

Shine

THE PORIRUA EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Literacy Project

Background

A significant proportion of children in New Zealand fail to achieve a satisfactory level of literacy although they have the ability to do so. In 2009 Titahi Bay School engaged a literacy facilitator to help them understand the reasons behind some children not achieving the literacy results that were expected. An evaluation of teacher knowledge and student achievement led to a change in literacy instruction in the junior school.

The learning needs of both teachers and students were addressed with the provision of explicit instruction to meet these needs. Student achievement over a three year period demonstrated a clear difference between children who had been taught using the new approach and those who had not.

These results were significant enough to warrant further work to validate the change in teaching practice and as a result, a larger, independently-evaluated study has been designed.



Project Assumptions

Based on other research in New Zealand and overseas the Literacy Project is based on the following initial assumptions:

- ◆ Approximately 25% of children in New Zealand fail to achieve the literacy standards expected of them
- ◆ Not all children start school with the same level of literacy knowledge
- ◆ Children who start school with more literacy knowledge generally learn at a faster rate and make greater gains than those who start with less knowledge
- ◆ The literacy gap that exists at school entry is likely to increase over time
- ◆ The literacy gap is typically seen between children in high decile and low decile schools, with children in the high decile schools achieving better results than children in low decile schools

Project Outline

The project uses research findings which have identified what all children need to know to become capable writers and readers. These core skills and items of knowledge are taught explicitly until they are no longer needed during a child's first year at school.

Teaching all necessary skills explicitly – leaving nothing to chance – means that the negative process of waiting for a child to fail is removed. Consequently there is less need for 'catch up' instruction to address knowledge gaps. The skills can be acquired with structured teaching for as little as ten minutes a day as supplements to existing programmes.

The project strategies are not complex. They break the task of literacy instruction into *what* has to be taught and *why* it needs to be taught, at the same time as giving teachers clear teaching techniques that show *how* it needs to be taught. Many of these techniques are developed by teachers in the collegial environment of professional development sessions.

Project Design

The **Shine** Literacy Project was designed by the Institute of Education at Massey University with approval from the Massey Ethics Committee in March 2013. It has been running since May 2014 with 32 schools in the greater Wellington region taking part.

An integrated approach to teaching literacy skills (the *Sounds Like Fun* approach) to children in their first year of school is being evaluated. Seventeen schools are trialling the approach and 15 are continuing with their usual programmes as comparison schools for the first year. After the first year the results showed that the trial is making a difference, and the comparison schools have been invited to opt in to using the approach from August 2015.

Data is provided by children who are tracked over a two year period with five assessment points during this time. There is a project leader (voluntary), a full-time project co-ordinator (salaried position), and four research assistants (contracted) who carry out the assessments with children.

Project Governance

Shine

Shine, the Porirua Education Initiative, exists to facilitate the community coming together, to realise the potential of young people of the Porirua Basin. It is a network of relationships among organisations, communities and citizens. The network encourages activities that weave together energy and resources that help children and young people to learn and grow.

The **Shine** summit in June 2013 provided the umbrella under which the **Shine** Literacy Project has been able to gain traction in the education community and the city as a whole.

For more information <http://shineporirua.org.nz>

Porirua Foundation

The Porirua Foundation is a Trust which enables citizens to participate in the shaping of Porirua, growth of its people, care of their environment and the development of their community today and in the future. The financial control for the **Shine** Literacy project is being managed by the Porirua Foundation.

For more information <http://www.poriruafoundation.org.nz>

Project Outcomes

May 2014 – June 2015

Our first goal was to prevent the increasing gap in achievement from occurring. Children were assessed at school entry (Time 1) and again after 16-17 weeks at school (Time 2). For many of the skills we assessed at Time 2, the rate of progress was the same for children in the Trial schools, whether they were in a high or low decile school. The gap that existed when they started school did not increase, and in a number of cases children from the Trial low decile schools showed considerable acceleration in the development of skills, compared with children in the Comparison low decile schools.

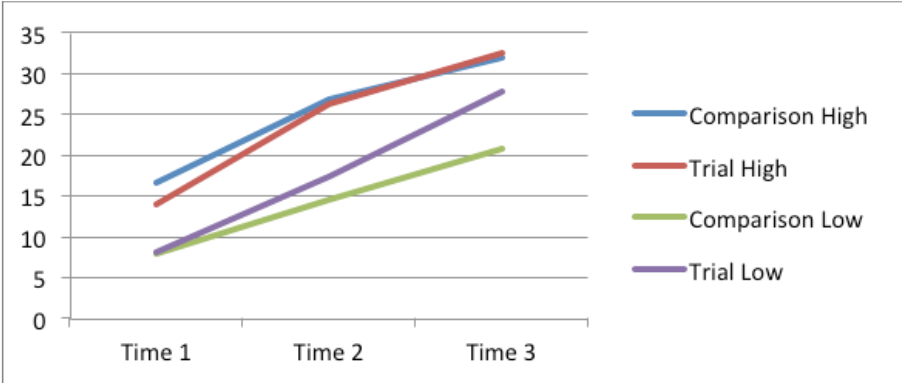
In the Comparison schools, children in the high decile schools made more progress than those in the low decile schools. This finding is evidence of the increasing achievement gap, often related to the decile ranking of schools.

Our next goal was to close the achievement gap between children in the high decile and low decile schools. Results comparing children's progress after one year at school (Time 3) show that this has happened in many key areas of literacy knowledge.

Following are two graphs showing the progress made by children in the Trial schools compared to children in the Comparison schools with the low decile Trial group making the most progress.



SPAT: Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test - by Decile Groups

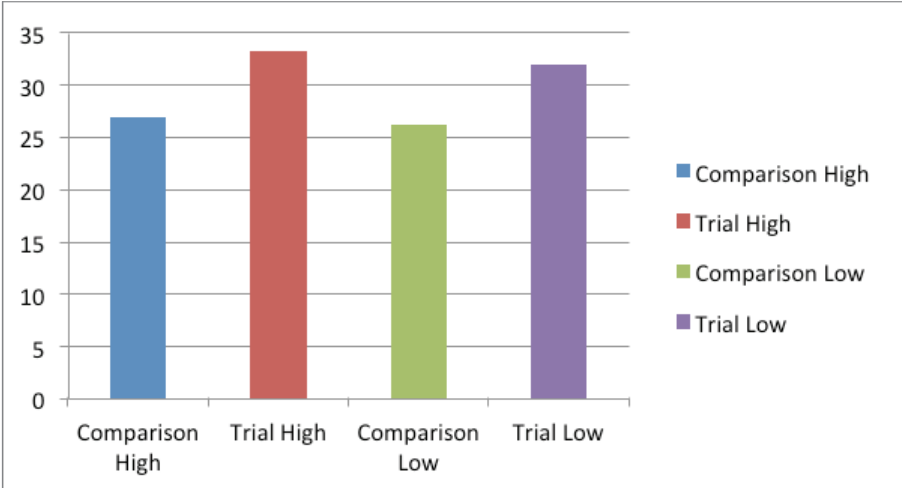


Progress by Decile Bands: Comparison High v Trial High, Comparison Low v Trial Low

	COMPARISON HIGH	TRAIL HIGH	SIGNIFICANCE
Time 1	16.61	13.94	Non Sig
Time 2	26.89	26.23	Non Sig
Time 3	31.91	32.50	Non Sig
	COMPARISON HIGH	TRAIL HIGH	SIGNIFICANCE
Time 1	7.78	7.96	Non sig
Time 2	14.49	17.31	Borderline Sig (Trial)
Time 3	20.73	27.79	Sig (Trial)

This graph shows progress with children’s acquisition of phonological awareness skills – skills that are essential for early literacy development. The Trial group made significantly more progress with the SPAT tasks over the year. The Trial low decile group is closing the gap with the high decile schools, and is doing significantly better than the low decile Comparison children at Time 3.

Writing: Number of Words



Mean scores

	COMPARISON HIGH	TRAIL HIGH	SIGNIFICANCE
Time 3	26.92	33.23	Sig (Trial)
	COMPARISON HIGH	TRAIL HIGH	SIGNIFICANCE
Time 3	26.15	31.94	Sig (Trial)

Both Trial groups significantly out-performed the Comparison groups in the number of words children wrote in 10 minutes. The low decile Trial group achieved effectively the same results as the high decile Trial group, with both these groups out-performing the Comparison high decile group. The two Comparison groups achieved similar results, with the low decile Comparison children writing as many words as their high-decile counterparts.

Going forward

The structure of the Literacy Project has changed for the second year which began in July 2015. Most of the comparison schools have joined the trial and consequently the number classrooms using the approach being trialled has increased from the original 28 Year 1 classrooms in 17 schools to 114 Year 1 and 2 classrooms in 28 schools. This increases the requirement for professional development for teachers, and resources for classrooms. The number of children in classrooms in this project where the 'Sounds Like Fun' approach is being used is now more than 2,600.

The two main challenges through 2016 are:

- ◆ Completing the research, except for the follow up assessment when children reach Year Four
- ◆ Introducing sustainable practices for teachers and parents that can be used in all following years

Completing the research

The trial intervention is designed to run for two years to provide a reliable indication of trends, and to allow the comparison group from the first year who have opted in, to benefit in the second year. The Institute of Education at Massey University will continue to provide supervision and analysis through 2016. To date data has been collected by independent, professional educators using an extensive range of assessments. The cost of gathering this data from 250 children in 2 more rounds of assessment is approximately \$25,000.

Introducing sustainable practices

Once the effectiveness of the *Sounds Like Fun* approach has been firmly established the priority will be to move what began with private and voluntary contributions into the ongoing practice of teaching in Porirua, and perhaps beyond. The position of the Ministry of Education is critical and discussions are underway. To this point the Ministry has funded some teacher release time so sessions previously held in teachers' own time can now be scheduled during the working day – a considerable step forward.

The next elements in the Project that have to be integrated with the public system are the role of the Coordinator and the provision of classroom and student resources. A full time Coordinator is required to maintain consistent ongoing professional development for teachers and to manage the transition from independent assessors to teacher administered testing to guide classroom practice. Learning has been enhanced through the provision of classroom resources that support both teachers and children.

The next phase of voluntary activity will also include information for parents. It is important that children have their own resources which can be taken home, so that parents and families are also involved in their learning.

The transitional costs to allow the project to run to the end of Year 2 (July 2016) are:

- ◆ Coordinator's salary \$70,000
- ◆ Classroom resources (one off cost for 90 classrooms - 28 have already been resourced) \$50,705
- ◆ Children's resources (per annum) \$ 20,000

After July 2016 we envisage the ongoing costs for maintaining this initiative in schools in Porirua City and in the Comparison schools outside Porirua, to be the Coordinator's salary and student resources – approximately \$90,000 per year.

