



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

**Key features and related research findings**

Prepared for Group Māori, MoE, 2009 as part of Ka Hikitia.

**The Biddulph Group**



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## 1. Introduction: Purpose and scope of the document

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to summarise the findings of research into *Reading Together* and link these to the findings of relevant research studies so that the evidence base is more readily accessible to educators who are interested in the programme. The document has been prepared for Group Māori as part of *Whānau Engaged in Learning* initiatives within *Ka Hikitia*.

### Scope

The research findings included in this document are summarised from:

- research into *Reading Together* itself (1982 - 2009)
- studies which are relevant to *Reading Together* which are reported in the MOE's Families and Communities BES 2003

The final section of the document links key factors in *Reading Together's* self-sustainment to three significant papers which are particularly relevant to this feature of the programme:

- Ministry of Education (2009) *Ka Hikitia - Whakapumautia, Papakowhaitia, Tau ana: Grasp, Embrace and Realise – Strengthening Relationships between Iwi and the Ministry of Education*. Wellington, Ministry of Education.
- Coburn, C. (2003) Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher*, 32, 6, p 3-12.
- Hargreaves, A., Halasz, G. and Pont, B. (2007) *School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland: A case study report for the OECD activity - Improving school leadership*.

## 2. Key Features of *Reading Together*: An Overview

References: *Biddulph (1983)*, *Biddulph & Tuck (1983)*, *Biddulph (1993)*, *Biddulph (2004)*.

### **Reading Together is:**

- a low-cost group family literacy programme, first developed in New Zealand in 1982, which helps parents to support their children's reading at home
- designed to enhance children's literacy achievement and social development, and support the work of teachers and schools
- based on a sound theoretical and research framework
- implemented throughout New Zealand on a voluntary basis, by self-selected teachers
- practical, user friendly and manageable for teachers, parents/whānau and children

### **Reading Together consists of:**

- 4 workshops for parents/whānau (each 1 hr 15 mins) spread over 7 weeks
- participation by groups of no more than 15 adults in each workshop series
- workshops conducted in relaxed settings such as school libraries, staffrooms and (in some cases) community libraries
- informed, sensitive support from competent teachers/workshop leaders who model ways of interacting that promote literacy and social development
- specific suggestions for helping with reading at home, which are explained, demonstrated and discussed during the workshops
- meaningful and non-threatening experiences and activities which are carefully structured and sequenced
- encouragement and support for parents/whānau to use the suggestions to help their child(ren) with reading at home for 10 – 15 minutes at a time, 4 – 5 times each week
- opportunities to be supported by other parent participants
- opportunities to meet with and be supported by community librarians

### **Reading Together supports all children and their parents/whānau, namely:**

- children with reading difficulties
- children who are reluctant readers
- children who are competent readers
- children from junior primary to junior secondary school levels
- children and parents from diverse language/literacy, cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds

### 3. Reading Together research evidence: A summary

#### 3.1 The original *Reading Together* research 1982 - 1983

References: *Biddulph (1983); Biddulph & Tuck (1983).*

- The *Reading Together* programme was developed, implemented and evaluated in the course of a Masters' degree action-research project at the University of Canterbury in 1982.
- The research project was designed to
  - help the parents of children who were low-progress readers to support their children's reading at home more effectively
  - explore the effects of the workshop programme on the children's attitudes to and engagement with reading
  - investigate changes in children's achievement in reading
  - explore the attitudes and responses of the parents, together with changes in relationships between parents and children
- The study was action-research and experimental i.e. it involved a randomised, controlled trial
- Forty-eight children were involved in the research project (24 target, 24 control/comparison). They were 9 and 10- year- olds who were experiencing difficulties with reading i.e. their reading levels on standardised comprehension measures ranged from 5½ - 8½ years.
- The children were attending seven Christchurch schools across a range of socio-economic and ethnic groups. School effects were controlled for i.e.
  - The children were matched and randomly assigned to groups in both a 'within-schools' sample (3 schools) and 'across-schools' sample (4 schools)
  - Parents of 11 target children in the within-schools sample attended one series of *Reading Together* workshops in one part of the city
  - Parents of 13 target children in the across-schools sample attended another series of *Reading Together* workshops in another part of the city
  - All children, target and comparison, received the usual, in-school support for children with reading difficulties, including individualised specialist support
- The investigation was grounded in a strong theoretical framework. A range of relevant quantitative and qualitative research strategies were used to investigate the effectiveness of the programme, and the findings were elaborated and explained through detailed case studies.
- Statistical analysis of the data revealed that three months after the workshops began, when measured against the comparison group, the target group of 24 children (i.e. those whose parents attended the workshops):
  - made significantly greater gains in reading attainment (average gain = 9 months in the 3 months of the study)
  - read more regularly and with more enjoyment
  - gained more confidence in themselves as readers and as people
  - became more independent in their reading.
  - used libraries more frequently

- As a group, the parents of the ‘target’ children:
  - were keen to be involved in the programme
  - gained competence in assisting their children at home
  - gained confidence and satisfaction from helping their children (including recent immigrant parents whose understanding and knowledge of English were limited)
  - reported that:
    - they had developed more supportive and positive relationships with their child(ren) and within their families
    - they felt less frustration, anger and anxiety about their children's reading achievement
    - they were using the programme strategies to help siblings of the target group of children
    - their own reading had improved (in cases where parents lacked confidence in their own reading ability)
    - they were showing other family members and other parents/friends how to help their children.
- In follow-up testing 12 months later the ‘target’ children maintained significant gains. 76% of the ‘target’ children had reached a reading age greater than 9.5 years (similar gains to those of average readers), whereas only 10% of the comparison children had reached this level.
- The underlying processes of the programme were of critical importance because they developed:
  - Genuine, collaborative and non-threatening partnerships between the parents, their children and the Workshop Leader.
  - A sense of community among the parents, children, teachers and local librarians involved in the workshop programme.

### **3.2 The research evidence about *Reading Together* at St Joseph’s School Otahuhu 2007**

*Reference: Tuck, Horgan, Franich & Wards (2007).*

Additional research evidence about *Reading Together* was gathered in a study funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. The in-depth study in 2007 investigated the ongoing implementation (since 2005) of *Reading Together* at St Joseph’s Primary School, Otahuhu, Auckland. The research revealed:

- statistically significant gains in children’s levels of reading comprehension which were:
  - sustained over time (two years)
  - evident across the siblings in the families who participated
  - over and above that achieved by a highly effective school literacy programme
- that parents can make a significant difference to children’s reading achievement in partnership with a decile one school that is already providing highly effective literacy education programmes for their (mainly Pasifika) children
- positive and constructive changes in parents’ relationships with their children
- positive shifts in children’s independent reading
- enhanced relationships and interactions between teachers and parents (over and above school/home relationships which were already very positive and supportive).

### 3.3 Workshop leaders' documentation

References: Biddulph (1993); Biddulph & Allott (2006); Horgan, Franich and Wards (2007); Tuck, Horgan, Franich and Wards (2007); Horgan (2008); [www.readingtogether.net.nz](http://www.readingtogether.net.nz) (from workshop leaders' written reports)

Since 1982 workshop leaders who have implemented *Reading Together* throughout New Zealand have also documented (from a range of observational data and parent questionnaire responses) positive changes in:

- children's literacy achievement which are long term and over and above those of the school
- attitudes toward and engagement in reading
- confidence and independence generally
- parents' support for children's reading at home
- relationships between parents and children, and parents and teachers
- use of libraries

These effects are evident across a range of ages and in a range of contexts, including those in which:

- the families involved have very little formal education, and/or are from diverse/minority backgrounds, and face adverse financial circumstances
- the children are struggling with and/or are disinterested in reading
- the children involved are already performing well in literacy achievement i.e. the impact is over and above that of even very effective school programmes, including specialist support. The positive impact extends to siblings in the target families.

## 4. What contributes to the effectiveness of *Reading Together*? – relevant research findings from the *Families and Communities Best Evidence Synthesis*

A number of factors contribute to the effectiveness and ongoing voluntary implementation of *Reading Together* throughout New Zealand. The factors which contribute to *Reading Together's* effectiveness are consistent with those which have subsequently been identified in national and international research studies. The main findings of some of these studies (i.e. those which were included in the MOE's Families and Communities BES, 2003) are linked to key features of *Reading Together* in the table below.

The findings relate to:

4.1 Key features of *Reading Together*

4.2 Understandings about reading and learning to read

4.3 Understandings about family factors and children's achievement, and school, family/community partnerships and children's achievement

### 4.1 Key features of *Reading Together*

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<i>Reference: The content, structure, processes and activities of Reading Together are explained in the Workshop Leader's Handbook (2004).</i>	<i>References: The research findings below are selected from the MOE's Families and Communities BES 2003.</i>	
<i>Reading Together</i> is specifically designed to help parents/whānau of diverse ethnic, cultural, language, socio-economic and educational backgrounds to support their children's reading development more effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased achievement is possible even in families with little formal education.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspects of literacy influenced by the family and home environment include print awareness, concepts, and functions; knowledge of narrative structure; literacy as a source of enjoyment; and vocabulary and discourse patterns.</li> </ul>	Snow et al (1998) [26, 79, 102, 116-117, 124-126]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children from low-income backgrounds can make significant academic gains when they are part of an emotionally and academically supportive home environment in which their parents help them with homework, and communicate clear and consistent behavioural limits to them.</li> </ul>	Okpala et al (2001) [119-122]
<b><i>Reading Together</i> helps parents/ whānau to:</b>		
1. Develop key (but not complex) understandings about reading and how children learn to read.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children learn the purposes of literacy in the family setting e.g. to engage in problem-solving activities, or for enjoyment (and are therefore more motivated to persist in their efforts to learn to read).</li> </ul>	Snow et al (1998) [26, 79, 102, 116-117, 124-126]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children from middle-income homes have greater opportunities for informal literacy learning than children of low-income homes.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literacy learning is a social practice to be enjoyed and shared with family and</li> </ul>	Various studies (1991-

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
	friends.	2002) [158-9, 163-4, 171]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parental beliefs and attitudes regarding literacy (reading in particular) influence children's literacy development. The values, attitudes, and expectations held by parents and other caregivers with respect to literacy have a lasting effect on a child's attitude to learning to read because the social and emotional context of early literacy experiences relates directly to children's motivation to learn to read later on.</li> </ul>	Snow et al (1998) [26, 79, 102, 116-117, 124-126]
2. Learn and use carefully selected and appropriate strategies to support their children's reading at home, e.g. how to determine the difficulty/suitability of text materials, engaging in conversations, using 'wait-time'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many parents require guidance on how to help their children at home.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiences with stories, both oral and written are crucial. Storybook reading experiences are considered by many to be the most important aspect of emergent literacy experiences, giving children the structure and syntax of written language as well as demonstrating purpose and function of reading. Children who do not have this background framework upon which to hang the more explicit literacy experiences received in schools can struggle with literacy learning.</li> </ul>	Braunger & Lewis (1998) [66, 132]
3. Help their children improve their understanding of texts, their enjoyment of and engagement in reading, and their confidence and independence as readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where emphasis is placed on accuracy rather than comprehension or interest, many children show poor comprehension and little interest in reading.</li> <li>Working-class and Asian families tend to assume a helping style which mitigates against reading for meaning, including comprehension of the overall meaning of the text.</li> </ul>	Richardson (1994) [127-128]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The amount of voluntary out-of-school book reading that children report is positively related to their achievement levels.</li> </ul>	Bardsley (1991) [125]
4. Gain increased awareness of the nature and effects of constructive support by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>watching and discussing demonstrations, and engaging in activities during the workshops, and then</li> <li>using the strategies when working with their child(ren) at Workshop Two and on a regular basis at home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children from low income homes and homes with low levels of parental education can overcome these factors when they take part in activities and interactions which feed their use and enjoyment of literacy and mathematics, and of words, patterns and other symbols generally.</li> </ul>	Wylie (2001) [53, 66-67]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate verbal interaction between adult and child during story readings supports children's literacy learning, but note that non-mainstream parents can successfully be taught how to interact with books in ways that support successful literacy development.</li> </ul>	Braunger & Lewis (1998) [66, 132]
5. Interact with their children positively and effectively, encouraging, affirming and nurturing them as individuals and as learners, while avoiding negative and threatening forms of interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psycho-sociological resources provided by parents such as parental warmth, involvement, and consistent parental supervision provide children with a sense of security and facilitate their adjustment and achievement.</li> </ul>	Hill & Yeung (2000) [90]

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families have a key function in providing responsive learning contexts which allow children to gradually take more and more initiative in their own learning, work cooperatively on shared tasks with others, and provide responsive feedback.</li> <li>The emotional environment that children experience in the home and wider family is critical. Children who suffer stressful, unpredictable or violent environments are less likely to have high levels of achievement and development.</li> <li>Parental involvement has the potential to have positive or negative impacts.</li> <li>Many opportunities to talk: descriptions and conversations with positive interactions and feedback from those around the child.</li> <li>The frequency and manner of responding to children's questions is an important parental influence on early reading ability. Parents help children to develop oral language which is the basis for later literacy learning.</li> <li>Gains in children's skills are evident when their parents are shown how to become more responsive and 'dialogic' (that is, asking and responding to questions) during shared reading.</li> </ul>	<p>Smith (1998) [66]</p> <p>Tabberer (undated) [135]</p> <p>Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]</p> <p>Braunger &amp; Lewis (1998) [66, 132]</p> <p>Snow et al (1998) [26, 79, 102, 116-117, 124-126]</p>
<p>6. Enhance the educational resources (both physical and psychological) available to them e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>by accessing and selecting (with their children) suitable reading material from their neighbourhood libraries</li> <li>by helping them to develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effective ways of supporting their children's learning on an ongoing basis</li> <li>more confidence in their parenting abilities</li> <li>their understanding of, and ability to support, the work of teachers and the literacy programmes of the school.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The resources available to children, rather than their culture or ethnicity, affect their educational progress.</li> <li>Lower achievement of children in low income families is linked to lower levels of parental education, and fewer experiences and resources of the kind which extend language and mathematics use.</li> <li>There are strong links between family/home resources and children's academic achievement.</li> <li>Resources are linked to socio-economic status.</li> <li>There is strong evidence that Māori on average perform worse because they do not have the resources to succeed.</li> </ul>	<p>Wylie (2001) [53, 66-67]</p> <p>Wylie &amp; Thompson (1998) NZ and Chamberlain, Chamberlain &amp; Walker (2001) [91-92]</p> <p>Chapple, Jefferies &amp; Walker (1997) [54-55]</p>
<p>7. Help themselves and each other by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reflecting on and talking about their experiences of helping their children</li> <li>developing a sense of community and support among the parents/whānau in the group, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and whānau involved in constructive partnerships can benefit.</li> </ul>	<p>Various studies 143 Other studies (1991-2002) [163-164, 171]</p>

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enhancing their own confidence and also reading development (in the case of those who are not competent readers) i.e. by reading easy, relevant and meaningful material with their children in non-threatening contexts.</li> </ul>		
<b>Partnership features of <i>Reading Together</i>:</b>		
<p>1. Competent and sensitive teachers provide the informed and specific guidance which parents seek so that they can help their children effectively with reading at home, and enhance their literacy achievement at school.</p> <p>Note: The concepts underlying this guidance are those of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'scaffolding' i.e. teachers providing just the right amount of informed and appropriate support for parents, who are then able to provide just the right amount and form of support for their children.</li> <li>the 'zone of proximal development' i.e. learning is enhanced when a learner is supported by a more informed and experienced person to engage with an aspect of learning which is just within the learner's reach. <i>Reading Together</i> enables each parent to 'scaffold' or support each of their children within the child's particular 'zone of proximal development' i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>by helping the child find material which is 'just right' for him/her (in terms of difficulty level and interest and background knowledge), and</li> <li>by providing appropriate support for the child as s/he is reading that text.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher leadership plays a major role in the extent to which parents become involved in their children's in-school learning and sustain that involvement.</li> <li>Teachers can take the initiative by 'reaching out' to parents/whānau and establishing partnership relations with families and their communities, to the children's academic and social benefit.</li> <li>Replicating inappropriate teaching approaches which parents experienced as children (which are often all they know) can be unhelpful or even harmful.</li> <li>Virtually all parents want their children to succeed educationally.</li> <li>The overwhelming majority of parents want their child to succeed at school and will do what they can to help bring this about.</li> <li>When parents are given clear guidance about what to do, and how, most parents are keen to help.</li> <li>Programmes to support Māori parenting are dependent on the extent to which the programme is founded on the real needs of Māori parents;</li> <li>The quality and nature of partnership programmes is critical.</li> <li>There is growing recognition that adults involved in school/home partnerships (i.e. those which are focused on learning, including subject-specific tutoring and support) are able to enhance children's academic and social development more effectively if they participate in adult education programmes designed to help them to work constructively with children.</li> <li>Socially responsible and family-responsive literacy programmes should be learning-centred, not learner-centred.</li> <li>Programmes can build on the aspirations and motivation that most parents have for their children's literacy development.</li> </ul>	<p>Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]</p> <p>Merttens (1999) [159]</p> <p>Rokx (1997) [26-28]</p> <p>Walberg (1999) [143]</p> <p>Sanders (2000) [150]</p> <p>Various studies (1991-2002) [158-159, 163-164, 171]</p>
<p>2. <i>Reading Together</i> is designed to add to the repertoire of literacy practices and resources of each participating family, whatever their socio-economic, cultural and language backgrounds i.e. the programme is a strengths-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programmes are much more likely to be effective for those involved when notions of empowerment (rather than a deficit view) consistently inform the content and processes and are guiding practices throughout the programme.</li> <li>Groups that experience the most disproportionate school failure in North America</li> </ul>	<p>Cummins (2001) [157]</p> <p>Cummins (2001) [60-61]</p>

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
based approach and is founded on the belief that all parents can help their children.	and elsewhere have been on the receiving end of a pattern of devaluation of identity for generations, in both schools and society.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The process of partnership building should add to family practices, not undermine them.</li> </ul>	Various studies (1991-2002) [163-164, 171]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Factors contributing to the Māori families' sense of empowerment in educational settings include educators valuing the whānau concept and establishing trusting relationships with them.</li> </ul>	Shivnan (1999) [151]
<p>3. <i>Reading Together</i> is also designed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as an interactive informal workshop programme for small groups (no more than 15 parents, preferably 10 – 12) i.e. it eschews large meetings, electronic presentations and formal settings</li> <li>to be manageable and low-cost for teachers</li> <li>to be manageable, non-threatening and no-cost for parents/whānau.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programmes and services provided by school and community need to be family-friendly, i.e. must take into account the needs and realities of family life, be feasible to conduct, and equitable toward all families.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]
<p>4. The processes of <i>Reading Together</i> enhance children's social and academic development by creating (over time) genuine, collaborative and non-threatening relationships and partnerships between parents and children, parents and teachers, and parents, teachers and librarians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development of a partnership is a process, not a single event.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001)[ 145, 160-161]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing commitment by respected facilitators is crucial to supporting Māori whānau.</li> </ul>	Livingstone, 2002 NZ [167-169]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The relationship teachers have with parents is important - children whose teachers felt they had a very good or excellent relationship with their parents do best.</li> </ul>	Wylie (2001) [135]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal contact is a key to making educators/schools more approachable for Māori whānau.</li> </ul>	McKinley (2000) [161-162]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Factors within school processes and structures are contributing to difficulties which Māori children experience.</li> </ul>	Glynn (1997) [137]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barriers to positive home/school relationships and parental engagement for Māori include prior and current experiences e.g. past schooling experiences, unemployment and single parenting.</li> </ul>	Bishop & Berryman (2002) NZ [58]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barriers for Māori include mainstream dominance, unequal power relationships in the education system and lack of involvement in decision making.</li> </ul>	Moewaka Barnes (2001) [58-59]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effectiveness of the programme is determined by the extent to which it exemplifies communication processes that work for Māori and enables informed choices for Māori parents, rather than imposed solutions.</li> </ul>	Rokx (1997) [26-28]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher-parent report evenings held in the school setting can be highly problematic e.g. all parties can feel defensive at times, and parents can feel powerless, impotent,</li> </ul>	Walker (1998) [152]	

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
	frustrated and/or deeply distressed.	
<p>5. The processes and resources of the programme also help to develop the independence and self-reliance of all participants; workshop leaders, parents/whānau, and children i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competent workshop leaders become independent of the <i>Reading Together</i> developer</li> <li>• parents/whānau are able to provide independent and effective support for their children, including accessing and selecting suitable text materials</li> <li>• children become more independent readers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The real strength of family literacy programmes is their ability to foster autonomy and self-reliance within families, schools and communities, i.e. their focus on the empowerment of all those involved.</li> <li>• Effective community education involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ concern with capacity of individuals to be self-directing</li> <li>○ helping individuals gain more control of their lives</li> <li>○ raising self-esteem and a sense of self-fulfilment</li> <li>○ increasing parents' knowledge and understanding of their children.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community participation and ownership is important for the success of interventions for Māori.</li> </ul>	<p>Various studies (1998-9) [158-159]</p> <p>Whalley (2001) [167-167]</p> <p>Moewaka Barnes &amp; Barrett-Ohia (2001) [164-165]</p>
<p>6. The processes (including setting up) and activities of <i>Reading Together</i> are firmly based on principles of respect, trust, mutual understanding and collaboration. Value judgments are avoided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the heart of partnerships is a feeling of caring which involves mutual trust and respect.</li> <li>• It is essential that parents and children are shown respect as fellow human beings and that interactions with them reflect this respect.</li> <li>• Viewing teachers as professionals and parents as non-professionals is unhelpful. It does not credit parents with the unique and specialist knowledge and understandings they have of their own children.</li> <li>• Māori parents and their children are particularly sensitive to the relationship they have with their teachers, and this relationship is pivotal to children engaging in school activities and therefore to their success.</li> </ul>	<p>Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]</p> <p>Various studies (1991-2002) [163-164, 171]</p>
<p>7. The processes, workshop activities and experiences of <i>Reading Together</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are non-threatening, supportive, meaningful and enjoyable for all participants, including children (who are actively involved in Workshop Two), e.g. they incorporate humour such as sharing jokes and riddles</li> <li>• are carefully structured, sequential and incremental, each workshop building on the understandings, experiences and strategies of the previous one</li> <li>• include demonstrations, modelling, discussions and sharing experiences</li> <li>• develop a sense of sharing and community among all participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful programmes promote group cohesion among parents.</li> <li>• Māori have preferred (as a teaching and learning technique) an emphasis on learners looking, listening and imitating, particularly in the early stage of learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Various studies (1991-2002) [158-159]</p> <p>Hohepa et al (1992) [133]</p>

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<p>8. Workshop leaders and classroom teachers are encouraged and supported to observe and record:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing responses and feedback from parents, children, other teachers</li> <li>changes in children’s attitudes, confidence, behaviour, understanding of texts, reading levels and independence in reading i.e. in a range of authentic contexts and over time</li> <li>changes in relationships</li> <li>other feedback e.g. from librarians</li> <li>their own reflections on what they learn.</li> </ul> <p>None of the participants (teacher/workshop leader, parent or child) is subjected to any form of high stakes observation, monitoring, evaluation and/or assessment at any stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in communities with low employment, low incomes, or who have minority cultural and language status tend to engage in literacy and language activities that are different from mainstream children</li> <li>The knowledge of these children may not be well represented in tests of conventional literacy practices, especially at the beginning of schooling.</li> <li>Identification of a gap between the achievement of these children and that of their more ‘mainstream’ peers is problematic; the broad description of the gap can mask important aspects of positive literacy development and achievement of children in minority groups.</li> </ul>	<p>McNaughton (1999) NZ and Snow et al (1998) US [126]</p>
<p><b>Professional development of teachers</b></p>		
<p>1. The implementation of <i>Reading Together</i> in a school enhances the professional development of teachers involved, e.g. by helping them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gain a deeper awareness and specific knowledge of the family literacy practices and competencies that individual children from diverse backgrounds bring to school</li> <li>reflect critically on any deficit views they may hold about the children and families in their school communities</li> <li>clarify (i) what it is that really matters in ‘teaching’ literacy and (ii) what forms of support actually make a positive difference for children when they are reading with an adult i.e. by considering the content of <i>Reading Together</i> and particularly the ‘ways of helping at home’ which are explored throughout the programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers can learn as much from families as families from teachers, e.g. teachers can gain a deeper awareness of children’s experiences and competencies.</li> <li>Educators who work effectively with parents and avoid making judgments about them, learn a great deal from listening to them and gain a better understanding of the learning opportunities in the home.</li> <li>New Zealand teachers, on the whole: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>know less about the expertise in literacy and language of children from diverse cultural and language backgrounds than those from mainstream backgrounds</li> <li>are less able to identify non-mainstream children’s relevant knowledge and incorporate that knowledge into text reading and writing.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Four and five year-old Māori, Pakeha and Samoan children involved in a range of family writing activities before they came to school could write some part or all of their names (guidance for writing some letters of the alphabet had occurred in all families).</li> <li>However, the teachers of these children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>believed that they knew very little about literacy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Various studies (1991-2002) [158-159, 163-164, 171]</p> <p>Whalley (2001) [167-7]</p> <p>McNaughton (2002) [129]</p> <p>Goodridge (1995) [129]</p>

Key features of <i>Reading Together</i>	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise the importance and benefits of genuine, respectful and learning-centred ‘partnerships’</li> </ul> <p>2. Workshop leaders and those directly involved in the workshops gain the most, professionally, from their involvement. This is true even of very experienced and highly competent teachers and principals who consider they know their families well.</p> <p>3. Teachers who are not directly involved can also benefit i.e. as a result of the introduction to the programme during a staff meeting, through ongoing discussions about the workshops as they proceed, and through observing changes in any of their children whose parents may be involved in the programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ did not know about the topics and the family writing activities that were familiar to the children</li> <li>○ did not know, and could not identify, the nascent knowledge that the children had</li> <li>○ took few opportunities to identify the children's existing knowledge of letters and sounds and incorporate this into activities.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deficit assumptions about families are a barrier to effective partnerships – an alternative ‘strengths’ model is required.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cultural, linguistic, imaginative and intellectual resources children bring to school from their communities must be acknowledged.</li> <li>• For dominated minorities, the extent to which children’s language and culture are incorporated into the school programme constitutes a significant predictor of academic success.</li> </ul>	Cummins (2001) – US. [60-61]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children who are traditionally poor achievers in school nevertheless bring with them complex alternative learning and literacy experiences and knowledge that have not traditionally been accessed by educators to support in-school learning.</li> </ul>	Hull & Schultz (2001) [17]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More complexity is needed in the translation of Māori community values into educational practice.</li> </ul>	Hohepa, McNaughton and Jenkins (1996) [154]

## 4.2 Understandings about reading and learning to read

Understandings about reading and learning to read	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<i>Understandings underpinning the development of Reading Together</i>	<i>References: The research findings below are selected from the MOE's Families and Communities BES 2003.</i>	
<p>The understandings about reading and learning to read on which <i>Reading Together</i> is based are summarised briefly below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading is a construction of meaning from written (and other visual forms of) text. It is an active, cognitive, and affective process.</li> <li>• Background knowledge and prior experience are critical to the reading process.</li> <li>• Social interaction is essential in learning to read.</li> <li>• Reading involves complex thinking.</li> <li>• Environments rich in literacy experiences, resources and models facilitate reading development.</li> <li>• Engagement in the reading task is a key to successfully learning to read.</li> <li>• Children's understandings of print are not the same as adults' understandings.</li> <li>• Children develop phonemic awareness and knowledge of phonics through a variety of literacy opportunities, models and demonstrations.</li> <li>• Children learn successful reading strategies in the context of 'real reading'.</li> <li>• Children need the opportunity to read, read, read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy is deeply embedded in processes of family life and is mediated through interpersonal interaction with children through the provision of literacy materials in the home and a positive emotional and motivational climate.</li> <li>• Children who have had a wide variety of language experiences - in both oral and written modes - fare better as they begin to learn within school settings.</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The processes by which mainstream, 'school-oriented' parents and their children interact in the pre-school years give children 'ways of taking' from books (e.g. how to take meaning from books, and also how to talk about it) which are very similar to those of schools and other institutions, but in other communities the school ways may be in conflict with home-taught ways.</li> <li>• By the time they enter school, these mainstream children have had continuous experience as information-givers; they have learned how to perform in those interactions which surround literate activities throughout school.</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early literacy development encapsulates the complexity of relationship between language, reading and the social and cultural contexts of the home and community i.e. the act of becoming literate varies according to the particular social and cultural contexts within which the young child is operating.</li> <li>• Home environment plays a significant role in the development of language ability in young children from low-income families.</li> <li>• Families from low-income backgrounds tend to engage in fewer literacy related activities such as joint reading, library visiting, the learning of words and letters, and writing - all of which are important for the development of literacy related skills, the motivation to learn to read, and the children's future success in schooling.</li> </ul>	<p>Braunger &amp; Lewis (1998) [66, 132]</p> <hr/> <p>Heath (1982) [128-129]</p> <hr/> <p>Adams et al (2000) [93-94, 123-126, 128]</p>

### 4.3 Understandings about family factors and partnerships

Understandings about family factors and partnerships	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<i>Understandings underpinning the development of Reading Together</i>	<i>References: The research findings below are selected from the MOE's Families and Communities BES 2003.</i>	
<p><b>Family Factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents care about their children's development and want to help them, especially with reading.</li> <li>• Parents need and appreciate specific guidance to help their children with reading in positive and effective ways.</li> <li>• Many parents try to help their children with reading at home but the help provided frequently has negative rather than positive effects (especially when children are struggling with reading).</li> <li>• Parents need to be <b>shown</b> how to help at home in ways which are practical and manageable for them (not simply told how to help).</li> <li>• Parents/whānau need help to access and develop the resources required to support children's learning effectively.</li> <li>• Helping parents to help their children with reading at home requires sensitive support, over time, from competent and experienced teachers.</li> <li>• Programmes, workshops, activities and suggestions for helping at home must be non-threatening and manageable for families/whānau and the teachers involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most parents place a high value on their children's learning/education, including lowest income and least educated parents.</li> <li>• The role of whānau is highly significant.</li> <li>• Parents can create a 'press for achievement' e.g. by expressing their expectations for achievement by their children, providing reading instruction, and responding to the children's reading initiations and interest.</li> <li>• Families need a range of specific resources to create an effective and rich home literacy environment i.e. they need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ relevant economic resources (to buy books, computers and other educational materials) and cultural resources</li> <li>○ to possess quite specific educational resources, knowledge and practices</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Parental qualifications, educational backgrounds, family class location and parental knowledge of literacy learning all work together, or against, families being able to provide effective environments where early literacy development can occur.</li> <li>• Book ownership, home language use, general print exposure, and home literacy activities are significant in promoting beginning reading achievement in low-income home environments. Without books in the home, it is more difficult for young children to become interested in early childhood literacy activities and familiar with the conventions of print.</li> <li>• Māori children doing well at school come from stable home environments. They are strongly supported by their whānau who value education and take an active interest in their children's education.</li> </ul>	<p>Lythe (1997) [148]</p> <p>Hohepa, McNaughton &amp; Jenkins (1996) [154]</p> <p>Snow et al (1998) [26, 79, 102, 116-117, 124-126]</p> <p>Adams et al (2000) [93-94, 123-126, 128]</p> <p>Mikaere &amp; Loane (2001) [135]</p>
<p><b>Partnerships:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership programmes should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ focus on helping children to learn in a specific area e.g. reading</li> <li>○ be developed carefully and sensitively</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The home environment powerfully influences what children and young people learn within and outside school – it is more powerful than parents' income and education in influencing children's learning during early childhood and schooling years.</li> <li>• Cooperative efforts by parents and educators to improve home conditions</li> </ul>	<p>Walberg (1999) [143]</p>

Understandings about family factors and partnerships	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ have a sound educational and research base</li> <li>○ be low cost (in terms of money and time)</li> <li>○ be manageable and avoid unnecessary complexity</li> <li>○ be based on small groups not mass meetings.</li> <li>● The processes and content of family literacy partnership programmes must enable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ parents to support their children more effectively and to continue to do so independently after the programme ends (which includes accessing resources)</li> <li>○ children to become more competent, enthusiastic and independent readers</li> <li>○ teachers to support parents and children in ways which are manageable, effective and beneficial for all participants</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Processes within partnership programmes must be supportive and based on genuine respect, trust, equality, collaboration and personal involvement/commitment.</li> <li>● Partnerships can be initiated by thoughtful and competent teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● can have strong, beneficial effects on learning.</li> <li>● Poorly designed/inappropriate programmes that are not responsive to families can be ineffective or counterproductive.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● International evidence demonstrates that simple interventions can have powerful effects.</li> <li>● ‘Dramatic’ changes in children’s academic progress can be realised when educators take the initiative to change an ‘exclusionary pattern to one of collaboration’.</li> <li>● When educators involve parents from minority groups as partners in their children’s education, parents feel empowered and this communicates itself to children, with positive academic results.</li> <li>● Assessment can play a pernicious role in legitimising deficit views and disabling children from minority groups. It has been used to locate the ‘problem’ within the minority children and thereby support a deficit model which in turn can deny children their culture.</li> <li>● Curriculum and teaching must focus on empowerment, rather than the more typical initiatives that focus on remediation of presumed child deficits (and monitoring compliance of these initiatives through top-down, mandated, high stakes standardised tests).</li> </ul>	Cummins (2001) [60-61, 157]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● When educators draw upon the funds of knowledge and resources in communities not historically seen as important for effective teaching, there have been dramatic and systemic lifts in achievement persisting to tertiary level for groups of children who previously achieved poorly in mainstream education.</li> </ul>	Gallego, Cole & the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (2001) & Moreno (2002) [17]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Because family and school have overlapping spheres of influence on children’s development and learning, an <u>integrated</u> theory of family-school relations is required.</li> </ul>	Epstein (2001) [145, 160-161]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is growing recognition that adults involved in school/home partnerships (i.e. those which are focused on learning, including subject-specific tutoring and support) are able to enhance children’s academic and social development more effectively if they participate in adult education programmes designed to help them to work constructively with children.</li> </ul>	Sanders (2000) [150]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The overwhelming majority of parents want their child to succeed at school and will do what they can to help bring this about.</li> <li>● When parents are given clear guidance about what to do, and how, most</li> </ul>	Merttens (1999) [159]

Understandings about family factors and partnerships	Relevant research findings	Source & [BES page]
	parents are keen to help.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective centre/school-home partnerships can enhance children’s learning in both home and centre/school settings and can have substantial positive impacts on children, compared to traditional institutionally-based educational interventions.</li> <li>• Partnership benefits can enhance the well-being, behaviour and achievement of children and young people and can also persist into adult life and civic participation.</li> <li>• Parents across ethnic groups are often able to help their children make significant achievement gains despite experiencing very adverse economic conditions themselves.</li> <li>• A holistic perspective in Māoridom does not treat home and school as separate. Māori parents understand that they must continue their children’s learning at home.</li> </ul>	Various studies 143 Other studies (1991-2002) [163-164, 171]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents welcomed the family literacy project and the children who read to their parents made significantly greater progress in reading than those who did not engage in this type of literacy sharing.</li> <li>• Small-group instruction in reading, given by a highly competent specialist, did not produce improvements comparable to those obtained from the collaboration with parents.</li> </ul>	Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison (1982) cited in Cummins (2001) [157-158]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When collaborative home and school strategies were used the children (all in low decile schools) made substantial and positive reading and writing gains which were greater than those of children who received literacy teaching only at school.</li> </ul>	Glynn et al (2000) [162]
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater whānau and community participation is important in addressing the range of disparities for Māori in education.</li> <li>• The Māori parent community has high aspirations for the future of their children.</li> </ul>	Moewaka Barnes (2001) [58-59]

## 5. Key factors in the self-sustaining nature of *Reading Together*

*Reading Together* has been self-sustaining, as a non-funded voluntary programme since 1982. The factors which contribute to the self-generating and self-sustaining nature of *Reading Together* are listed below. They have been identified from a range of sources, including research reports on *Reading Together* and data from questionnaires completed by parents and teachers, observations by participants, reflections recorded by workshop leaders. The table below also links these factors to three significant documents which are particularly relevant to the self-sustaining nature of *Reading Together*:

Key factors in the self-sustaining nature of <i>Reading Together</i>	Ka Hikitia, Coburn (2003), Hargreaves et al (2007)	Source
<i>References: Biddulph 1983, Biddulph and Tuck (1993), Biddulph (1993), Biddulph &amp; Allott (2006), Horgan, Franich and Wards (2007), Tuck, Horgan, Franich and Wards (2007), Horgan (2008) see also <a href="http://www.readingtogether.net.nz">www.readingtogether.net.nz</a></i>	<i>References: Ministry of Education (2009) Ka Hikitia Coburn, C. (2003) Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change; Hargreaves, A., Halasz, G. and Pont, B. (2007) School leadership for systemic improvement in Finland.</i>	
<p><b><i>Reading Together</i> is self-sustaining because:</b> It is effective and rewarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and parents see improvements in children’s reading, confidence, attitudes and independence.</li> <li>• They also see relationships improve (between parents and children, parents and teachers).</li> <li>• The programme works across a range of ethnicities; socio-economic, literacy and age levels; and contexts (e.g. whānau helping at home, volunteers helping at school).</li> <li>• It is manageable, non-threatening, enjoyable, satisfying and empowers all participants.</li> <li>• Workshop Leaders are appreciative of the gratitude of parents and also learn more about the families and their lives.</li> </ul> <p>It develops genuinely collaborative relationships which assist the work of teachers and schools, as well as supporting and empowering whānau. These relationships are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developed between teachers, parents/whānau, children, librarians and schools</li> <li>• founded on trust, respect and recognition of the expertise and strengths of parents,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An educational partnership model based on collaboration is required to improve learning and enable Māori potential to be realised</li> <li>• The engagement of whānau in the teaching and learning of their children has a powerful influence over their educational achievement</li> <li>• A recognition of each other’s strengths provides a relationship of reciprocity that generates a high level of trust</li> </ul>	Ka Hikitia (2009)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with communities are essential</li> <li>• Collaborative styles and strategies are more suited to producing higher level learning</li> <li>• Co-construction is a vital relationship model for effective engagement</li> <li>• High trust educational systems produce higher standards</li> </ul>	Hargreaves et al. (2007)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal ownership occurs when teachers take on the responsibility to enact and sustain an educational innovation in ways that make a difference for children</li> </ul>	Coburn (2003)

Key factors in the self-sustaining nature of <i>Reading Together</i>	Ka Hikitia, Coburn (2003), Hargreaves et al (2007)	Source
<p>children and teachers.</p> <p>It is implemented voluntarily by self-selected workshop leaders who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the expertise and sensitivity required</li> <li>• Understand the importance of family influences on children’s well-being and achievement</li> <li>• Are committed to supporting children and families</li> <li>• Understand that informed parents will support children more effectively and will also support (rather than undermine) the work of the school</li> <li>• Value <i>Reading Together’s</i> effectiveness, research base and long history and become committed to its ongoing implementation in their schools.</li> <li>• Value the fact that the programme is user-friendly, respects their professionalism and expertise, and avoid high stakes assessment and evaluation.</li> </ul> <p>The <i>Reading Together</i> developer has provided ongoing and, until 2005, unpaid support i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• through seminars, courses, publications, personal contact</li> <li>• by providing detailed user-friendly resource materials (which are designed to ensure the integrity of the programme) and a website.</li> </ul> <p>Senior education leaders have provided ongoing (and unpaid) support e.g. by contributing to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seminars and workshop for others</li> <li>• research studies and journal articles</li> <li>• professional networks, including providing direct support and encouragement for other teachers</li> <li>• initiating <i>Reading Together</i> seminars and projects in their areas</li> </ul> <p>Community librarians throughout New Zealand have supported <i>Reading Together</i> since 1982 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participating in the workshops and supporting workshop leaders</li> <li>• helping parents/whānau and children when they visit their local library</li> <li>• collaborating with workshop leaders to ensure that suitable materials (e.g. high interest material for struggling or disinterested readers) are readily available and easily accessible for whānau and children.</li> <li>• attending seminars (and initiating seminars in some regions).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep educational change goes beyond surface structures and procedures.</li> <li>• The more that knowledge of and guidance in implementing an educational innovation can be built into the innovation via greater elaboration or scripting the less may be the need for investing in professional development.</li> <li>• Change is better able to be sustained when there is knowledgeable and supportive school leadership</li> </ul>	

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