

WELLBEING EFFECTS FROM FAMILY LITERACY EDUCATION: AN ECOLOGICAL STUDY

Jane Furness^{*}, Neville Robertson^{*}, Judy Hunter^{*},
Darrin Hodgetts^{**}, and Linda Waimarie Nikora^{*}

This paper describes a study that used community psychology theories to investigate family-focused literacy education programmes, evaluations of which usually focus solely on skills gains and their economic advantage. Specifically, the study drew on an ecological systems-based, culturally adaptive framework for personal, relational and collective wellbeing bringing much-needed new thinking to how family-focused adult literacy education might be theorised and practiced. The study traced the experiences of 19 adult participants in four family-focused literacy programmes in different communities in New Zealand over 18 months. Participant accounts from 79 key informant interviews, 12 classroom observations and programme documentation were scrutinized using latent theoretical thematic analysis which drew on broad perspectives of literacy, ecological systems theory, network theory and integrative theories of wellbeing. The study found that the programmes shared common principles and practices that prioritised holistic wellbeing whilst valuing literacy enhancement. It showed that participants experienced positive literacy, social and wellbeing-related outcomes. Programme effects were found to be interconnected and to flow on to other parts of participants' lives and to their families and communities. We demonstrate community psychology's critical contribution to a fuller understanding of family-focused literacy education.

Keywords: Ecological theory, community psychology, wellbeing, literacy, Māori, Pacific peoples

1. Introduction

Literacy abilities tend to be measured as particular kinds of skills residing in people's heads (Gee, 2008). Since 1996, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

^{*} University of Waikato, New Zealand ✉

^{**} Massey University, USA

countries have used a common, skills-based measure to identify levels of literacy ability in adults based on the skills deemed necessary for participation in a knowledge-based economy and society (OECD, 2016). This measure is undertaken internationally each decade. Some OECD nations have also developed related assessments for use at the individual and programme level (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2007). These different level approaches to monitoring literacy skills in the adult population are in keeping with dominant Western views of what literacy is: skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening related to the essay text form of literacy, a formal, discursive, rule-based form, often in the English language (Graff & Duffy, 2008). Measurement of this kind makes sense where literacy is viewed in this narrow, skills-focused way.

There is, however, a very strong counter view of what literacy is. In a social practice view, traditional essay text skills are important, but other sets of skills are as well. One example of another important literacy is the ability to read the geography of tribal lands for indigenous Māori in New Zealand (The Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001). In particular, the real importance of literacy from a social practice perspective lies in the way people interact with text and the meaning this interaction has for them. There are, therefore, many literacies and many meanings of literacy, rather than a singular meaning as in the skills-oriented view. This means, too, that other ways of measuring people's literacy abilities are needed, as measuring gains in skills in the dominant literacy captures only part of what literacy is and what it means for people.

This paper takes a social practice view of what literacy is and argues that: (1) a different and broader way of measuring effects of participation in literacy education programmes, beyond the dominant essay text skills, is needed; (2) the focus should be on measuring what is important to people in their everyday lives whilst also understanding literacy's contribution; (3) measuring broad outcomes of literacy programmes beyond literacy skills alone is complex, but not impossible because outcomes are tangible. Community psychology values and principles provided a lens through which to view literacy programmes and their outcomes, and a framework for describing what was found, that could tap into a wider definition of literacy, the broader effects of participation in literacy programmes and how these occurred. A case study approach over time helped achieve depth of understanding of the complexities involved in programme practices and their effects that allowed patterns and trajectories in outcomes to be seen.

In this paper, we first explain the context for the study, the ecological systems-based social and wellbeing theories used in the study and the research method. We then present the key principles and practices that reflected programme staff beliefs and values about literacy and about people, followed by an overview of the effects and the effects process. We present one participant's experiences of the programme, and draw conclusions about the value of a broad view of literacy and the contribution of community psychology to understanding how the benefits of family literacy programmes radiate out from participants to family and community.

2. Family-focused adult literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand

In first world nations such as New Zealand much effort has been devoted to concerns related to a perceived reduction in literacy levels among their adult populations (Graff & Duffy, 2008). Much of the debate dominating public discourse assumes an overly narrow view of literacy as pertaining to the ability to read. Such a narrow view is not adopted in this article. Literacy, more

broadly defined, refers to the many ways people communicate and make sense of the world. There are many text forms and meanings of literacy – many *literacies*. Text forms include alphabetic text, oral presentation, performance, art and graphics, and they may be combined as in, for example, computer technology or kapa haka (Māori song and dance). Literacy involves skills required to use text forms (such as strategies to decipher a bus timetable). Further, it involves the meaningful use of these skills in particular social and relational contexts (identifying which bus to catch to get to the market or negotiating the morning household routine so the bus to work is not missed). When literacy is defined broadly in this way, it is clear that everyone has some literacy and literacy is always purposeful. It can be thought of as a social practice essential for people's participation in family, community and society.

Programmes aimed at improving literacy abilities across populations reflect choices concerning what kinds of literacy are needed or wanted, who this literacy is for and how people, or indeed the nation as a whole, will benefit. While there are many options, programmes are often mired in the dominant, narrow, Western perspectives of literacy and its purposes, often focusing on skills for further, higher level education or paid employment. These literacies are important for many people but other literacies are also important in daily family and community life.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, family-focused adult literacy programmes form part of a response to concerns by literacy educators, Māori, Pacific and other communities, and government about low levels of ability among adults in the kinds of literacies that could enable increased participation in their family and community lives and society. Developed by the OECD, the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) showed about 1 million New Zealand adults had literacy levels below those thought necessary to 'function well' in a modern knowledge-based economy and society (Ministry of Education, 2001; Walker, Udy, & Pole, 1997). These results sparked a decade of policy-led infrastructural development set out initially in *More than words: Kei tua atu i te kupu: The New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2001) (the Adult Literacy Strategy) and the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002/07* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The approach is built on a view of literacy as comprising a particular set of skills thought essential for economic and social progress (Graff & Duffy, 2008) and seen as 'residing in people's heads' (Gee, 2008). It focuses on the English language literacy and numeracy which predominates in our major societal institutions (such as schools and health services). Subsequent OECD assessments have shown some improvement in levels overall but no significant reduction in the *number* of people performing poorly on these limited measures (Satherley, Lawes, & Sok, 2008; Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2016). The singular, individualistic, skills-based view of literacy stands in contrast to that presented in our first paragraph in this section where literacy is described as a multiple phenomenon and as social practice.

From the outset, many Māori educators did not consider that the Adult Literacy Strategy reflected a Māori perspective of what literacy is and what its purposes are, putting forward a different way of thinking about literacy in *Te kāwai ora: Reading the world, reading the word, being the world* (Te Kāwai Ora) (Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001). Te Kāwai Ora set out a meaning of literacy that embodied and clarified differing Māori and Pākehā (European New Zealanders) worldviews and which presumed the rights and obligations established by the Treaty of Waitangi – signed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840 – which guaranteed Māori protection of their assets as the new nation of New Zealand was formed. As well as

providing a basis on which literacy work for all New Zealanders might be carried out, the report defined literacy in specifically Māori terms.

For Māori, literacy includes both English and Māori languages (bi-literacy). It includes oral linguistic traditions, performance and text, and the ability to “read” tribally significant land features, objects and their locations. For Māori, the purposes of literacy are to enable Māori to live as Māori and as global citizens. Living as Māori involves seeing oneself as connected to all things and not above them (Durie, 1997). Recent adult literacy policy documents articulate, more strongly than in the past, a commitment to improving Māori and Pacific people’s literacy levels through approaches that will attract and retain them and ensure their success (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010). However, there is little evidence of collaboration to achieve this. Neither does current policy address the fundamental differences between Māori and government in meanings and purposes attached to literacy and ways of being ‘literate’.

Although poorly supported in government policy and funding, family approaches in adult literacy are highly valued by practitioners, adult learners and their families and some government officials (Benseman & Sutton, 2005; Furness, 2009; 2012; May, Hill, & Donaghy, 2004). Research conducted by the first author on one pilot cluster of a project carried out by Literacy Aotearoa confirmed the approach was valued by participants and by the schools and early childhood education centres involved as partners (Furness, 2013). Internationally, studies have shown mixed but generally positive effects (Brooks, Pahl, Pollard, & Rees, 2008). At the same time many educationists have noted that more needs to be known including the meaning of programmes to participants (cf. Hannon, 2000). Reder’s (2012) work in the US on measuring changes in literacy practices has contributed to understanding the wider effects of literacy. The few evaluations of family-focused programmes in New Zealand have found, in addition to enhanced literacy skills, improved ‘confidence’ (Benseman & Sutton, 2005) and ‘ripple’ (‘flow-on’) effects to other aspects of participants’ lives and to other people in their social networks (Benseman & Sutton, 2005; May et al., 2004). The recently trialled wellbeing-focused outcomes framework for Māori adult literacy learners (Hutchings, Yates, Isaacs, Whatman, & Bright, 2013) reflects the strong desire by Māori to be able to identify, record and give recognition to the valued outcomes of these programmes beyond the limited range of literacy skills that can now be captured systematically. These developments echo acknowledgement of the limits of measuring changes in a narrow set of literacy skills alone.

The need to think about family-focused adult literacy programmes in ways which could accommodate breadth and inclusivity led us to drawing on an integrative notion of wellbeing as a new way of thinking about family literacy programmes. It was hoped that a wellbeing-focused framework or frameworks could transcend the dichotomies in adult and family literacy theory and lead to programmes that were relevant and useful to people in their daily family and community life. This would require programmes to respect the diversity of families, understand the structural difficulties they face and recognise the strengths and abilities of family members. Applying systems-based social and wellbeing theories enabled this critical shift.

3. The study in brief

Drawing on culturally appropriate methodologies (Mutch, 2005; Powick, 2002) the study traced the experiences of nineteen adult participants in four family-focused adult literacy

programmes located in various communities in New Zealand. The research was undertaken within a social constructionist paradigm; the study findings are an interpretation of the phenomenon investigated (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In questioning the often taken-for-granted meanings of ‘family’, ‘family literacy’ and ‘family literacy programmes’, the approach was a critical one.

The programmes involved varied combinations of individual tuition in the dominant literacy, computer skills, group work on social interaction and communication, knowledge of how schools work, driver licenses, parenting information and skills, literacy related to personal interests and aspirations, critical thinking, *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and *tikanga Māori* (customary system of values and practices). Programmes also included various forms of social support including emotional support and practical help (often shared and/or reciprocated among the participants), counselling and referral to agencies. Located in a strongly Pacific community, the 128-hour Benley Whānau Literacy Programme built adult literacy learning around supporting children’s school learning. Located in a mainly Māori community, the *Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka* (HPP) children’s storybook reading oral language development programme (Atvars, Stock, & Pinfold, 1999) formed the basis of an adult literacy programme called the HPP-based Whānau Literacy Programme. The adults learned to use HPP, which ran in ten-week blocks, with the children in the local school. The adults were employed as teacher aides doing a variety of jobs of which ‘reading tutor’ was one. The Ormond Whānau Literacy Programme and the Preston Family Literacy Programme, located in mixed communities with a large Māori and large Tongan group respectively, focused on individual needs or goals in the context of the adult’s circumstances and aspirations. This was usually parenting and home management in the Ormond programme. Participants could stay in these programmes for as long as they wished. All programme names are pseudonyms. Eight participants were Māori, seven were from Pacific Islands (Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands), three were *Pākehā* (European New Zealanders) and one was Indian. Aged from 19-65 years, all but one were women. Most were raising or supporting the education of children or grandchildren; one lived with her adult son and one was expecting her first child.

The research involved fifty-four days of site visits over 18 months during which seventy-nine repeated conversational interviews were conducted with the adult participants, programme staff and others who knew the participants well. Twelve participant observations of programme sessions took place and programme documentation was reviewed. All data was analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data collection and analysis focused on changes in participants’ lives that were linked to programme participation and how these ‘flowed on’ to their families and communities. Literacy and social changes, their links to wellbeing and how these links occurred were explored. The overarching question was: “What is the contribution of adults’ participation in family literacy programmes to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities?” Each participant was a ‘case’ within a programme whose experiences were documented through multiple, cross-party interviews and analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This approach enabled a rich picture of the experiences of participants, their families and communities, essential to make sense of the complex nuances of the programme effects.

4. Systems-based social and wellbeing theories

In our analysis, we drew on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Marks, Murray, Evans, & Willig, 2000), Network Theory (Gottlieb, 1981; Stansfield, 1999), holistic integrative theories of wellbeing (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) and Māori ways of theorising wellbeing (Durie, 1998). Ecological approaches, the common thread in these theories, are relevant in understanding social life generally and in understanding wellbeing specifically. They also traverse both education and community psychology scholarship. For instance, community and applied social psychologists alike will be familiar with the notion that human development is best understood in reference to structural ecosystems (Drewery & Bird, 2004; Marks et al, 2000). Classically, Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains this process as:

the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which these settings are embedded (p. 13).

Community psychologists Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005, p. 71) describe the ‘ecological metaphor’ simply as “the interaction between individuals and the multiple social systems in which they are embedded”. The metaphor conceptualizes individuals, groups and communities as occupying niches within an ever-changing ecosystem in which the component parts are interdependent. Although for analytic purposes the entities of individuals, groups and communities are distinguished, this approach does not accept the model of the autonomous individual or lonely thinker endemic in Anglo-American psychology. People, groups and contexts are all inseparable parts of an integrated whole. Changes in one part or level of the system will almost inevitably result in changes in other parts. For example, macro-economic changes half a world away may force the closure of a particular enterprise, resulting in massive dislocation in a local community and give rise to the need for that community to adapt to the new conditions (for example, by finding new ways of utilising traditional skills to create new economic endeavours). Relatively new in Western psychology, ecological frameworks are commonplace for Māori and other indigenous communities for whom they have been fundamental for many thousands of years. Ecological theories underpin a holistic, integrative way of thinking about wellbeing. For community psychologists the ecological metaphor constitutes the key paradigm in wellbeing and relational notions of health (Angelique & Culley, 2007). Relatedly, Network Theory is also helpful in explaining how the connections between people set up the possibility of social support, social capital, social inclusion and social cohesion (Furness, 2012).

The present research drew from Nelson and Prilleltensky’s (2005) Ecological Systems-based model of personal, relational and collective wellbeing as its overarching wellbeing framework. Self-determination, caring and compassion, and health are needed for personal wellbeing. Respect for diversity and participation and collaboration are needed for relational wellbeing. Support for community structures, and social justice and accountability are necessary for collective wellbeing (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). All parts of the ecosystem – the individual, relationships and the collective structures in which people are enmeshed and live their lives – need to be in a state of wellbeing for the overall health of the person to be supported. For example, in the scenario above individuals are unlikely to lead fully healthy lives unless the economic challenges are successfully met at a community level, which will in turn likely

enhance relational wellness (for example, removing the stress that unemployment can have on family relationships).

As a holistic, integrative framework the ecological approach is consistent with certain culturally based perspectives on wellbeing, including Māori and Pacific perspectives. Such perspectives acknowledge the link between personhood and the extended family networks in which the individual is embedded (for example, *whānau* [Māori] and *aiga* [Samoan]). These links extend to genealogical connections (*whakapapa* in the case of Māori) and relationships with ancestral lands (*whenua*) and significant waterways (*awa*). Moreover, health is seen as encompassing not only the physical (*tinana*) but also the spiritual (*wairua*), the mind (*hinengaro*) and emotions (*whatumanawa*) (Durie, 1998; Pere, 1991; Pulotu-Endermann, 2001). Indeed, Mason Durie (1998, p. 71) describes Māori health as “an interrelated phenomenon rather than an intrapersonal one” in which “poor health is typically regarded as a breakdown in harmony between the individual and the environment”.

Such conceptualisations of wellbeing recognize that wellbeing is defined and realised differently by different groups of people in different situations, that values play a role in how wellbeing is defined and realised and that there are historic antecedents to wellbeing, such as colonisation in countries such as New Zealand (Glover, Dudgeon, & Huygens, 2005). The balancing of self-determination, autonomy and independence with shared responsibility, obligation and interdependence, are regarded as central concerns in the achievement of wellbeing in the Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) model. The dominance of individualistic worldviews is recognised as often problematic for nondominant groups with differing cultural practices and perspectives. Even in modern, global consumerist society where individualism is valued, unmitigated individualism is recognised as counter-productive to the common good. The goals of social (“distributive”) justice therefore permeate their framework.

Inherent in our discussion of wellbeing, particularly the relational aspects, is the idea of participation in community life and the notion of citizenship. Perhaps not surprisingly for a study of family literacy, our conceptualisation of wellbeing encompassed Friere’s notion of citizenship as “the use of rights and right to have duties as a citizen” (Stromquist, 1997, p. 97). The general idea here is that interventions which enhance literacy (broadly defined) are expected to increase the ability of individuals and groups to participate as citizens, both benefiting from, and contributing to, the health of the collectivities to which they belong, in a reciprocal process which increases their own wellbeing.

In the findings presented next we describe the principles and practices related to literacy and wellbeing that we found in the programmes we studied, the effects of participation on the adult participants, their families and their communities and a process model of the relationships involved. Finally, Paula’s story is presented as one case example, bringing to life one adult’s experiences and their meaning for her, her *whānau* and the communities in which she moved.

5. Findings

We found six principles and practices related to literacy and six related to people which shaped and reflected the character of the four differently designed programmes. Anchored by commonly held beliefs and values, these key tenets were evident in the programme practices and staff expressions of the beliefs and values which underpinned the practices. Briefly, the dominant

literacy was seen as useful to have but as one of many literacies and not the only important one. Literacy was seen as partly skills and partly individual activity, but primarily as social activity; in other words, literacy and numeracy learning was interwoven with the contexts of people's lives. Taking a critical approach was highly valued and encouraged. Although wanting to develop their literacy, participants were regarded as already skilled in many ways, as multifaceted, and as cultural beings. Children were seen as needing support, yet adults who were parents were also viewed as people in their own right. The programmes shared an overarching concern for people's wellbeing and welfare. Staff saw that human needs must be met in these programmes as in all human endeavours. Expanded on in Furness (2012), the principles and practices and their guiding beliefs and values reflected a broad and inclusive view of literacy as social practice and an inclusive and strengths-based view of people. The literacy development aims in these programmes were clearly located within a wider concern for the wellbeing and quality of life of individuals, families and communities.

We found wide-ranging effects of programme participation related to both literacy and social aspects of people's lives and linked to wellbeing. We identified six categories of effects and three overarching characteristics of these effects. In the first group, participants acquired new literacy knowledge, skills, or practices, or learned to use their existing literacy knowledge, skills and practices in new ways. Second, participants acquired knowledge, skills and practices relevant to everyday life that are not so obviously literacy, for example, establishing household routines that work for the family. Third, participants acquired new knowledge, skills and practices related to the wider context of the programmes. For example, participants in the school-based programmes developed deep knowledge of schools and schooling. Fourth, participants experienced positive social and relational events and changes – beyond those connected to the taught literacy content – which also often had positive impacts on their families or their communities. Such effects included receiving practical help and advice on personal issues, having warm and respectful relationships with tutors, being included in all aspects of learning and enjoying the social aspects of the learning process. Fifth, participants valued the tangible ways in which programme staff communicated their valuing of people and their differences, inclusiveness, children and families, parents as adults in their own right, education and learning, and people's right to know, to participate and to have a say. Lastly, participants experienced affirmation and building of positive identity in which their self-view, including the cultural aspects, was strengthened, they were more aware of and confident in their abilities and saw themselves as capable citizens and valuable contributors to their families, communities and society. Examples were enhanced sense of selfhood, more positive general self-evaluation and confidence, more positive self-evaluation of their literacy, new or strengthened self-awareness of their abilities and capacities, increased participation in family and community life and increased criticality.

The overarching characteristic we called *interconnectedness* refers to the interconnectedness of the programme principles and practices with the personal circumstances and sociocultural histories of the participants and with the participants' experiences and learning from situations external to the programme. These came together and acted synergistically to influence programme outcomes in ways particular to the individual. The characteristic of *'flow on'* refers to the way in which the literacy and social effects were experienced in wide aspects of the participants' lives beyond the immediate focus of the programme and, as well, beyond the adult participants to include also their families and communities. The literacy and social effects were therefore also interconnected and synergistic. These flow on effects were linked to wellbeing at

the personal, relational and collective levels (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) in interconnected and synergistic ways. *Personalisation* refers to the idiosyncratic nature of the pathways people journeyed from participation to enhanced wellbeing. These relationships are shown in the process model in Figure 1.

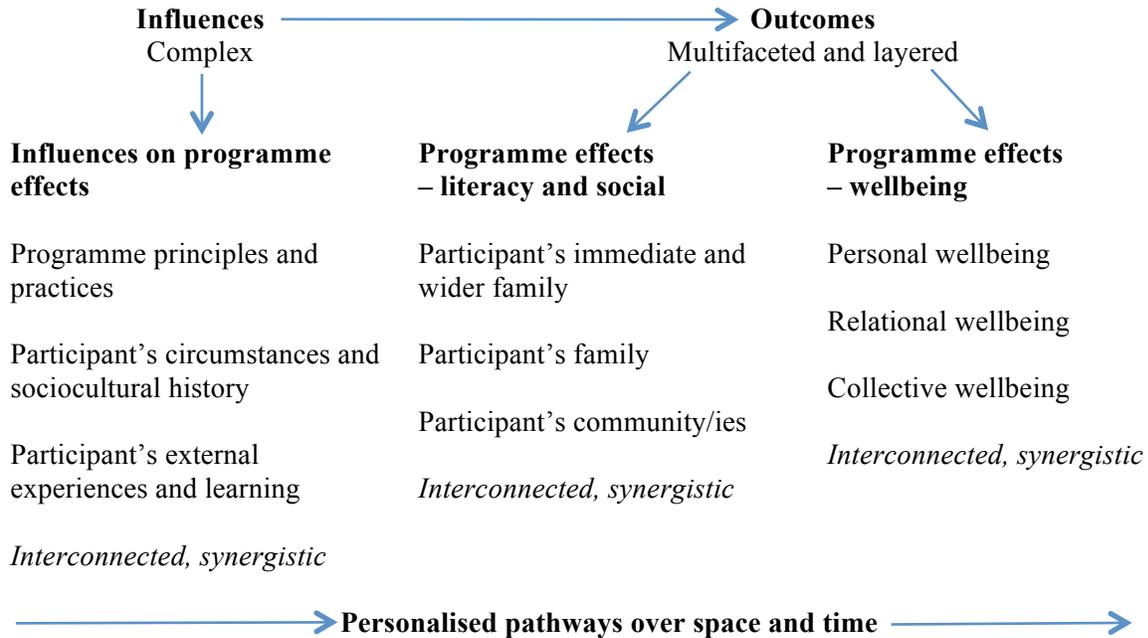


Figure 1. Process model of effects of adults’ participation in four family-focused literacy programmes

In Paula’s story below, the effects of participation in the programme for Paula, her family and the communities in which she lived are described. Paula’s story demonstrates what is possible in these kinds of programmes. In the context of this paper, its importance lies in its demonstration of the breadth and reach of effects, and their meaning for individuals, families and communities in relation to wellbeing and quality of life that are uncovered when a wellbeing-focused ecological approach is taken in the examination of literacy programme outcomes.

6. Paula’s story

Paula (not her real name) participated in the HPP-based programme located in the small rural community of about 400 people where she lived with her son and daughter, her parents and her grandfather. Paula’s children attended the English/Māori bilingual primary school where the programme was based. Like most others in the community, Paula and her family were members of the local *iwi* (the Māori tribal group associated with the area). Paula was also actively involved at her *marae* (the specific meeting area and its buildings belonging to one branch of the extended family to which Paula affiliated). She had grown up in an environment of strong *whānau* connectedness and caring: her parents often looked after other children as well as their

own. A government agency paid Paula, a widow, to undertake some caregiving duties for her grandfather. Paula's mother was an active learner throughout her life.

The HPP-based programme involved Paula in working with Year 1 and 2 children who were below their chronological age in reading and oral language development in the English language. The school staff and the school's community wanted their children to do well in both Māori and English languages and some young children needed additional help. While learning and using HPP the adults were encouraged to reflect on their own skills, interests and goals and to apply their learning in their personal and *whānau* contexts. Employed as teacher aides (in Paula's case as the school librarian), they undertook other tasks in the school which provided further useful experiences and learning. In these ways, the adults' literacy learning was fully interwoven with the social and educational practices of the children's programme and the school more generally. The school principal and the project director (who jointly taught and monitored the programme) reflected in their actions the values and beliefs described earlier as common across all programmes, such as the importance of *whānau*, relationships and connectedness. Other examples included helping the adults support their children by informally sharing ideas on parenting and home management, and regularly reflecting back to the adults their existing and growing abilities and their importance for their own lives, their families and the community. The principal and the director also encouraged the adults to ask questions and to express their opinion, for example on educational papers available in the staffroom where they were welcome. In such ways, the principal and the director demonstrated their belief in the adults as capable contributors in their families and communities and in their right to have knowledge, to participate and to have fair access to the resources of society.

Paula tutored a child for a ten week block. The child showed improvement on the assessments used in the programme and was also clearly happier at school as observed by the school principal. The early success experienced by the child demonstrated that Paula had learned the critical elements of the literacy practices of the programme: she was able to build a warm, trust-based relationship with the child, apply the oral language development skills (and other reading and language skills as time permitted) and have fun with the child engaging with books and learning (the child continued learning with another tutor when Paula moved away from the area).

Paula had been the school librarian for some time before beginning the programme. She loved books and knew what kinds of books children liked. Paula's knowledge was such that the Principal asked her to choose books from a national collection for specific children in the school. Her librarian role gave her access to useful information as she completed a National Certificate in Iwi Māori Social Services (NCIMSS) through the tertiary institution Te Wānanga o Awanuiarangi, which she was doing simultaneously. Paula's goal was to become a youth counselor. As part of the certificate, Paula was engaged in a project seeking improved access to her *marae* during periods of flooding which involved considerable study of law, consultation with local landowners and documenting of their viewpoints, all further valuable knowledge and skills. Utilising her library skills, Paula researched information on the impact of dress on relationships as an aspect of professionalism, relevant to her NCIMSS study and her role in the school as a librarian and reading tutor.

Paula linked the improved relationships she enjoyed with her own children to participating in the programme. Her increased presence in the school initially caused tension as the children felt they could not be themselves and she felt she must address any bad behaviour she saw. The Principal helped her to understand her role in relation to her children while she was in the school, illuminating the notion of personal-professional boundaries. She and her children negotiated

how they would be with each other, which led to better relationships both in and out of school. Impressed with the change they observed in the tutored child (in the playground), and listening to Paula's explanation of the importance of reading and learning, her own children began reading each night before going to sleep and doing their homework of their own volition. She observed that the children's attitude to schooling:

changed for the good because before I used to come down to the school they weren't doing their homework. They enjoyed actually doing their homework when I was teaching because they actually wanted to get in there and seeing, 'Oh, why is that child happy?' ... With all of us that were on HPP and Porowhā [Māori language version of HPP] they had seen the slight attitude change of the children, reading, and just hard out. ... and the actual behaviour of the children. They go 'Oh!' (Interview 3).

With increased confidence in her growing knowledge and relational skills, Paula left the area to take up a placement for the next level in her qualification (a diploma), taking her son with her. The increase in her knowledge of how to use professional vocabulary and how to be professional in the school setting helped her write her resignation letter to the school in a way which satisfied her. She lived temporarily with her brother and sister-in-law where she modelled how to have full conversations with her nephews, a practice their parents then took up. This meant the parents knew a lot more about what their children did at school and how they felt, and boded well for their relationships and understanding of each other in the future. Referring to these family members, Paula explained that:

I think they have benefited quite a lot, just spending time with them, talking, listening, to sit down with the child and actually asking, 'Oh, how was your day?' ... 'cause, especially with my nephews, they'll come home, their parents will ask, 'Oh, how was your day?' 'Good', and that's all they'll get and now they get a long conversation, lucky to be a half hour conversation, just talking about what they have [been doing], how was their day at school or work (Interview 2).

The knowledge of schools Paula had acquired through the programme and her librarian role led to her asking questions of and asserting her point of view in discussions with staff at the school her son began to attend. Her aim, which she felt she achieved, was to ensure he was best placed within the school to be appropriately supported and challenged in his learning. She was also able to ask questions of, and express her opinion to, the builders, painters and her future landlord as her house was renovated. She applied for jobs, securing one for the first time and later securing a placement for the diploma as a child advocate with a government agency. It was in this role we see very strongly Paula's learning and experiences coming together in a different context and community several months after her programme participation.

One of her cases involved a child accused of a serious misdemeanour at school. He had been interviewed by the school principal and other school staff members without a support person present. The parents had taken him out of that situation but did not know if they had done the right thing. They later received a request from the school's governing body to meet with them, a letter they had trouble interpreting. The child and the parents were not communicating with each other and the case worker, who was related to the family, was struggling to help them. Paula

used her relationship building skills from the programme to build rapport with the family, enabling her to establish the child's version of events that the parents, school or case worker had not yet heard. Paula's NCIMSS training provided strategies for the parents and the child to rebuild trust between them that had broken down. She used her school knowledge, her comprehension strategies, and her expanding vocabulary gained through her engagement in the programme to help the family decipher the official correspondence, and she drew on her legal knowledge from NCIMSS to clarify for the parents and the child what their rights were. Collectively, these actions helped prevent a miscarriage of justice. She also helped the case worker clarify his own personal-professional boundaries and increased his knowledge on points of law which boded well for his ability to help other families in the future. Paula explains how her school-based learning about professionalism stood her in good stead later on:

I think I learned a lot of what school's all about; it wasn't only the learning and the teaching, it was also getting on with people you work with, and dropping your personal boundaries, not mixing it with the professional, you know? You have to be professional about things, even though you're having problems with a colleague or whatever; still sticking to the professional boundaries ... there was a time to be professional and a time to be personal. Working in the school and being a mother at the same time I had to understand what was parent and what was librarian ...”
(Interview 3).

When Paula's grandfather died she returned to her community where she very quickly became involved in the local *Kōhanga Reo* (Māori language immersion early childhood education centre), becoming its chairperson.

In summary, we saw that Paula acquired new literacy knowledge and skills and new uses for her existing literacy knowledge and skills. New literacy knowledge and skills included understanding what children need to know and do with language in their first two years at school for successful ongoing oral language development and reading, and how warm relationships between children and adults support learning and other positive school, family and community experiences. New wider contextual knowledge and skills covered the books children like and why, librarian skills, how to be professional in a school setting compared to being a parent, and how to engage in warm and expansive conversations with children and adults in a variety of educational settings. She applied this learning in new settings as the flow of her life took her into new contexts and communities. New everyday living knowledge and skills included ideas for parenting, awareness of her rights as a learner, parent and citizen, and confidence in asking questions. These, too, were applied in both existing and new educational and life settings. The relational aspects of what Paula learned in the programme affirmed her own beliefs and values about the importance of relationships for personal, family and community wellbeing and gave her ways to strengthen her enactment of these values and beliefs, contributing to a growing awareness of her own capabilities and contributions and a positive identity. Her children, children in her extended family and community, and children and their families in a new community benefitted from her participation in the HPP-based programme. Learning from this programme was separately identifiable but interwoven with learning and experiences from elsewhere such as the legal and professional knowledge she gained from the NCIMSS programme and through her librarian role. Her learning was useful beyond its primary purpose to help underachieving children. It provided her with knowledge and skills she valued in other

aspects of her life, such as writing a resignation letter she was proud of. It benefitted others in her social network beyond the children she tutored such as the family she worked with as a child advocate whom she assisted to be agentive in their dealings with authorities in the best interests of their son.

7. Conclusion

Paula's story demonstrates the wide-ranging and far-reaching effects that may occur through adults' participation in family-focused adult literacy programmes. These effects are literacy, social and wellbeing-related and occur for the participant over space and time and for other people in their social networks: they 'ripple out' or 'flow on' from the immediate, primary focus of the programme. Paula's story also demonstrates the complexity of the pathway from participation to enhanced wellbeing. Programmes are influenced by the values, beliefs and programme practices of staff, the participants' personal histories and current circumstances and other experiences and learning they engage in. The effects are then experienced by the adult, by their children, other family members, their wider *whānau* and their communities. While layered and complex, the effects process is nevertheless tangible. The benefits and the pathways to them are always highly personalised and idiosyncratic but are not arbitrary. In Paula's case programme staff offered a broad and strengths-based approach to adult literacy learning within an overarching concern for holistic individual, family and community wellbeing. The effects of the programme on Paula flowed on to her wider life as an aspiring youth counselor; to her children in their renewed interest in learning; to her brother's family in their improved communication; to a family in a different community needing knowledge to support their son; to a case worker in the likely enhancement of his skills in working with families; and, on her return to her community, to her new role as the *Kōhanga Reo* chairperson preempted by her growing confidence in her abilities.

The ecological systems-based social and wellbeing frameworks used in this study were essential to more fully understanding the effects of the programme and its contribution to individuals, families, communities and society. The ecological approach required that broad and inclusive meanings of literacy and holistic and integrative meanings of wellbeing provided the lenses through which the effects and processes of the programmes were viewed. We then looked with more open eyes through the multiple parts and levels of the social systems in which the adult was embedded to see what effects changes in one part had on other parts. It was also clear that the adults and others in their networks benefitted personally, relationships were enhanced and there were also levels of collective benefit for families, extended families and communities. In Paula's case we saw that she gained useful skills and knowledge and a more positive identity, enhanced her relationships with own family, built new relationships and benefitted others through modelling how to build relationships; she helped others in two communities – children and adults – build knowledge and skills which enhanced their relationships and agency.

Given what we found, we argue that the full impact and meaning of participating in programmes, such as those in the study, cannot be understood, or their critical importance appreciated, if change in a limited range of literacy skills is the only dimension observed and measured. Further, the field can be transformed by bringing a focus on social justice where people's wellbeing is the overarching and most important concern. If wellbeing is the goal,

which social justice dictates, the perspectives of the participants and their communities must determine the shape of programmes and how their success is measured.

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