*
>
> *4. Do you have schools that have already used it that I could speak to, especially if they have a similar profile to us?*

This was followed by a phone call in which Jeanne recalls:

> *"I explained that lots of competent, sensitive teachers run the programme by following carefully the suggestions in the Handbook.*
>
> *We talked about how the programme caters for children and parents whose language/cultural background differs from that of the school - I mentioned that the programme caters for 'diverse' backgrounds - that I have worked with Pasifika and Maori children and parents and that others have too - I think I mentioned some excellent feedback from a teacher working with Pasifika families in Porirua.*
>
> *I offered to send Liz an inspection copy of the Workshop Leader's Handbook and also a hard copy of the case study of 'Odette' a Pacific Island child."*

Following another phone conversation, in which Jeanne recalls she had the most informed and perceptive discussion in 25 years with a principal about *Reading Together* and school-home partnerships, Jeanne and Phillipa (a member of the group that wrote the *Workshop Leader's Handbook*) met with Liz, Cathy and

Marian at St Joseph's School. Jeanne was impressed by the relationships between Liz, Cathy and Marian-*"There was this lovely kind of banter..."*-and the understanding they had of the processes and underlying rationales of *Reading Together*. It was obvious to her that *"...they had all read and discussed the Workshop Leader's Handbook"*. This meeting lasted about two hours and Jeanne and Phillipa, in a written response to a question from the primary researcher about the content, provided the following summary:

1. *We talked about the processes and activities of the programme and how they are designed to be non-threatening and as supportive as possible of parents and children whatever their language/literacy competencies and confidence might be (and that lots of workshop leaders over two decades have found that Reading Together works across cultures.)*

2. *We discussed the importance of reassuring parents that they will not have to read or write anything by themselves, that it doesn't matter if they can't read and write very well etc. The emphasis was on partnership. There was also a discussion about the ways in which 'stigmatising' of children is avoided throughout the whole process - e.g. when contacting parents there is no mention of 'reading difficulties' etc. Cathy and/or Marian were keen to know about the effects on the other two children who were mentioned on the case study we sent, especially 'Donna' (the case study of the child whose mother missed two of the workshops, and had social/family problems to deal with).*

3. *Liz, Cathy and Marian talked about which parents they would invite first, and how they would approach them- they were thinking 'strategically - they immediately understood that if they involved 'key' parents in the community then those parents could then encourage others to become involved - possibly they were also thinking about which parents might be more confident too. We were just very impressed by the way they were thinking about the processes in such a sensitive way and focussing on the longer term. - plus the fact that they obviously knew their families so well (and cared deeply for them).*

4. *We talked about specific workshop activities and the fact that any reading that is done is done as a group and parents participate or not as they can and wish to do so. I think I also explained that Brock (for example) is placed in workshop four for various reasons, but one of the main reasons is that by that stage the parents are comfortable in the workshops, know that they don't have to 'perform' by themselves etc and they are usually willing to give it a go - or shut the booklet halfway through in frustration (which is always an interesting response to discuss too!).*

5. *We discussed the physical environment - Liz, Cathy and Marian talked about using the staff room - comfortable chairs etc.*

6. *Part of the discussion focussed on ways of supporting parents from different backgrounds. We suggested that a parent who is not very confident (for whatever reason) may feel more comfortable if they bring another family member or friend who can provide support. Mentioned that this is done quite frequently in RT workshops and works well.*

7. *Liz, Cathy and Marian had all read the Handbook before we met - and it was obvious to me that they had done so and understood what RT is all about."*

At the conclusion Liz, Cathy and Marian invited Jeanne to discuss the programme with the staff and this meeting occurred late in July 2005, and was facilitated by Cathy and Marian. In the meeting they looked at the *Reading Together* booklet for parents and demonstrated some of the specific strategies and activities. This was done to ensure that staff understood the nature of the programme and its approach to developing

literacy and school-home partnerships. Jeanne recalls that staff seemed interested and responsive and Cathy and Marian were very welcoming and supportive. *"We felt at home and part of a group of people who care about what we care about."* Liz then discussed the programme at a staff meeting. Jeanne recollects that the first workshop was probably run about two months later.

Thus from Jeanne's perspective, before the first workshop was run, Liz, Marian and Cathy understood the rationales underlying the programme, were familiar with the specific processes and strategies outlined in the *Leader's Workshop Handbook, "regarded them as user friendly"*, and were aware of the specific demands on resources, including personnel. They were thus well placed to judge its manageability, its alignment with their existing literacy programme and their perceptions of what a school-home partnership should entail, and its fit with their parents' needs and skills. Jeanne was convinced that there was never any hint of deficit theory:

> *"Never at any stage* (during the initial discussions) *did they infer or say "Our parents can't be bothered or they would not be able to do that"...positive regard for parents...absolutely no hint, sniff or whiff of deficit thinking."*

Moreover before the first workshop Cathy and Marian had taken an overt leadership role with staff by facilitating the meeting in which Jeanne discussed the programme in an open forum. Jeanne also had observed at first hand the quality of the professional relationship among the three members of the *senior management team*, and the teachers' responses to the issues and outcomes entailed in the home-school partnership modelled by *Reading Together*. Jeanne regarded the involvement of the senior management team and the nature of their commitment to parents, staff and students as unique in her experience:

> *"The whole thing at St Joseph's is unique...different...because of the nature of the engagement of Liz, Cathy and Marian...we have had before very positive feedback from parents and the workshop leaders...but it is the understanding and commitment of Liz, Marian and Cathy (as the senior management team)...their sensitivity...their awareness of things from the parents point of view...that is different..."*

Jeanne's interaction with the school did not end with the beginning of the first set of four workshops. A series of interchanges occurred throughout the five sets of workshops, e.g. Liz, Cathy and Marian provided feedback, including the collation of parents' feedback and photographs of interactions between parents and children, to Jeanne throughout and this stimulated exchanges similar to the following:

> *10 November 2005*
>
> *Dear Liz, Cathy and Marian*
>
> *Your feedback is particularly helpful...I think that the photos you have taken and the display board you created with them are just brilliant...the idea would be very helpful to others who are interested in running the programme. I realize that the photos of individual parents and children could only be used in 'public' forums with their consent, but would it be possible for me to have a photo of your display board to show to others (as a power point slide' or OHT) during seminars and workshops? ...individuals would not really be recognisable.*
>
> *1. You mentioned that the parents enjoyed the humour, jokes etc, which is great! Did you use the Reading Together jokes sheets or did you prepare sheets yourself which you thought might be more appropriate/relevant for your parents? If you wrote your own sheets, did you use any of the resources listed in Appendix H of the Handbook, or links on our website?*

2. I am very interested in the parents' comments on the feedback summary and in particular 'Happy to have the meetings in English'. Did any of the parents say why they felt this way?

Kind regards
Jeanne

Dear Jeanne,

Yes we did use the (existing) joke sheets. The parents loved using them and some asked/checked on the last night if they were getting them. We asked why the parents preferred the workshops in English and they said it was an interpretation issue. They said they didn't want to lose meaning, which could occur if it was (translated) into their first languages, i.e. Samoan, Tongan etc. If we can help with anything else don't hesitate to ask.

Regards,
Cathy Franich
St Joseph's Otahuhu

The immediate set of workshops was not always the focus of the emails, and later emails frequently addressed more general issues such as professional and scholarly support:

19 June 2007

Dear Jeanne

Thank you very much for your message below.....it is great for us to have you so interested in how the RTG programme is progressing as often schools just 'box on' with very little feedback from 'experts' in the field who also understand the constraints and commitment involved. Would love to have a coffee with you to talk about the RTG programme.....we discuss it a lot!! Liz (my secretary) has just finished typing up the feedback from the parents and it is delightful....affirming and humbling. Cathy and Marian should take great pride in how they have obviously related to and helped the parents.

Cheers

Liz

PS Thanks for your comments on the Reading Forum article Jeanne. If you are happy with it then that is fine. Certainly the 'voices' are clear and direct and you are right that is what people relate to.

Thus Jeanne and the senior management team became members of a professional learning community with much broader interests than simply the nuts and bolts of *Reading Together*. Jeanne very much appreciated this involvement with Liz, Cathy and Marian over the two years as much as they appreciated the involvement with her. The content of their interchanges provides evidence of the positive regard that they all have for each other, and indicates quite clearly that the relationship provided the forum for continuing professional learning for all of them.

The Observations of the Workshops

The primary researcher observed workshops three and four in the fifth run of *Reading Together*. They were chosen because it was possible to arrange observations on those nights. The workshops were held in the staff room on the 30th of May and the 13th of June, 2007. The workshops proper began at 7pm and had finished by 8.15pm. The observations started approximately 30 minutes before the workshops began and concluded approximately 30 approximately after they ended. There were no children present at either Workshop 3 or Workshop 4. The opportunity to observe the workshops arose after the research contract was finalised. The decision to run a fifth set of workshops in conjunction with the primary researcher's prior commitments enabled only the third and fourth workshops to be observed. Initially the intention was to interview a small sample of parents, but it was decided that, given they had already provided written feedback and were particularly loyal to the school, more would be gained by observing parents immediately before, after, and during the two workshops.

<u>Workshop 3</u>

The school entrance, the area around the building in which the staffroom was located, and the parking area were well lit at 6.30pm when the observer arrived. The staffroom and the associated foyer and entrance were also fully illuminated. Cathy and Marian were finalising preparations for the workshop in the staffroom. Liz was helping set up the room and welcomed the observer at the foyer entrance. The temperature in the staffroom was comfortable and it was an attractive environment with a brilliant display of children's art on one wall. As parents arrived they were welcomed by their first names and offered tea or coffee and biscuits.

> *"Hullo 'E'"*

> *"'L' come sit over here"*

> *"'M' would you like a cup of tea"*

Liz, Marian and Cathy engaged the parents in informal conversations. One overheard involved a discussion of how a child, who had not been well, was progressing. Liz, Marian and Cathy used parent's first names and often the conversation broadened to include siblings of the child involved with the parent in *Reading Together*. Again they used the first names of siblings. The workshop proper began with a prayer in Samoan and English. At this stage there were 12 parents, including two mother and father couples, seated with Marian and Cathy around two coffee tables. Marian and Cathy were seated together at one corner of the group, with Liz seated on the edge of the group with the observer. Liz welcomed me to the group and explained my presence, making it clear that my role was not to observe the parents, but rather to observe how Cathy and Marian ran the workshops. Some parents turned and welcomed me. The workshop then followed the steps, procedures and activities set out in Section 6.3 of the *Workshop Leader's Handbook*. Parents shared experiences readily and the following are typical of the interchanges during the sharing of experiences in the first 10 minutes:

> *"It is better now-I am more relaxed-I am not as impatient"*

> Q Marian *"What about 'L'* (the child's first name)?"

> *"More enjoyable-understands the story."*

> *"'A'* (the child's first name) *comes to me now…she is beginning to read on her own,,,*
> *It does work (checking on the difficulty level of prose)…tried at home and it is good."*

(Cathy) "*That's good 'E''.*

"They *are reading much more…sitting beside them…reading together…it was good.*"

(Marian*) "That's wonderful."*

Marian and Cathy had a very easy relationship with the parents; addressing them by their first names and knowing the first names of their absent children, including siblings. The interchanges between Marian and Cathy, and them and the parents, were frequently accompanied by smiles and sometimes laughter.   Liz later moved into the group, but played a relatively passive role, clearly deferring leadership to Cathy and Marian. Occasionally she commented positively on something raised and reinforced particular strategies, e.g. on the need for reading together to be enjoyable for both parent and child. In any interchange with parents and Cathy and Marian she used first names as she did for children.

Photographs of the interactions between parents and children reading together in Workshop 2 were given to parents accompanied by laughter and positive comments by Cathy, Marian and Liz:

"*What a lovely photo of you and 'A'…wonderful*"

At the conclusion of the workshop some parents stayed on talking with each other and with Liz, Marian and Cathy. After the last parent had left Marian, Liz and Cathy rearranged furniture and concurrently ran an informal debriefing; "*How did you think it went?*" This conversation considered the difficulties one family was having and they also discussed how to make up the session for an absent parent, with Cathy agreeing to run a catch up session with them in the coming week.

"*'J' didn't come*"

"*No*"

"*Why didn't she come?*"

"*I could ring…*"

"*If you ring tell her I would run her through the workshop*"

I then arranged to meet Liz in the coming week and we parted company at the foyer entrance.   The areas around the building and the parking spaces and the entrance to the school were still well lit. At this stage, about 8.35pm, Cathy and Marian were still engaged in conversation in the staffroom.

<u>Workshop 4</u>

The observer arrived a little after 6.30 pm. The staffroom, foyer and surrounding areas were illuminated as for Workshop 3. I let myself in the foyer door and Liz met me at the entrance to the staffroom. Prior to welcoming me, I had observed Liz talking with Smaranda, a young teacher, in the staffroom. Smaranda stayed throughout the workshop. This was her first attendance at a workshop. She had expressed interest in attending a set of workshops to me at an earlier interview. The period before the beginning of the workshop followed the same pattern as in the previous workshop. Parents were welcomed by first names, offered refreshments, Marian, Cathy, Liz and now Smaranda conversed with parents, and parents talked with each other, e.g.

"(Parent) *She wants to read two times a day*"

(Response from Smaranda) "*Every morning I see her in the library*"

At the time of the prayer there were 11 parents present and this increased to 12 when 'L' arrived with a child. Name tags were distributed before the prayer. The seating arrangements were similar to the previous workshop except that Smaranda, Liz and the observer tended to be an extension of one side of the group. Smaranda and Liz joined Cathy and Marian in moving around the parents during the first ten minutes when parents were "*Sharing progress and experiences*" (Section 6.4, *Workshop Leader's Handbook*). At the completion of "*Sharing progress and experiences*" Smaranda and Liz sat within the group among the parents.

The balance of the workshop closely followed the sequence outlined in 6.4 of the "*Workshop leader's Handbook*". The parents and workshop leaders read *Brock* together, and this was accompanied by considerable laughter and comment as they struggled to understand the text. A lively discussion followed and the following is typical of the nature of interchanges:

(Parent) "*I am worried that she is only choosing text that is too easy-she is not making mistakes*"

(Workshop Leader) "*Does she enjoy reading them with you?*"

(Parent) "*Ah yes she loves us reading together...we are enjoying...she is reading more...but?*"

(Workshop Leader) "*That's good...perhaps you could choose a book together to read...perhaps choose together one that is a little more difficult*".

(Another parent) "*It's really good that she is reading.*"

Sometimes the <u>parents'</u> comments included strategies covered in the programme, e.g.

"*... choosing the level...*"

"*...correcting her mistakes when I wait,,,*"

"*I share with him...I read it right through before...we think about it before.*"

"*I make time...I put reading first...he is now laid back*"

The feedback questionnaire (see Appendix C) was handed out to the parents and Liz stressed that,

"*This is helpful for us the next time we run it*"

'*Please don't put your name...*"

The workshop ended with graduation certificates being awarded and a group photo which was accompanied by laughter as participants cleared a space and arranged themselves. Parents, the workshop leaders, Liz and Smaranda then talked amongst each other. After the parents had left, some still talking with each other outside the staffroom, I spent a few minutes talking with Liz about the evening. On leaving I observed her join Cathy and Marian who were talking together in the staffroom. The time was 8.40pm.

Summary

Care had been taken to create a physical environment that was attractive and comfortable for parents, with the workshop leaders sitting within the group. The layout was deliberately as different from a classroom as could be created within the staffroom. Parents became visiting participants within what was normally the teacher's private space. On two cold winter evenings there was only one parent who could not make the workshop.

The nature of the parents' exchanges with the workshop leaders was somewhat deferential, but clearly not didactic, e.g. they laughed together and shared activities, such as reading *Brock*. The leaders raised possibilities, *"That's good…do you find that helps them?"*, rather than providing solutions. Parents were welcomed by their first names and discussions occurred among parents and between parents, workshop leaders and Liz prior to and after the workshop. The workshop leaders and Liz initiated conversations inquiring about children and siblings that suggested genuine interest. Even though the workshops finished relatively late in the evening they stayed on for awhile "chatting" with each other, Liz, Marian and Cathy. The observations suggest that by Workshop 3 the parents were confident visitors in the staffroom.

Liz used first names when she welcomed parents and in the conversations with them before the workshops began. She was obviously the Principal, but the two workshop leaders obviously ran the workshop, with Liz a relatively passive participant. Cathy and Marian organized the distribution of materials with help from Liz and then Smaranda, and Liz did not contribute in most of the interchanges. Her location in the group provides further insight into her role; she sat among the parents away from the workshop leaders and read *Brock* alongside parents. She had a more active role near the end of Workshop 4 in the feedback section, e.g. *"This is helpful for us"*; a clear signal to the parents that she was part of the team. When the group photograph was taken she sat among the parents. The general impression was one of support for Cathy and Marian, and ensuring that parents knew she valued their involvement. When she did contribute verbally, it tended to affirm a comment by a parent or Cathy or Marian.

Parents raised issues related to reading together with their children in an open forum, and their discourse from time to time incorporated concepts integral to the programme, e.g. "*difficulty level*", "*self-correction*", and "*understanding the story*" before reading together.

There was considerable feedback from parents during the workshops that reading together with their child was now more enjoyable and less stressful, and the child was frequently being proactive in the relationship, e.g. *"Before I was impatient, now I am relaxed"; "She wants to read"*. This sharing of positive outcomes had to be a positive contingency for parents and the workshop leaders. It was not the case that the parents were telling the leaders only what they thought they wanted them to hear, e.g. I overheard one parent discussing how difficult it was to create a quiet time given the demands of a large family and a husband on shift work, and another raised the issue of the role of Samoan in learning to read with the whole group. The pleasure shown by parents when receiving photographs of them and their children reading together in an earlier workshop, and the similar reaction to the graduation certificates, were very positive contingencies for parents, Liz, Marian and Cathy. The overwhelming impression was that the workshop was not only a positive experience for parents but it was also an affirming activity for the workshop leaders.

The workshops followed closely Sections 6.3 and 6.4 in the *leader's Workshop Handbook.* This is consistent with the comments in interviews by Liz, Cathy and Marian:

> *"Marian and Cathy had been very faithful to the programme. They have no reason to change it"*

> Liz

"The programme is organised (e.g.) workshop four...this is what you had to set up three weeks ahead...you sent this letter home two weeks before...it is very well set out...it is comprehensive (including availability of the resources)...teacher friendly, user friendly"

"It has strategies that look great for parents"

Cathy and Marian

From their perspective the package was very "*user friendly for them and the parents"*, it worked and it was complete. There was no reason to go outside of it for additional materials or to modify the sequencing of activities set out in the handbook.

Marian and Cathy with Liz were involved in informal debriefing sessions after the parents had gone, and arrangements were made between them during the informal debriefing to follow up an absent parent.   All the discussions overheard between Liz, Marian and Cathy suggested the three had a shared understanding of the expected outcomes and the nature of the process.

The reader is reminded that St Joseph's is regarded by the Evaluation Review Office as a well run school, with good relationships with the community and children achieving across the major curriculum areas. Over 90 percent of students identify themselves as Pasifika. The school has a very stable staff and truancy is not an issue.   St Joseph's is not a typical decile 1 school in that the distribution of the students on standardised measures of achievement in language tends to be positively skewed, e.g. in 2007, only 12% of the students in St Joseph's, compared with 23% in the normal population, fell in the lowest three stanines on STAR, 59% are stanine five or higher on PAT Reading Comprehension, and 80% are stanine five or higher on PRETOS. There is a well developed system in place to monitor all students' achievement in the language area using a range of assessments and measures, e.g. students identified as having <u>relatively</u> underdeveloped skills in reading are taught within small groups by a teacher trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher during their instructional reading sessions (about 3 hours per week). Their progress is closely monitored using the difficulty of the text they can read with comprehension, their performance on running records, and their rates of completion of assigned home reading. There are few students in the school in 2007 whose reading age is one year or more below their chronological age, and any such student will have been identified as having special needs, their progress will be closely monitored, and it is highly likely that they will be in or have recently been in a *special needs reading group.*

The senior management team have worked successfully together for a number of years and the 2004 ERO review notes "*achievement focussed leadership*", and "*the thoughtful way in which teachers and support staff have been encouraged to reflect on their practice and to develop their teaching strategies.*" The 2007 report is equally positive about the leadership and the quality of the teaching. The school, a state-integrated Roman Catholic full primary school, has a long and stable history, going back to 1862. A good example of its place in the community is the nature of its relationship with the local community library. The Customer Services Librarian is a recent member of the school's Board of Trustees, and she currently has a grandson at the school. Children and parents use the community library, and about 10 children from the school use the homework centre on an average day (private communication, Community Librarian). Insight into the nature of the school can be gained by reading its newsletter to parents (www.stjosephsotahuhu.school.nz).

Reading Together was never considered by the Principal as solely a panacea for underachieving children. Rather she saw it in the first instance as espousing a role for parents in teaching and learning that was consistent with her beliefs about constructive school-home relationships. Its emphasis on extracting meaning from text was also perceived as a positive feature by her and the *senior management team*, in that it complemented their existing programmes. It was not construed as a stand alone package but perceived as an integral part of a commitment to a more constructive school-home alignment and a commitment to the development of <u>better</u> levels of reading comprehension among pupils. It is important to appreciate the <u>emphasis</u> on better, it was not considered primarily as remediation for low levels of achievement. Thus at the time of this report it is being implemented systematically across families, not just across the families of the lowest achieving children, and will shortly begin its sixth cycle. To date it has covered 64 parents and over 120 children, which is nearly 40% of the pupils in the school.

There is considerable evidence from the narratives of the Principal, Deputy (DP) and Associate Principal (AP), teachers and the observations of the workshops that *Reading Together* has been implemented consistently with the programme outlined in the *Workshop Leader's Handbook.* There is also a network of data from various sources (feedback questionnaires completed by the parents, the unstructured observations of the Principal and workshop leaders of interactions between parents and children in workshops, unstructured observations by teachers of pupils and parents in classes and libraries, and the

data analyses of changes in reading levels in Appendix D) that its introduction has been associated with positive changes in both parents and children. The interactions between parents and children are reported as more positive, parents are constructively engaged with the school as participants in learning and teaching, some teachers report parents as being more confident in exchanges about their children, and there are numerous reports from teachers of improvements in children's attitudes towards reading and of positive shifts in independent reading. It is difficult not to conclude that we are observing the successful implementation of an innovation. The commitment of the parents is not inconsiderable, and the ability of some to maintain this level of involvement may be constrained by the demands of large families and working broken hours.

Types of leadership

The Principal has been and is active in the profession at a number of levels: she was a founding member of the Otahuhu branch of NZEI, is a Fellow of NZEI, and a recent past president of the Principal's Council of NZEI. The interview published in NZEI Rourou provides insight into her independent and critical stance regarding Ministry initiatives: *"There needs to be a high level of trust, which allows for diversity, freedom and innovation within schools…it is important that …strategy or resourcing* (does not) *become fettered with a myriad of accountability requirements … there needs to be a genuine spirit of trust and professional responsibility at all levels."* The 2004 ERO report comments on her achievement focused leadership and the key role she has in leading professional discussions, and ensuring relevant professional learning is available for staff. In 2007 the report notes that her leadership is "highly effective" and comments positively on the leadership provided by the DP and AP. The three members of the *senior management team* (the Principal, DP and AP) have been together at the school for some decades, and teachers regard them as having a very good understanding and knowledge of the families and children. They now teach children of parents they have taught, and together have published and presented papers in professional forums.

Observers comment on the quality of the relationships among the senior management team, and teachers comment on their ability to engage them in conversations on professional issues. There is a high degree of personal and professional respect, within the senior management team, which one suspects has developed from working collaboratively together over a considerable period of time on a variety of successful initiatives. The DP and AP characterized their relationship with the Principal as "*empowering*". The Principal values them as professional colleagues and there is a high degree of trust in their relationship.

The Principal quickly recognized the significance of *Reading Together* in terms of its alignment with needs that had been identified in a curriculum area and its potential to develop constructive links between school and home. Prior to asking the DP and AP to consider the programme, the Principal had a series of communications with Jeanne Biddulph, the developer of *Reading Together*. This was done to ensure that the time of the DP and AP would not be wasted by having them consider a programme that was not aligned with curricula and community values. Marian and Cathy assumed that this had occurred. The Principal raised *Reading Together* as a <u>possibility</u> with the DP and AP over a weekend at school. The three then worked together through the *Workshop Leader's Handbook*. Concurrently the Principal continued her dialogue with Jeanne, which culminated in Jeanne meeting with the *senior management team* and then addressing staff. Jeanne commented that the questions asked by the *Senior Management Team* indicated that they had read and understood the underlying rationales for activities in the workshop, and were considering strategies to ensure the productive engagement of the parents. The *senior management team* concluded that the programme could be resourced and was likely to be very effective. It was at this stage that th*ey* owned the programme!

The *senior management team* decided to implement a set of specific strategies, focused on improving students' reading comprehension, which had a good fit with the existing coherent programme in language.

Not only did the Principal, DP and AP comment independently on this fit, but a senior teacher also made this coherence explicit:

> *"We are doing 199 things-monitor children…review progress-have strategies for addressing children's needs-this is part of a multi-disciplinary approach-it fits in our school. It (Reading Together) is not a stand alone programme…reading for meaning is a driver in our school programme-it (Reading Together) complements what we are doing-what learning with your child is."*

It was of critical importance to the Principal that she and the leaders of the workshop had a "*deep understanding*" of *Reading Together*. One of the reasons for this was to ensure that she and her senior management team (who also had critical roles as syndicate leaders in the school's leadership) could engage in intelligent discourse with each other and teachers about the process and outcomes. She discussed the existence of an informed community as a necessary precursor for intelligent professional discourse within the school, and believes that such a community provides opportunities for ongoing professional learning and support for initiatives. Another insight into the nature of this community is provided by a quote from an experienced teacher:

> *"We don't see a teacher in a classroom as being…just solely responsible for that child's progress. It is a much broader issue than that and there is a lot of consultation around all kinds of issues to progress and facilitate children's learning…within the staff there is a collective responsibility for children's learning."*

There are concrete outcomes of professional learning in this community associated with *Reading Together*. The Principal, DP and AP worked with Jeanne Biddulph, the developer of *Reading Together*, in preparing to implement the programme, published and presented papers in professional forums, and they collaborated in the writing of this report. The Principal has continued to communicate over professional issues with Jeanne and Adrienne (Chief Education Adviser, Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programmme, Ministry of Education) and a number of teachers have provided support in the workshops on their own initiative.

Teachers in the interviews describe leadership as "*top down*": the Principal "*drives change*", "*has high expectations*" for herself, teachers and students, sets "*high standards*", and "*mentors leadership*". The notion of top down leadership is on the surface somewhat inconsistent with her commitment to an *integrated professional culture* (Kardos, More Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001, p. 275), which is one where "*the support for teachers and the communication among them extend*(s) *throughout the team, department or school. In integrated professional cultures, the organised structures for support, the norms of how work is done, and the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about collegiality and professional growth* (are) *embedded in the schools professional culture…they* (teachers)*…exhibit a collective responsibility for the students and the school community*". In such a culture there are few barriers to communication. The notion of "*top down*" in the context of St Joseph's does not imply a leader removed from the everyday activities of teaching and learning, by a series of administrative levels of control. As one teacher commented in a note:

> *"We speak of a top down management style and it sounds like a case of 'My way or the highway', but that is not at all the case. The top down image speaks of Liz and the management team's vision and direction for the school in all areas-academic, environmental, pastoral, social etc. I feel confident to approach the senior team when I disagree with a position or need a view point cleared up. We are respected and valued as professional teachers by Liz."*

All of the teachers in the interviews were insistent that they had no difficulty in approaching the Principal to discuss professional issues. The primary researcher observed two such interactions between the Principal

and younger staff. The younger staff appeared at ease in the conversations.   Perhaps the nature of the relationship is captured in two teachers' comments:

> *"The drive and the leadership come from the Principal… From there I think there are a whole range of … there are some very competent, able professional staff here who then facilitate at a number of levels…I really do think we have a very strong layer of leadership."*

> *"It's like a community…I am a year 1 teacher (but) I still communicate with the year 8 teacher."*

The DP and AP discuss Liz as bringing forward ideas for consideration. In *Reading Together* the Principal, DP and AP were collaboratively involved in the decisions to implement the programme.   There is no implication for them of an autocratic decision maker; she initiates rather than promulgates.   Perhaps it makes sense to construe the Principal as a leading learner or a top leader (Locke, 2003). In her role as Principal she has primary responsibility for specific core functions, which are not distributed, but works within an institution that has an *integrated professional culture*, where teachers work collaboratively within and across organisational levels.   The development and maintenance of this informed *integrated professional culture* being one of her specific core functions. It should not be assumed from this that others in the school are not equally committed to an integrated professional culture and a shared vision of community, but it is the Principal who will lose sleep if a discrepancy occurs between the vision and the reality of experience.

Oversight of a teaching programme and instructional goal setting are key indicators of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005). The Principal and DP and AP were involved in both aspects. The senior management team identified key data that could inform them of the impact of the programme on student's achievement, e.g. Pedagogically significant shifts in attainment on the PM benchmark survey in November:

> *"One of our year 6 girls whose mother attended the Reading Together Workshop programme (the lovely photo of the girl leaning over the shoulder of her mother) showed up with over a 2 year improvement on her reading levels on the PM benchmark survey that we do in November each year. The teacher who does the test had also tested Sharon last year and commented that she had moved from a "struggling reader' to a confident and competent one who clearly understood the text."*

<div align="right">Email from Principal to Jeanne</div>

In addition they obtained and collated feedback from parents, and *informal conversations* with teachers provided them with relevant observations on pupils and parents. The Principal also spent time in the workshops enabling her to reflect collaboratively on processes and outcomes with the DP and AP. Although we have only presented a small sample of what is covered in depth in the narratives and the observations of the workshops, it is sufficient to indicate that the Principal is primarily an instructional leader (Hallinger, 2005). In the implementation of *Reading Together*, she was goal oriented, facilitated the alignment of resources, facilitated professional learning, was directly involved in the curriculum, and worked directly with the workshop leaders and teachers in the realisation of goals.   In Hallinger's terms, she is a 'hands on' leader, actively involved in curriculum and instruction and working directly with teachers. But there are other aspects to her leadership: she is regarded as having an excellent knowledge of students and parents, teachers recognise her status with parents, and she has status within the profession.   The DP and AP say she often brings forward ideas for them to consider as a team, and regard her as "*empowering*". A teacher refers to her as '*mentoring*' leadership. Moreover the nature of the engagement of the DP and AP with the rationales and nuts and bolts of the initiative, in conjunction with comments on their status and competence by teachers, their pivotal role in ensuring teachers were informed of the nature of the initiative, and the regard parents have for them, provides further evidence that the leadership type associated with the

decision to implement *Reading Together*, its implementation, and its oversight is primarily instructional. The school culture within which this occurs is similar to that labelled by Kardos *et al* (2001) as an *integrated professional culture*.

The Principal had the initial vision, *"It made me think about what our responsibility as a school is in terms of those home-school links"*. There are thus elements of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) in her everyday leadership. However the critical decision to proceed and continue with *Reading Together* was a collaborative one based upon the *senior management team* assuring themselves of the initiatives effectiveness, the reasonableness of its demands on resources, and its alignment with curriculum objectives. This is often the way, according to the DP and AP that decisions are made in the senior management team: the Principal raises something to consider; *"This may be worthwhile"*, then after examining the proposal a collaborative decision occurs, *"We decided to give it a go"*. The Principal did not consider any other alternatives to Marian and Cathy as workshop leaders, and the decision in some respects seems to be an example of *spontaneous collaboration* (Gronn, 2003) or *spontaneous alignment* (Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007). The Principal on reflection provided cogent justifications for having Cathy and Marian lead the programme, e.g. their competence as teachers in the area, their knowledge of the community of parents, their status with parents, and their pivotal location as syndicate leaders and members of the senior management team. However she frankly commented that at the time she didn't give it a lot of thought, it just seemed so obvious.

There is considerable evidence that the leadership was distributed (Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007; Spillane & Orlina, 2005; Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2007) in the planning and implementation of *Reading Together*. A senior teacher talked about *"very competent, able professional staff here who then facilitate at a number of levels…I really do think we have a very strong layer of leadership"*. The nature of this distribution in some instances is *collaborative*, two or more leaders working together in place and time, at others perhaps *collective* (Spillane *et al*, 2007), when the DP and AP worked separately but interdependently to prepare actual workshops, and at others *aligned* with particular organisational roles. The key decision-makers in *Reading Together* included the Principal, DP, and AP, and, because the latter two leaders had dual roles, the two key syndicate leaders. The roles of Principal, AP, DP and Syndicate Leader are common in primary schools and a normal part of the organisational structure; however it should not be assumed that such labels entail a universally agreed upon set of leadership functions (Spillane *et al*, 2007). The leadership functions attached to these roles are likely to vary according to the activity and the school. The initial decision to proceed with the implementation of *Reading Together* and the determination of the workshop leaders is an example of *spontaneous collaboration*, but following this there was an alignment of functions according to the level of the role. The DP and AP facilitated the staff meeting with Jeanne, and as workshop leaders had responsibility for leading and teaching the programme. The Principal had active oversight while providing professional and personal support throughout the workshops, e.g. she personally invited parents, found/arranged administrative support, visited workshops, and collated feedback from parents. Thus we probably have an example of *institutional practice* (Gronn, 2003) or *planful alignment* (Spillane *et al*, 2007, p. 40), in that *"Agreement(s) have been worked out among sources of leadership about which leadership functions are best carried out by which source."* However underlying this alignment was the egalitarian nature of the exchanges and relationships among the Principal, DP and AP; observed by the primary researcher in meetings and workshops and commented on by Jeanne in emails and conversations with the primary researcher.

The Principal is committed to an informed community of teachers, and this is achieved and sustained in part through *formal notices* and *informal conversations*. The Principal, DP, and AP were active initiators of *informal conversations* about the workshop with colleagues. The construction of an informed community enabled teachers to recognise changes in pupils and parents linked to the programme, and engage in

intelligent discussion with the senior management team and pupils and parents. These conversations also have the potential to affirm the contributions of the workshop leaders:

"*It is as much for the people (running the programme)...it is nice if other people...if you are engaged in something in a school and others know about it and are interested enough to say, how did it go...even if they are not directly involved, its nice. I think its part of a school working well together*"

The Principal

Colleagues' affirmation of the leadership of the programme by Cathy and Marian was not the only positive contingency for achievement. There was also concern to affirm the value of the parents' achievement. Workshop leaders frequently used comments such as "*That's good*", "*That's wonderful*", etc. during workshops. Equally significant, given the parents' reactions, were the photographs they received of them reading with their children (copies were also displayed in the school foyer). Parents also received a certificate of completion/graduation with a photograph of their group including the workshop leaders and the Principal. In addition the Principal, Marian and Cathy before and after workshops inquired about their families, again signalling their importance to the workshop leaders. These interactions were not idiosyncratic but reflections of a commitment of the Principal, DP and AP to ensure that parents realised the value of their achievements, and hopefully assist in sustaining that commitment. It is important to appreciate that the focus was on empowering parents, in terms of their constructive involvement with the curriculum and the teachers.

Conclusions

What we have observed and experienced in this school is a case of parents and the school working constructively together. Some of the positive outcomes have included significant changes in the nature of the interactions among teachers, parents and children, but this should not distract us from what for the Principal is the "*core business of a school*", effective teaching and learning (NZEI Rourou, 2005). *Reading Together* facilitated the alignment of school-home links with this core business, through distributed instructional leadership among participants with a high degree of trust and confidence in each other, collaborative decision-making, and a community of teachers who regarded themselves as having collective responsibility for teaching and learning. The Principal "*drove*" the process as a "*top leader*" and "*leading learner*", but in the context of an *integrated professional culture.* Finally, a focus on an informed community and professional learning has been an integral feature of the implementation of *Reading Together.* The maintenance of this culture is one of the Principal's core functions.

References

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

Alton-Lee, A. (2004). Improving Educational Policy and Practice through and Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme. Paper presented at *OECD Meeting on Evidence–Based Policy*, Washington, April 19.

Baird, J., Courtney, P. and Tuck, B. F. A case study of the influence of action research on school policy. *New Zealand Association for Research in Education*, Annual Conference, 1981

Biddulph, Jeanne. (1983). A group programme to train parents of children with reading difficulties. *Unpublished MA Research Report,* University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

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

Biddulph, Jeanne & Jan Allott. (2006). Reading Together: a programme which enables parents to help their children with reading at home. *Reading Forum NZ*, 21, 20-27.

Denzin, N. (1970). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Denzin, N. (1997). *Interpretive Ethnography.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds), (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Education, motherhood and apple pie. (2005). *NZEI Rourou*, p.8, February 14.

Education Review Office. (2004, 2007). *Education Review Office: St Joseph's School Otahuhu.* (www.Education Review Office.govt.nz/Education Review Office/reppub.nsf).

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gronn, P. (2003). Leadership: Who needs it? *School Leadership and Management*, 23, 267-290.

Grudnoff, L. & Tuck, B. (2003). Learning about teaching, learning while teaching, and becoming a teacher. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2, 33-42.

Grudnoff, L., Hawe, E. & Tuck, B. (2004). Effective Teaching and standards for teaching; A loose coupling. In *New Zealand Annual Review of Education.* Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 95-110.

Grudnoff, L. & Tuck, B. (2005). *The evaluation of an initial teacher education programme; benefits and risks.* Paper presented at *British Educational Research Association, annual conference*, University of Glamorgan, September.

Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4, 221-239.

Horgan, Liz, Franich, Cathy & Marian Wards. (2007). Reading Together workshop-St Joseph's Otahuhu. *Reading Forum NZ*, 22, 35-40.

Kardos, S., More Johnson, S., Peske, H., Kauffman, D. & Liu, E. (2001). Counting on colleagues: New teachers encounter the professional cultures of their schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 37, 250-290.

Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research. 1996-2005. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4, 177-179.

Leithwood, K., Mascall, B., Strauss, T., Sacks, R., Memon, N. & Yashkina, A. (2007). Distributing leadership to make schools smarter: taking the ego out of the system. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6, 37-67.

Spillane, J. & Orlina, E. (2005). Investigating leadership practice: Exploring the entailments of taking a distributed perspective. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4, 157-176.

Spillane, J., Camburn, E. & Pareja, A. (2007) Taking a distributed perspective to the school principal's workday. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6, 103-126.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basis of Qualitative Research* (2nd edition). California: Sage Publications.

APPENDIX A: Host verification – AP, DP, Teachers, and Jeanne

DP and AP

12 July 07

Hi Bryan,

Thank you for the transcript of our interview. Sorry I haven't acknowledged the results sooner – I like to wait till the holidays so that I can go down with the flu!!

All seems well – you have done a commendable job of making our comments readable, and I think the results reflect the processes we went through and make clear the nature of the leadership involved.

See you soon.

'X'

15 July

Bryan,

Sorry it has taken a while to get back to you … after reading through 'the analyses of the interviews' .. I'm happy with it. You have captured the essence of what we said or intended to say. Will you mention that you came and sat in on some of the workshops ?

I'm quite happy with what you have recorded.

Thanks Bryan

'Y'

_____

Teachers

<u>Teacher 'X'</u>

23 July 2003

Hi Bryan

To answer your letter:

1. Yes, I feel that my identity was well protected. Changing the names did the trick!
2. The collated information and its analysis do reflect the understanding that I have of the way the programme works (remember I have only attended the final meeting, I am to be more involved in the programme this term).

I hope this helps.

Kind regards

'X'

<u>Teacher 'Z'</u>

28 July

Dear Bryan,

I am perfectly happy with the preservation of my identity.

I think the analysis does give a portrayal of the Reading Together Workshop from the teacher's perspective. The only thing I might add is that while the workshop is led by Liz, Marian and Cathy there is very committed support from teachers underpinning the programme. On reflection, I think that the Reading Together programme would not be anywhere near as effective if classroom teachers weren't reinforcing and supporting it at every step of the way. It is really about partnership - parents, management and teachers. Underpinning all of this is the professional expertise of the classroom teacher who actually implements the reading programme for the individual student. I wouldn't want people to gain the impression that the Workshop is a stand-alone programme,

I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you and reflect on what really contributes to the success of the programme.

Many thanks Bryan.

Regards 'Z'

29 July

Dear 'Z'

I have gone back and reread the transcript of your interview and reflected on this and your email. It seems to me that I need to add a final sentence to the Teachers Narrative. Would the following be consistent with your argument/comment?

"Perhaps the last word should reside with Eleanor who in an email reminded the writer that "I wouldn't want people to gain the impression that the Workshop is a stand-alone programme…underpinning all of this is the professional expertise and support of the classroom teacher." She wanted to emphasis a point made in an earlier interview that the school has in place a robust programme in literacy, with capable committed teachers and where students' progress is systematically monitored across the school. Reading Together is a part of this greater whole."

Bryan

1 August

Dear Bryan,

The inclusion of this statement is very appropriate.

Thank you for taking the time to include it.

Many thanks,

'Z'

_____

Teacher 'Q'

Conversation with teacher 'Q':

OK with anonymity and essential aspects captured-expanded notion of top down with following note:

> *"We speak of a top down management style and it sounds like a case of 'My way or the highway', but that is not at all the case. The top down image speaks of Liz and the management team's vision and direction for the school in all areas-academic, environmental, pastoral, social etc. I feel confident to approach the senior team when I disagree with a position or need a view point cleared up. We are respected and valued as professional teachers by Liz."*

_____

Jeanne Biddulph

28 July 2007

Hi Bryan

I've now had time to re-read and reflect on the 'Jeanne's Narrative' section of the report and I think you have captured and summarised very accurately:

- my indirect (and minor) role in the implementation of *Reading Together* at St Joseph's by Liz, Cathy and Marian

- my ongoing admiration (and gratitude) for the superb way in which Liz, Cathy and Marian

    o understand all the processes of the programme (including critical aspects of setting it up and maintaining it in a school, community engagement etc)

    o implement it collaboratively (as a senior management group) with the highest degree of sensitivity, respect and caring for the parents/grandparents and children (and other teachers) involved

    o understand and value the research/theoretical base of the programme, and its history as an effective, manageable and low-cost form of home/school/community partnership

- my appreciation of the way in which Liz, Cathy and Marian have

    o provided me with ongoing feedback (including wonderful photos taken at Workshop Two of each series they have run to date)

    o participated in *Reading Together* presentations to other educators and community groups

    o published an article about their *Reading Together* implementation in *NZ Reading Forum*

    o allowed me to incorporate their feedback into my *Reading Together* presentations

    o given me a sense of being part of their professional and school community

- my view that the way in which Liz, Cathy and Marian have established and implemented *Reading Together* at St Joseph's Otahuhu is both unique and outstanding. Hundreds of teachers throughout NZ have run this programme over more than two decades, and in some cases principals/senior staff have demonstrated some interest (and, in one case, a principal worked collaboratively with me to run the workshops in his large city school), but to my knowledge, no senior management team has ever shown the degree and quality of leadership demonstrated by Liz, Cathy and Marian in establishing and implementing *Reading Together* in their school.

I've thought about this quite a lot and my view is that the way in which *Reading Together* is implemented by Liz, Cathy and Marian is the 'ideal', the 'optimum', and therefore likely to lead to optimum and long term 'outcomes' (social and academic) for children, parents and teachers. We know from the original research and subsequent use of the programme in other contexts that positive outcomes occur but the St Joseph's case study demonstrates how much more can be achieved when the Principal, DP and AP are as informed, committed and involved as Liz, Cathy and Marian are.

Jeanne

APPENDIX B: Interview schedules

Interview schedule-Principal

Q.1   When and how did you first learn about the programme?

Q.2 What made you decide to implement the programme in your school?

key features of programme
        alignment with existing curriculum
influences of any key personnel-outside and within school
        ability of programme to address needs of children, community
        professional learning

Q 3 How did you go about implementing the programme?

        evidence of goal setting
        obtaining relevant resources
        approach to implementation with staff-content of critical meetings critical written information
        nature of distribution-collaborative? Aligned with roles? Collective?
        identification of key staff (characteristics, reasons for choice...)
how were children identified
        how were parents approached

Q 4 What was the most challenging aspect of implementation and how did you meet these?

Q 5 What are the things that you did that were critical in ensuring its success?

Q 6 What were the critical outcomes?

Q 7 What information was critical for you when monitoring the programme?

        nature of monitoring, timing data obtained and nature of anecdotal evidence.

Q 8 Were their any unintended outcomes? If yes, what were they?

Q 9 Nature of feedback if any to staff, parents, children? Why these forms of feedback?

Q 10 What in your judgement were critical to the success of the programme?

        specific characteristics of the programme
        quality of workshop instructions and rationale set out in Workshop Leaders Handbook
        particular personnel within school
        nature of community within school (learning community?),
        particular features of wider school community
        nature of monitoring

provision of feedback to parents and staff
resources outside school-Jeanne Biddulph/MoE etc
.

Q 11 Have you amended the programme in any way? If yes, in what way and why?

Q 12 How would you characterise the programme, e.g. a one shot/add on or embedded within experienced curricula with enduring impact?

Q 13 What advice would you give to a principal considering implementing the programme in their
school?

Interview schedule- Deputy Principal and Associate Principal

Q.1 When and how did you first learn about the programme?

Q.2 What made you decide to commit to the implementation of the programme in your school?

key features of programme
influences of any key personnel-outside and within school
    ability of programme to address needs of children, community
    professional learning

Q 3 What were the most challenging aspects of implementation and how did you go about meeting these?

Q 4 Was the programme a success?

Q 4a If yes, why was it a success?

Elements of programme
    Actions of PD and DP
    Actions of P
    Informed staff

Q5 What were the critical outcomes?

    Q 6 What was the evidence that enabled you to conclude that these had been achieved?.

    nature of systematic planned formal and informal monitoring including timing data obtained and nature of anecdotal evidence for impact on students, teachers, parents,on AP, DP and P. Link with critical outcomes?

Q 7 Were their any unintended outcomes? If yes, what were they.

Q 8 What was the nature of the feedback if any to staff, parents, children?

Q 9 What were the reasons for selecting these particular forms of feedback?

Q 10 What in your judgement were critical to the success of the programme

    leadership of P- check on their perceptions of the nature of her leadership
    nature of introduction to senior staff
    nature of introduction to staff
    nature of introduction to parents
    nature of introduction to parents

specific characteristics of the programme-alignment with existing curriculum (coherence)

quality of workshop instructions and rationale set out in Workshop Leaders Handbook

particular personnel within school

nature of community within school (learning community?),

particular features of wider school community

nature of outcomes

provision of feedback to parents and staff

alignment and utilisation of resources within & outside school-Jeanne Biddulph/MoE etc

.

Q 11 Have you amended the programme in any way? If so what were the reason?

Q 12 How would you characterise the programme, e.g. a one shot/add on or embedded within experienced curricula with enduring impact?

> *If latter, was this expected and give examples-check for R and D...*

Q 13 What advice would you give to a principal considering implementing this programme in their School?

Q14 Are there any significant elements of leadership and administration in the successful implementation of the programme that we have not covered?

Interview schedule- teachers

Q.1 When and how did you first learn about the programme?

Q1a *Check on level of insight.*

Q.2 What contact did you have with the programme?

Q 3 It was hoped that the programme would bring about positive changes in the role parents had in teaching and learning and positive changes in their children's learning. Do you think that these objectives were achieved?

Q 4 If yes: Can you give examples of changes in children, in parents?

If no: Why weren't they achieved?

Q 5 If achieved: What do you believe were the key elements that resulted in the programmes success?

> *leadership of P-its nature*
> *specific characteristics of the programme-including alignment*
> *quality of workshop teachers*
> *particular personnel within school*
> *nature of community within school (learning community?),*
> *particular features of wider school community*
> *involvement of staff*

Q 6 Were their any unintended outcomes? If yes, what were they.

Q 7 What was the nature of the feedback if any to staff?

Q 8 How would you characterise the programme, e.g. a one shot/add on or embedded within experienced curricula with enduring impact?

Q 9 Are there some things that could have been done better?

Q 10 How would you describe the nature of leadership in the school?

Q 11 Are there any significant elements of leadership and administration in the implementation of the programme that we have not covered?

APPENDIX C: Examples of collated feedback from parents

READING TOGETHER WORKSHOP FEEDBACK - TERM 3 2006

Looking back over the Meetings what are the most important things you have learned about helping your child(ren) with their reading?

- ❑ To find the right books for my children
- ❑ A quiet place for my kids
- ❑ Helps me to understand that reading is very important for our kids and also how hard to can be
- ❑ I get along with my child (I) when I came to this meeting and then I read together with her
- ❑ Quiet time to read
- ❑ Interesting
- ❑ Give them time
- ❑ Let them read at a peaceful place and helps me to stop yelling at them if they do not know how to say a word.
- ❑ To have time for kids to do their reading
- ❑ To help them read their books and make them like their reading
- ❑ Is good for them to learn more reading
- ❑ A quiet place
- ❑ Give them time to pronounce the word
- ❑ Patience
- ❑ Easy book for her to read
- ❑ A time suitable like bed times when they're really into it
- ❑ The most important thing is that I find myself and the kids very keen to read and also I find the time to do it with them.
- ❑ I can see now that we've been doing a lot of reading – my kids love to read and it's a very good effort.
- ❑ Giving her time to think
- ❑ I ask her about the story and get her to talk
- ❑ Elizabeth is writing more too – I am giving her a hug.

2. *Do you think your child's reading has improved?   If so, in what ways has it improved?*

- ❑ Yes, I think it has, I've learnt to pick books for my kids and that really helps.
- ❑ If my kids don't know a word they will look at the pictures then they will know what the word is (sometimes it doesn't work) because there are no pictures.
- ❑ I don't have to point at words (they get all funny if I do) so they read without me pointing at the words.
- ❑ She can read and after that, can tell the story.
- ❑ Love reading
- ❑ Yes, at the first place my daughter runs over her finger on the words and says them but now she can read on her own without pointing to the words.
- ❑ Yes, she can read her books by herself
- ❑ She can read a different book every time

- Yes, it has improved. Doing her best to pronounce the word. Pictures also really does help especially something she likes eg animals.
- She tries to tell me in her own words about the story. She even follows the pictures.
- Sometimes she even tries to write about it and that's the time when the spelling help comes in because she'll be asking about every difficult word.
- Definitely! Especially my 6 yr old daughter, she is doing a lot better with her words, if she doesn't know it she'll ask me and I help her but she is doing a lot better.
- I can tell she's starting to learn a lot of difficult words like e.g. (understand, must) she'll say it and ask me what's it mean.
- My son – he's getting there – just started primary 2 months age and he's learning a lot from his big sister. He reads books slowly so he can't make a mistake. (very tricky)
- Elizabeth is more confident now – she reads to herself and her dad. I ask her if she wants me to tell her the hard words – but now she says "Wait – I'm thinking"

3. Has the programme helped your child or your family in any others ways?

- Yes, I have found this programme very successful because it helps my kids to read better and to understand that reading is important and for me to understand that it is hard to read.
- Teaching of reading to my kids works really well.
- Yes, Iunisi reads to her cousin and the next door kid even her little sister.
- Yes, reading together
- Like a game in the family
- Yes, it helps me in a way how to show my child how to read a book that is suitable for her to read and stops me from yelling at her by telling the words straight away.
- Yes, the parents know how to read with their kids and spend 10 min or 20 min to read together with the kids
- Older sisters and brothers really help – if she knows I'm sleeping she'll run to them for help on how to say or spell a word
- Every time they do their reading it gives me a break just sitting there with them (which is great)
- It's been good to talk and share with other parents

4. What things did you find hard or difficult?

- Before the programme I found it hard but now that I know there are different ways of teaching of reading to our kids it has been good .
- To make time for my kids
- Concentrate with reading
- Hard to pronounce words
- The pronunciation of hard words for them
- Time to spend time to learn with the kids
- Giving time or making time but that's improved a lot now
- Getting frustrated – when Sandora gets stuck on the same word
- Just my son because when he started he struggled a bit but he's alright now
- It's good to hear a different way to help Elizabeth

5. *Any other comments that you would like to make about the programme*

- ❏ I have found this programme really good and I would just like to thank the teachers that are involved for the time they have spent on our kids. It indicates to me that teachers are doing a great job, so well done!! I recommend this programme to all parents. (What a success!!)
- ❏ I would like to say a big thank you to the teachers for this programme because it's helped me and my family to make reading easy.
- ❏ Hope to continue next year
- ❏ Very interesting
- ❏ Help family and kids and their future
- ❏ It is better to have more programmes like this in the future
- ❏ This programme is very helpful for us to help my children learn to love reading
- ❏ It is a very good programme
- ❏ To me, it really encourages me to give time to read to or listen to them reading. Some ideas I didn't know about and trying out new ideas to make reading more interesting.
- ❏ I am very happy with the programme, it's been helping me a lot and my kids – so very grateful – thank you.
- ❏ The parents need to come and support this programme
- ❏ Some parents are lazy – they don't spend time with their children
- ❏ They need to hear your advice.
- ❏ It's a good experience.

READING TOGETHER WORKSHOP FEEDBACK - AUGUST 2007

1. How has this programme helped you in supporting your child's reading?

- By being patient
- Timing
- Praising her for being excellent in reading
- It has helped me become more aware of how hard it is to learn to read
- I have a 5yr old, I now realise I have put too much expectations on her with reading
- It tells me how to read with my son/daughter – I should be patient and set up the time as well
- The strategies and ideas of meaning-making and comprehension. Setting the right time.
- It helped me to be more patient with my daughter. This programme has helped me a lot to deal with myself when it comes to reading time with my daughter, not to get angry and frustrated.
- By getting more ideas on how to go about reading to and with my child.
- Great involvement in reading with my son.
- Time management
- Having or showing patience

- Finally more open positive praising
- To stay more with him and spend my time with the kids
- Interesting on Reading and making stories
- It's really helped me and my son too. He likes to read more and more and even he asked some questions and also he reads to his little sister as well
- Give them a good example
- They know how to read and understand the topic and what's going on
- This programme helped me with the way that I have to show my child how to choose a book to read e.g. first five words in a book that my child know. If not the book is very hard. The waiting time while reading and praising of the child is very important. The programme not only helped my child in reading but for me as a parent for better reader.
- To listen to them read and have more patience and tell me to read with them better
- Heaps!! Helped me to learn to be <u>PATIENT</u> – Timing and controlling myself from rushing through the reading. Learnt techniques to improve, self correct and also confidence.

2. What did you like best about the programme?

- Sharing ideas from different parents about helping kids for their reading.
- I loved examples given, tips on how I can best make reading time enjoyable rather than a frustrating time for my daughter & I.
- Learn me more about how to read together with my boys
- The parents upbringing and their loyalty by telling about what and how they dealt with the children at home
- The parents and the teachers making it fun. I like how easy it is to help my child with her reading
- Getting to meet other parents and sharing ideas
- To meet some parents for their ideas and to make stories for the children
- Talk about the pattern how to read
- Working with a small group, and also it's good to hear from other parents what they like to share. Also to find out some new ideas that will help me to show my son
- Reading, understanding
- The time when I read with my child and practising the way of good reading
- Meeting other parents
- 10 – 15 mins reading routines every day
- The teacher is more funny - like the bridesmaid (haha) and to get to know other parents too and the feedback from the parents too helped a lot (*Cathy and Marian have a bit of banter when giving out booklets about who is the bridesmaid)*
- Everything we have learnt within these four weeks, especially fun learning with Marian and Cathy. Also sharing ideas with other parents

3. What could we do to make the programme more helpful to you or other parents in the future?

- To continue this programme every year
- More workshops in the future
- Maybe doing the whole 7 sessions rather than 4. Must be interesting to know what the other ones cover. (*not sure what this person meant here…..must have thought there were more workshops*)
- Is to share some good ideas together
- Putting up more of these workshops as an updated in a couple of months or more
- It is a good idea to have a Maths Workshop
- Would it be possible to have it every year
- Time and Place
- Do some more workshops and it's good to get a TV and show some of the parents & kids are reading together
- Sharing, try to give them a good example. Parents need help with children
- Perhaps do another or more workshops in the future
- To do more activities like games, and the parents should read too
- More workshops (i.e. Maths)

4. Is there anything you would like to go over again?

- No, Workshop was excellent, well presented
- Overall it has been great!! Thank you
- To keep this programme happening every year
- Not sure yet
- No
- No! Thank you!
- No
- I am alright now
- More workshops – it's good to bring kids in every workshop so that they know exactly what we are going to do, in different ways.
- No
- No
- Nah! I think you guys done a good job. Well done ladies!
- The whole programme next year if possible

APPENDIX D

Analyses of changes in reading levels associated with *Reading Together*

Analyses of changes in reading levels associated with *Reading Together*

Introduction

St Joseph's is not a typical decile 1[1] school in that the distribution of the students on standardised measures of achievement tends to be positively skewed: in 2007, only 12% of the students, compared with 23% in the normal population, fell in the lowest three stanines on STAR, 59% are stanine five or higher on PAT Reading Comprehension, and 80% are stanine five or higher on PRETOS. There is a well developed system in place to monitor all students' achievement in the language area using a range of assessments and measures, e.g. students identified as having relatively underdeveloped skills in reading are taught within small groups by a teacher trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher during their instructional reading sessions (about 3 hours per week). Their progress is closely monitored using the difficulty of the text they can read with comprehension, their performance on running records, and their rates of completion of assigned home reading. There are few students in the school in 2007 whose reading age is one year or more below their chronological age, and any such student will have been identified as having special needs, their progress will be closely monitored, and it is highly likely that they will be in or have recently been in a *special needs reading group*. The 2007 ERO evaluation commends the school for "its high performance" notes the impact of professional development in classrooms, comments on the high quality of teaching, "robust curriculum self review, prudent resourcing and practices that encourage and guide parents to be partners in education."

The family is the unit of concern for the school with *Reading Together*, not the particular child brought by parents to the workshop in which they read together. The majority of the children in the analyses did not come to the workshops with their parents. However it is the hope that the programme will lead to parents being constructively engaged with all of their children at school, not just those associated directly with the workshop, thus all of the children attending school in the family become units in the following analyses.

It is also important to appreciate that the nature and timing of the data used to test for the programme's impact on children's achievement is not uniquely designed for the evaluation of the programme. Rather we are using one element of the net of school wide data gathered in November of every year. This data is used by the school to identify children in need, set achievement targets for the following year, and provide feedback on the standing of the school against national norms across a wide range of curricula. One element only of this comprehensive net of achievement measures is used in these analyses, the reading level obtained by the student on the running record administered individually to every child in the school by an experienced teacher. This assessment was chosen on the grounds that the score provides a direct indication of a student's ability to read text with understanding.

[1.] Decile one schools draw their students from areas of greatest soio-economic disadvantage.

The first workshop, September 2005

The eleven mothers and one father attended all of the four workshops. One mother had four children at the school, another five mothers and one father had three children at the school, three mothers had two children, and two mothers each had one child attending. In most cases a mother bought only one child to the second workshop, but the unit of concern for the school is the family and their children enrolled in the school. Thus the 11 mothers and 1 father who attended the workshops covered 30 children attending the school. The children's ages ranged from six years 2 months to 13 years 4 months at the time of the workshop, although the eldest child was nearly one and a half years older than the next eldest. They were enrolled in classes ranging from Year 1 to Year 8. Fourteen of the 30 children had a reading age (Level PM Benchmark) within three months of their chronological age, another 7 had reading ages at least 9 months above their chronological age and 9 had reading ages 6 months or more below their chronological age. They were thus an extremely heterogeneous group.

An attempt was made to locate a match for each child covered by the workshop. These matches were identified after the workshop had been completed, and are thus retrospective. Retrospective matching is not as robust a design as one in which students are randomly assigned to either the treatment or the contrast group prior to the intervention, but it does enable the correlations between matched pairs across the groups to be built into the inferential analyses, thus increasing their power. We located a student who had been in class with a *Reading Together* student in the previous year (November 2004), whose reading level (as assessed using a running record) was at that stage within one level of the Reading Together student's level, and whose chronological age was within 6 months of their chronological age. In the end matches were obtained for 18 out of the possible 30 *Reading Together* students. We could not obtain matches for 12 of the 30 children covered by the workshop, either because their families had left the school or they had enrolled in secondary school at the beginning of 2006. This meant we had no comparative standardised information on their reading level for that year; a critical point for the assessment of programme impact.

Data on achievement (running records) was available for the year before the workshop (November 2004), immediately after the workshop (November 2005), and one year later (November 2006), for all of the matched pairs. The expectation was that the two groups of students, those in families who had attended the workshops and their matched counterparts, will have virtually identical achievement in November 2004 because of the matching, very similar levels of achievement in November 2005, because it was unrealistic to expect the programme to have had a significant pedagogical impact after such a short time, but significantly different levels of achievement in November 2006, one year after the programme.

Table 1 sets out means and standard deviations for the two groups (18 matched pairs) on running records administered in November 2004, 2005 and 2006. The patterns of achievement are as expected over the three years, with the *Reading Together* students doing significantly [$t(17)=2.041$, p=.02, one-tailed] better than their matched counterparts in November 2006. The difference between the groups of one reading

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for reading levels by group across three occasions-Sept 05 workshops

Group	2004 M	2004 S	2005 M	2005 S	2006 M	2006 S
Reading Together	20.11	5.91	23.50	3.31	26.16	3.03
Contrast	20.39	5.10	23.19	3.12	25.25	3.59

Note: The paired sample correlation at 2006 is 0.88

level in November 2006 was primarily brought about by the average and below average readers in the *Reading Together* group making bigger gains than their counterparts in the contrast group. Although there were two incidences of above average readers in the *Reading Together* group making bigger gains than their matched counterparts. The estimate for the effect size at November 2006 varies according to how it is calculated: using Cohen's *d*, the effect size is approximately 0.3, but when estimated from the value of *t,* using the formula $2t/\sqrt{N}$, it is considerably greater, around 0.7. This latter estimate of the effect size is probably conservative as an argument could be developed to use *df* + 1 rather than N as the denominator, because the design uses matched pairs.

The second workshop, March-April 2006

Ten mothers and three fathers attended all of the workshops, with the three fathers attending with their wives. One of the families had three children at the school, five had two children, and four had one child. In most cases a parent or parents brought only one child to the second workshop. The 13 parents who attended the workshops covered 17 children attending the school. The children's ages ranged from 5 years 1 month to 10 years 11 months at the time of the workshop. They were enrolled in classes ranging from New Entrant to Year 8. Four of the 19 children had a reading age (Level PM Benchmark) at least 9 months above their chronological age, 3 had reading ages 5 months or more below their chronological age, and the remainder had reading ages within 5 months of their chronological age. They were thus an extremely heterogeneous group.

An attempt was made to locate a match for each child covered by the workshop. These matches were identified after the workshop had been completed. We located a student who had been in class with a *Reading Together* student in the previous year at November 2005, whose reading level (as assessed using a running record) was at that stage within one level of the *Reading Together* student's level, and whose chronological age was within 6 months of their chronological age. In the end matches were obtained for 15 out of the possible 17 *Reading Together* students. We could not obtain matches for 2 of the 17 children covered by the workshop, because one was a new entrant and there was thus no pre-programme achievement data and there no match within the

defined limits for one *Reading Together* pupil whose reading age was more than one year behind his chronological age.

Relevant data on achievement (running records) was available for November 2005, four to five months before the second workshop, and for November 2006, seven months after the workshop. The expectation was that the two groups of students, those in families who had attended the workshops and their matched counterparts, would have virtually identical achievement in November 2005 because of the matching, but significantly different levels of achievement in November 2006, seven months after the programme. Data is not yet available for November 2007. Table 2 sets out the mean and standard deviations for the two groups on levels of achievement as assessed by running records before the workshop, and seven months later. All students, those in the programme and their matched pairs have gained on average about six levels over the seven months, but, on average, the students whose families are in the *Reading Together* programme have gained about a reading level more than their matched counterparts. The difference between the two groups at November 2006 is significant [$t(14)=2.53$, $p=.01$, one-tailed]. The effect size of the critical contrast at November 2006, varies from about 0.2 (Cohen's *d*) to a value around 0.7 when estimated from the value of *t*. An examination of the gains made by individual students found there were little differences between the gains made by the older able readers in *Reading Together* and their matched counterparts. There are two reasons for this: first, these able older students are reading independently and it is probably unrealistic to expect them to be influenced significantly by reading together with parents, and second, there is a ceiling effect, with the maximum level of 30 being attained in November 2007 by three reading together students. The biggest differences between the gains made between matched pairs tended to be with students whose reading ages in November 2005 were close to or below their chronological ages. Two of these pairs were in Year 2, a third was in Year 5, and the fourth pair was in Year 6.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for reading levels by group across three occasions, April 06 workshops

Group	2005 M	2005 S	2006 M	2006 S	2007 M	2007 S
Reading Together	17.60	8.91	22.90	5.45	*data not available*	
Contrast	17.44	9.02	22.03	5.35		

Note: The paired sample correlation at 2006 is 0.96

Summary

Students in both the families involved in *Reading Together* and their matched counterparts made substantial gains in reading levels in the year after the four workshops. This is to be expected given the quality of the programmes in language at the school (see ERO evaluations 2004 and 2007). However, on average, the children in

the *Reading Together* families gained about a level more than their matched pairs. This gain is statistically significant, and provides evidence of the contribution parents can make in partnership with a decile one school that is already providing a very high standard of education for their students (ERO, 2007). The leaders of *Reading Together* in this instance were not specialists, but school staff, albeit very competent respected senior leaders (ERO, 2007). This leadership was instructional and distributed and within the context of a school in which teachers accepted collective responsibility for children's learning. The programme was implemented consistently with the outline provided in the *Leaders Workshop Handbook*.

The effect sizes need to be interpreted with caution, because the differences between the gains of those within *Reading Together* and their matched pairs tend to be associated with chronological age and reading ability: *Reading Together* had the biggest differential impact on students in Year 5 or below who before the programme had reading ages close to or below their chronological ages. The programme had relatively little impact on the reading levels of the very able older students. In part this is because of a ceiling effect with the measure, but it is also likely in families with two or more children at school that parents will allot more time to younger siblings who are struggling than older siblings who are reading fluently and independently.

Finally, the reader unfamiliar with running records and reading levels must appreciate that the intervals between the levels are not equal, e.g. there are examples in this study of readers in Years 2 and 3 progressing through 9 or more levels in a year. Progress through levels in Years 5, 6 and 7 is more modest, with the typical student progressing through about 3 levels. Thus the intervals between levels increases as you move up the scale. A difference of one level between, for example, 9 and 10 is quite different from the difference of one level between 25 and 26. The unequal nature of the intervals may be contributing to the magnitude of the correlations between the matched pairs, and is certainly linked to the reduction in the size of the standard deviations over time.