

Exploring Facilitators for Successful Home Literacy Engagement at School Entry

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MIHI

Ko Mataatua tōku waka

Ko Pootauaki tōku maunga

Ko Rangitaiki tōku awa

Ko Ngati Awa tōku iwi

Ko Ngā Maihi tōku hapu

Ko Phoenix tōku ingoa

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

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ABSTRACT

The home literacy environment is a well-established area of research. Few studies, however, have explored the facilitators to and challenges of the home literacy environment in the context of Aotearoa. The aims of this study were a) explore different aspects of the home literacy environment and b) gain a better understanding of the various factors that influence parents' ability to engage in home literacy activities aligned to the literacy approach their children are receiving within their class learning. A qualitative approach was implemented through the use of in-person and remote semi-structured interviews with parents of year 0/1 children whose teachers were involved in implementing the Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA). Analysis of the interviews revealed eight key themes related to parents' engagement with home literacy activities associated with the BSLA; time, a positive relationship with the class teacher, child's reading interest and motivation, routines, siblings, structured approach to learning, screen-time and influence of COVID- 19 lockdown period. Overall, the findings from the present study suggest that parents preferred a flexible approach to home literacy by engaging in activities and experiences that can be integrated within their already established routines. The results from this study emphasise the importance of quality home-school communication, particularly when interacting with children and whānau who come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed, and opportunities for future research are outlined in the discussion.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The development of language and literacy skills is a crucial component in preparing young children to thrive across social and academic domains (Evans, Shaw & Bell, 2000). Literacy is one of the strongest predictors of academic success, influencing virtually all aspects of life (Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009; Walker, Greenwood, Hart & Carta, 1994; Labov, 2003). While literacy instruction is a fundamental aspect of the education system, the home environment is a vital and well-established component in fostering children's emergent literacy knowledge (Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011; van Bergen, van Zuijen, Bishop & de Jong, 2017). The present research aims to explore the facilitators and challenges of home literacy engagement during the period of children's entry to formal schooling. Understanding ways to improve home literacy practices is particularly important given that child literacy outcomes are more advantageous when there is continuity of learning between the home and school environments (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Swain & Cara, 2019).

Early Literacy Development

Historically, literacy was defined simply as the ability to read and write (Blake and Hanley, 1995). At its most basic level this still holds some truth, however literacy as we know it now extends far beyond this basic definition (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). Literacy encapsulates the way in which we make meaning of information from resources in our environment, and our ability to communicate (Worthington & van Oers, 2017). The development of literacy capabilities is largely influenced by environmental factors, as well as a variety of interactions that support the development of higher mental functions, such as memory, as well as the ability to pay attention and think logically (Davidson, 2010; Dickinson & Neuman, 2007). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory posits that these higher

psychological functions are learned and influenced through the child's social environments. These early social experiences shape children's later development and attitudes towards literacy to a great degree (Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014).

Recognising the unique context and culture of each individual child is a crucial step towards understanding the strengths and literacy opportunities available to each child (Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009). Within an indigenous Māori perspective, high importance is placed on the revitalisation of Te Reo Māori as well as knowing about one's cultural identity and whakapapa - who you are, and where you come from (Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001). Historically, within Māori communities (and like many other indigenous cultures) information and myths were transmitted orally through pūrakau (storytelling), waiata (song) and whakataukī (proverbs) across the generations (Calman, 2013; McLachlan, Wirihana & Huriwai, 2017). Post-colonisation created a new set of challenges for Māori that influenced Māori ways of learning (Calman, 2013). Unfortunately, inequities for Māori have persisted within our English medium education system and curriculum. Until recently there has been little recognition of Māori culture, language and tikanga within mainstream education literacy and curriculum practices, further marginalising Māori knowledge within the education system despite being the indigenous culture of Aotearoa (Marie, Fergusson & Boden, 2008; Neha, Reese, Schaughency & Taumoepeau, 2020). Positive and strengths based approaches to engaging Māori whānau in their children's learning should be made a high priority within schools. Understanding factors that influence the home literacy environment, therefore, will hold relevance for Māori (Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox and McRae, 2014).

Learning to read is a developmental process in which children generally follow a similar pattern and sequence of reading behaviours as they learn how to read (Brown, 2014). Typically in the early years children are introduced to reading through exposure to print

through, for example, shared book reading or environmental print. As children transition to primary school, attention shifts to phonological awareness and word recognition as they are learning to associate sounds to letters and words (Brown, 2014). Children generally acquire three emergent literacy skills during early childhood that directly contribute to the acquisition and development of conventional literacy, these include: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness and oral language/vocabulary (Arrow, 2010; Rachmani, 2020). A child's ability to identify the letters of the alphabet by name, their explicit awareness of individual speech sounds in words as well as phoneme awareness are strong predictors for reading and school success (Brown, 2014; Gillon, 2017; Hammill, 2004; Rachmani, 2020; Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson & Foorman, 2004; Treiman, Kessler, & Pollo, 2006). The early years of a child's education are critical in ensuring long-term academic success (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001). Fostering these foundational skills in alphabet and phoneme awareness early sets up the child's motivation to excel in their own literacy development (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002). These skills and behaviours that develop early, build the foundation for later competence and proficiency (Brown, 2014). Differences in children's foundational skills for literacy at school entry are influenced by differences in their home literacy environment, which are highly predictive of subsequent reading attainment (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006). It is therefore important to investigate the factors (e.g., facilitators) that positively influence parents' ability and confidence to engage in literacy activities with their children at home.

The Home Literacy Environment

The home literacy environment (HLE) is a vital and well-established component in fostering children's literacy acquisition (Puglisi, Hulme, Hamilton & Snowling, 2017; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011; Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014). Within the home environment, children internalise the values and expectations of their parents whilst

they are forming their own self-concept as a learner (Melhuish, Phan, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2008). Within an indigenous paradigm in Aotearoa, the types of literacy-based activities that Māori engage in with their children may be less visible to Western-based educational systems (Neha, Reese, Schaughency & Taumoepeau, 2020). For example, a study by Reese and Neha (2015) exploring variations in Māori families' reminiscing with young children found that young Māori children and their mothers reminisced about a diverse range of past events, including everyday events, the child's birth, cultural rituals and their child's misbehaviour. Māori whānau have been found to reminisce in a more elaborative way compared to New Zealand European whānau (Reese & Newcombe, 2007). This type of home learning may not be appreciated or recognised within mainstream education. It is important that parents engage with their child's learning at home in a way that is enjoyable and playful, thus promoting children's intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Law, 2008). For some cultures, this type of learning may be less conventional than typical home literacy activities assigned by teachers.

In line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory, children belong to a complex and ever-changing social and cultural ecology, the most influential being the proximal influences such as the child's immediate family. These proximal influences have a greater chance to positively influence developmental outcomes by increasing competency and/or mitigating dysfunction (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Parents and caregivers play an important role in supporting their child's language and literacy skills at home, acting as the child's first teacher in which learning occurs (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011; Neumann, 2016). Providing children with a nurturing home environment, and engaging in interactive activities such as shared reading, stimulates brain development and promotes language and literacy skills (Hutton, Dudleu, DeWitt & Holland, 2020; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen & Sekino, 2004). Other significant factors include distal influences such as

socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity (Hoff, 2006). Distal factors provide an index of a family's relative standing in terms of demographic factors; however, these factors do not have the same direct influence on development that proximal influences do (Pierce, Alfonso & Garrison, 1998).

The HLE is a broad term used to describe the interactions and experiences that occur in and around the home that aim to promote literacy development (Puglisi, et al., 2017; Van Tonder, Arrow, & Nicholson, 2019). These experiences include both those that are facilitated by parents/caregivers as well as behaviours that are initiated by the child themselves (Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn & Petrill, 2008). The home literacy environment is strengthened when parents provide a supportive home environment for their children, by engaging in a range of literacy activities and experiences (Law, 2008). When the continuity of learning between the home and school environment remains fluid, children gain more exposure to literacy, promoting the development of more advanced emergent literacy skills and knowledge (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011; van Bergen, van Zuijen, Bishop & de Jong, 2017).

According to the Home Literacy Model (HLM), whānau can engage in two distinct types of literacy-based experiences in the home, labelled by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) as informal and formal literacy experiences. These dimensions are thought to influence different aspects of children's language and literacy development. Informal literacy experiences are those that focus less on the print itself and more on the meaning behind the text. Shared reading experiences are often viewed as an informal literacy experience, particularly in the early years when the child is still learning how to read (Sénéchal, Lefevre, Thomas & Daley, 1998). Informal literacy experiences promote the development of children's oral language, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Neha, Reese, Schaughency & Taumoepeau, 2020; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014). In contrast,

formal literacy experiences focus more on the print itself, such as identifying letters and decoding words in a text. Shared reading can be used as an opportunity to engage in formal literacy experiences by decoding words in the text (Neumann, 2016). This type of explicit teaching fosters the development of letter knowledge, word decoding and phonological awareness (Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014). Ideally, parents should be engaging in both distinct types of literacy experiences in order to foster the different components of emergent literacy (Sénéchal, 2006). Providing children with different types of stimulating experiences develops a child's ability and motivation to learn, alongside the development of key literacy skills (Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn & Petrill, 2008).

During the first 5 years of life, the brain is developing most rapidly as a result of neuroplasticity (Asby, 2018). Parents who talk and engage with their children on a regular basis during these early years support their child in developing well organised language systems, which become more difficult to modify as they get older, if neglected (Mundkur, 2005). Establishing this learning process in early childhood is a vital component in promoting children's desire to learn and subsequently, their academic success (Hook, 2007).

The purpose of the education system is to provide children with the tools to promote the desire for growth, and the means for achieving it (Hook, 2007). A child's language development begins long before formal schooling and should be fostered within the home as much as possible (Hood, Colon & Andrews, 2018). A study by Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, Brooks-Gunn, Ayoub, Pan, Kisker, and Fuligni (2009) explores how the quality of early parenting affects young children's school readiness, as well any changes in parenting overtime. The findings revealed that children exposed to more optimal learning environments at 14 months, as well as those from homes that became increasingly supportive of learning (between infancy and preschool), achieved higher literacy scores across a number of domains. Changes in quality of parenting over time were also predictive of children's school

readiness, indicating that changes in parenting early in the child's life can positively influence children's outcomes. This emphasises the importance of early intervention not only with children, but also with parents to ensure that they are equipped to support their child's learning at home (Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, Brooks-Gunn, Ayoub, Pan, Kisker, & Fuligni, 2009).

Whānau Involvement

The literal translation of 'whānau' is family (reference). However its true meaning is much more complex, based on kinship ties which can sometimes include more than the extended family unit (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). Whānau involvement as well as their willingness to both learn and provide knowledge is vital for successful home-school partnerships (Henderson, 2013). In the literature, parental involvement (PI) is often broadly defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2007, p.83). It is important to note that 'parental' participation may not resonate with all children. Within some Māori whānau, it is not uncommon for children to be raised by kin members who are not their biological parents. The term for this customary practice is 'whangai' (McRae, Nikora, 2006). When parents/caregivers are actively engaged in their child's education, they can positively influence their child's motivation to learn, and subsequently, the child's academic performance and general wellbeing at school (Harris & Goodall; Menheere & Hooge, 2010). In recent years, this concept has become an important component of school policy reform in improving children's education (Domina, 2005). Successful home-school partnerships are those that are strongly encouraged by the school and integrated within the school's overall mission (Young, Austin & Growse, 2013).

It is important that PI initiatives focus on whānau strengths and provide additional support to whānau who have had less access to learning opportunities (Hall, Hornby & Macfarlane, 2015; Humphrey-Taylor, 2015). Parents should feel as though their involvement

(no matter how small) is valued by schools, whether it be home-based or school-based involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Previous literature has also explored how parents' personal educational experiences can influence their own involvement in their child's education resulting in parents' reluctance to seek help (Hall, Hornby & Macfarlane, 2015). Challenges to parental involvement often stem from individual factors such as parental beliefs about the extent to which they should get involved in their child's education, or beliefs about their ability to support their child's learning (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Although the research indicates that parental involvement is an important factor in driving children's education, research by Harris and Robinson (2016) questions the effectiveness of conventional parental involvement due to the ambiguity among scholars regarding what parental involvement entails. They propose a new framework for understanding parental involvement conceptualised as "stage-setting". Stage-setting encapsulates how parents communicate to their children, the importance of schooling and the overall quality of life that they provide. This definition diverges from traditional conceptualisations of parental involvement (i.e. helping with homework), giving a more holistic overview of how parents can improve their child's academic success by looking beyond their child's conventional academic capabilities. Parents can therefore influence their child's education by creating a space where the child can develop their own academic motivations. This becomes increasingly more important as the child becomes less reliant on parental support.

Another major downfall with many parental engagement initiatives is that they assume that all parents, teachers and children are the same, and equally capable of developing engagement plans (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This is however not always the case. Research by Crozier and Davies (2007) acknowledge that some parents have limited knowledge about the curriculum and school practices within Aotearoa. Unfortunately, these may be the same

parents that are perceived by schools as ‘difficult to engage’ or ‘hard to reach’. However, Crozier and Davies (2007) purport that in some situations, it is the school inhibiting accessibility for these parents, rather than the parents not being interested in their children’s learning. The Education Review Office (ERO) recommends that schools involve Māori whānau as partners in the education of their tamariki by acknowledging and incorporating te reo and tikanga Māori into their pedagogical method.

Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox and McRae (2014) explored the characteristics of school success among Māori students, many of the participating teachers in the study made a conscious effort to use te reo Māori where possible. For many Māori students in this study, feeling supported by both their whānau and teachers was a crucial component to school success. Participating whānau also recognised the influence they had on their child’s education, acknowledging that is not entirely the responsibility of the school. For example, whānau of high achieving students made an effort to create an emotionally supportive and positive home environment by spending quality time with their children, and providing ongoing encouragement and support. When the child’s key role models make an effort to support their education, the child feels as though they are a valued member of the whānau. As a result, students are more likely to view their efforts towards education and learning as a way that they can positively contribute to their whānau, community and the wider society (Macfarlane et al., 2014).

Socioeconomic Status/Whānau Challenges

The evidence consistently shows that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds arrive at school with significantly lower levels of literacy than children from more advantaged backgrounds (Cadima, McWilliam & Leal, 2010; Neumann, 2016; Van Steensel, 2006; Van Tonder, Arrow, & Nicholson, 2019). The home literacy environment is thought to be a major contributing factor to these disparities (Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006). It

is assumed that children from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience additional challenges, such as family stress caused by poverty, and as a result be engaged in home literacy activities less frequently, therefore decreasing their likelihood of developing strong emergent literacy skills by school entry (Duursma & Pan, 2011; Esmaeeli, Kyle & Lundetræ, 2019; Van Tonder, Arrow, & Nicholson, 2019). This assumption consistently appears in the literature, labelling SES as a “risk factor” for future academic difficulties (Carroll, Holliman, Weir & Baroody, 2019; Niklas & Schneider, 2013). However, the outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not fixed, despite these discouraging findings (Davis-Kean, 2005; Grieshaber, Shield, Luke & Macdonald, 2012). Difficulties likely stem from other factors/challenges that are preventing children from reaching their full potential (Grieshaber, et al., 2012).

The research suggests that parents’ perceptions of skills and knowledge shape their ideas about how they engage with their child’s learning at home (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). Parents who have obtained lower levels of education may lack the confidence or knowledge to actively engage in literacy related activities with their child within the home environment (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Parental self-efficacy can determine the degree of engagement that parents have with their child’s learning (Harris & Goodall, 2008). When parents feel as though they can make a difference, they will be more likely to take responsibility to be more involved in the education process (Harris & Goodall, 2008). In contrast, struggling parents may be reluctant to seek help from schoolteachers about how they can support their child’s early literacy development, out of fear of being judged (Comer, 1986). When there are cultural and ethnic differences present, this can exacerbate these difficulties even further (Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006). Providing parents with the skills and resources to enhance the quality of the home literacy environment in a non-

judgemental way, can help moderate the negative effects associated with socioeconomic disadvantage.

The economic position of a family should not discourage whānau from engaging in literacy practices at home. Parents can provide plenty of opportunities to engage their child through everyday life routines including household chores or family activities. These tasks teach children valuable life skills as they go about their daily lives (Tatel-Suatengco, & Florida, 2020). The reading materials that parents provide to their children at home should be interesting and engaging, to promote curiosity and encourage the child to read on their own terms (Tatel-Suatengco, & Florida, 2020). Additionally, qualitative researchers have explored the role of extended kinship networks in poor African American families, providing detailed accounts of how low-income families share resources across households in the neighbourhood, and support each other to promote positive family functioning and wellbeing, despite living in disadvantaged communities (Dominguez and Watkins, 2003; Roy and Burton, 2007).

Facilitators and Challenges to Home Literacy Engagement

While much is known about the benefits of providing children with a literacy-rich home environment, little is known about the facilitators to home literacy engagement and the barriers that may need to be overcome to create the opportunity for home literacy engagement. Barriers can generally be categorised into three broad categories: parent-centered, child-centered and structural barriers (Lin, Reich, Kataoka & Farkas, 2015). Parent-centered barriers are those that inhibit parents' ability to engage in reading due to personal feelings or attitudes towards literacy. Child-centered barriers are those related to children's receptivity and interest. And finally, structural barriers are the situational obstacles (i.e. not owning any books or having a quiet place to read). The first two categories often go hand in

hand, with child-centered barriers influencing parent-centered barriers and vice versa (Lin, Reich, Kataoka & Farkas, 2015).

A significant barrier that frequently appears in the literature is the influence of children's interest on parental beliefs and engagement in literacy activities in the home (Hume, Lonigan & McQueen, 2015; Preece, & Levy, 2020; Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014).

Exposure to literacy in the home is an important component in the development of literacy interest (Hume, Lonigan & McQueen, 2015). When children do not perceive these activities as fun and engaging, they inevitably lose interest (Preece, & Levy, 2020). In turn, an absence or lack of interest can sometimes influence parents/caregivers' beliefs about home literacy, and they may not see the value of engaging in literacy practices at home, due to the struggles that come with it (Preece, & Levy, 2020). When parents put more effort into making home literacy experiences interesting and enjoyable, this is likely to increase children's motivation and interest to learn, and subsequently their literacy development (Preece & Levy, 2020; Yeo, Ong & Ng, 2014). For children who show a lack of interest in literacy activities, whilst at the same time presenting with a degree of risk, efforts need to be made to ensure that their home experiences maximise their opportunities for language growth (Carter, Chard & Pool, 2009).

Parental self-efficacy is one way in which shared reading experiences can be enhanced (Lin, et al., 2015). When parents/caregivers believe in their ability to successfully read to their child, this can contribute to the child's interest and subsequently, their language and literacy growth (Lin, et al., 2015). Parental attitudes often stem from their beliefs about education and the role that they play as parents (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006). Weigel, Martin & Bennett (2006) examined mothers' beliefs about literacy development in relation to the home literacy environment. From this study two profiles of parental literacy beliefs emerged: facilitative and conventional. Facilitative mothers believed that it was important to

take an active role in their child's education by providing them with plenty of opportunities to promote literacy development within the home environment. In contrast, conventional mothers' were more likely to believe that it was the responsibility of the school to teach their child and often reported challenges to reading with their child at home (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006).

The above studies provide some initial information about the facilitators and barriers parents face to incorporating literacy within the home. However, previous research tends to restrict parents to select from a limited list of pre-existing factors, rather than engaging whānau in rich, detailed discussions to understand their perspectives and experiences. To date, most of the existing research focuses on the HLE in early childhood with few studies conducted during the initial transition to primary school. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the facilitators and challenges of successful home literacy engagement at school entry, a crucial step in children's education, as they are learning to read and write in a formal setting.

COVID-19 Lockdown

When COVID-19 entered the community in Aotearoa, the government responded quickly to the situation at stake, given how fast COVID-19 had spread in other countries (Mutch, 2021). On the 25th of March 2021 Aotearoa was placed in its first nationwide lockdown. As a result, schools were forced to shut down and children were expected to continue their learning from home. Just over 6 weeks later, children were able to return to school. The following year on the 17th of August 2021, Aotearoa was placed in a nationwide lockdown once again, this time lasting only 3 weeks for most of the country. However, in regions where case numbers continued to grow (such as Tāmaki Makaurau and Waikato), extended lockdown periods were enforced.

The effects of COVID-19 has put a strain on both teachers and parents at home, having to adapt to a new way of learning (Reimers, Schleicher & Tuominen, 2020). While some parents had the freedom of being able to take on more of an active role in their child's learning during this time, others experienced the challenge of trying to juggle other responsibilities such work alongside supporting their child's learning. The use of technology has changed the way we operate in our day to day lives. From scanning QR before entering public places to working/learning from home, technology has been an essential tool. Less fortunate whānau who do not have access to the internet or a device are disadvantaged from accessing e-learning material, which became the primary platform through which learning occurred during these lockdown periods (Zainuddin, Perera, Haruna & Habiburrahim, 2020). For example, over half of NCEA students in Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei were limited to using smartphones to complete their home learning as they did not have access to the recommended digital devices (e.g. laptops). This not only impacted students' ability to effectively engaging with the home learning material, but also reduced their motivation (Hunia, Salim, McNaughton, Menzies, Gluckman & Bardsley, 2020).

Despite these challenges, there are a number of ways that parents can foster their child's learning that do not require access to the internet through a range of play-based and game-based leaning while at the same time, allowing time to connect and strengthen family bonds (Rotas & Cahapay, 2021; Zainuddin, Perera, Haruna & Habiburrahim, 2020).

The present study occurred amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the year 2021 when the research was conducted, Aotearoa was placed in a nationwide lockdown for a period of time. This presented an additional lens through which to explore facilitators of success and challenges of engaging with home learning material and providing a literacy-rich home environment.

Transition to Primary School

This research focused on the whānau experiences during the first few months of children's transition to primary school. This is a pivotal point in the lives of children and whānau, as early school experiences set the stage for their ongoing achievement, motivation, and self-concept (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredricks, Resnik & Elias, 2003). Parental involvement with their child's school at school entry and their incorporation of literacy activities in the home environment at this time is likely to set expectations and precedent for the remaining primary school years and is thus a critical period to target in terms of whānau engagement.

At school entry, children are usually expected to know how to write one's own name, alongside alphabet knowledge, auditory memory skills and rapid automatic naming (e.g. letters, objects, colours) (Cameron, Carroll, Taumoepeau & Schaughency, 2019). A report from the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study indicated that 4.5 year olds varied greatly in the amount of letters they knew, averaging at 8.4 letters, with 31% knowing no letters. Additionally, 57% could write their own name and 43% could not (Morton, Grant, Berry, Walker, Corkin, Ly & Fa'Alili-Fidow, 2017). This data alone provides some evidence to suggest that many children are arriving at school unprepared to learn, lacking basic skills that are required to succeed at school. It is both the responsibility of whānau and the community to prepare young children for school so that learning is reinforced across contexts (Epstein, 1995). If children enter school ready to learn, their transition should be smooth, setting them up for future academic success (Bingham, & Patton-Terry, 2013; Peters, 2010). When children arrive at school without the necessary skills to learn how to read, they tend to fall behind their peers, and continue to present with academic difficulties as they make their way through the education system (Holmes & Kiernan, 2013; Larney, 2002). These developmental differences, once established, tend to remain stable overtime (Cabell, Justice,

Logan & Konold, 2013; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Sénéchal, & LeFevre, 2014). Given this trend, it is important to investigate factors that influence children's early literacy skills so that intervention can be provided to children in need, as early as possible (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014).

Better Start Literacy Approach

The Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) is a holistic approach to classroom literacy instruction that is currently being implemented in schools across Aotearoa. The BSLA is an evidence-based approach which focuses on vocabulary development using quality children's story books, explicit teach of critical phonological awareness skills, and fun game-based activities. It is targeted at new entrant primary school children and aims to build literacy skills immediately upon school entry. One aspect of this approach is a focus on whānau engagement and supporting whānau to implement literacy practices within the home. The BSLA includes workshops for whānau aimed at enhancing their abilities to build children's foundational literacy skills through activities in the home, and weekly handouts that keep parents up to date with the focus of their children's learning and ways to extend this learning at home.

Data for the present study was collected from a small sample of whānau whose children attended schools participating in the BSLA, thus presenting the unique opportunity to understand ways that this approach has been able to facilitate parental/whānau involvement and use of literacy activities in the home.

Summary

As the research consistently shows, the home literacy environment is an important component of young children's education during these critical years of learning to read and write. Parents/caregivers play an essential role in fostering their child's literacy skills at home by providing them with a range of activities and experiences both play-based and literacy-

based. Although the home literacy environment is a well-established area of research, few studies have explored the facilitators to and challenges of the home literacy engagement. Research that has explored these factors tends to restrict parents to select from a limited list of pre-existing factors, rather than allowing whānau to provide rich, detailed discussion about these topics in greater depth, which is what the present study focused on. Additionally, very few studies have explored the effects that multiple lockdowns have had on the home literacy environment of young children in the first year of primary school. To the researcher's knowledge, is the first study to explore this within the context of Aotearoa.

The Present Study

Given the evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of home literacy on children's emergent literacy skills and later academic success, this research study explored different aspects of the home literacy environment, to gain a better understanding of the facilitators and challenges to home literacy engagement. Additionally, this study explored the impact of COVID-19 on the home literacy environment. The results revealed areas of the home environment that whānau found difficult to manage as well as certain aspects within the education system that were incongruent with their own personal beliefs. Additionally, the present study revealed a number of strategies and facilitating factors that whānau already have in place, supporting their ability to engage in literacy at home with their child(ren).

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to:

1. Explore the facilitators of successful home literacy activities and experiences at school entry for all whānau.
2. Identify ways to support whānau in overcoming challenges to successful home literacy engagement.

3. Identify the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on the home literacy environment

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

Research Design

This section describes the theoretical framework that underpins the design of the current research.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the facilitators and challenges to successful home literacy engagement at school entry, a qualitative research design was implemented. A qualitative research design allows for a more in-depth focus on different aspects of the home literacy environment, to determine what aspects positively influence literacy development within the home context and the difficulties that whānau encounter.

Few studies have focused on both the facilitators and challenges to home literacy engagement. The research designs that have, restrict parents to select barriers from a list of pre-existing factors (e.g. Lin, Reich, Kataoka & Farkas, 2015; Baroody & Diamond 2012; Johnson, Martin, Brooks-Gunn & Petrill, 2008). A qualitative approach allows for a more insightful description of the facilitators and challenges to literacy engagement that whānau experience within the home environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information of participants' views and beliefs, in order to explore and understand an understudied area of research. The results from this study have the potential to be used to inform a more structured piece of research on a larger population sample, such as a questionnaire or a survey.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a larger ongoing project investigating the effectiveness of the Better Start Literacy Approach - a classroom-wide approach to literacy instruction implemented across Aotearoa by the Ministry of Education. All classroom teachers who were currently part of the approach (approximately 800 across the country) of the parents/caregivers involved in the BSLA were contacted via email, and asked to circulate

information to all parents of students in their classrooms, informing them of the research study (See Appendix A). Parents who were interested in participating contacted the researcher via email to arrange an interview either in person or via zoom.

Ethical Considerations

This research project received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (See Appendix B).

An information sheet and consent form (See Appendix C and D) were sent out to all participants via email prior to when the interview took place, outlining the nature of the research and what to expect in the interview. All participants were given the option to receive a copy of their interview transcript to review, and/or a summary of the final study results. If they were satisfied with the nature of the research, written informed consent was given.

Participants

The participants in this study were 7 parent(s)/caregivers of 6 children in their first year of primary school in Aotearoa. Both parents of one of the children decided to attend the interview, and both provided input to the discussion. The mothers of the remaining 5 children participated on behalf of their whānau. Participants were included in the study if they met the following child criteria: (a) 5-6-years-old; (b) have started primary school within the last year (2021; and (c) involved in the Better Start Literacy Approach.

Table 1.

Participant Information.

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Employment	Household Members
1A	36	Male	European	Bachelor's	Full-time	4
1B	35	Female	European	Master's	Part-time	4
2	41	Female	European	Postgraduate	Part-time	4
3	41	Female	British	High School	No	5
4	44	Female	European/ Māori	Honours	Full-time	3
5	40	Female	European	High School	No	4
6	39	Female	European/Māori	Bachelor's	Casual	4

Procedures

Following approval from the UC Human Ethics Committee, qualitative data collection occurred from August 2021 – December 2021. Qualitative research enables the opportunity to sit and talk with parents about the intimacies of their day-to-day lives and the interactions they have with their child during the time they have together out of school. Data collection involved an interview either in person or via zoom, exploring different aspects of the home literacy environment with participating whānau, to identify facilitators of success as well as any challenges that whānau perceive affect their ability, and motivation to engage their children in literacy experiences.

Predominantly open-ended interview questions were used to guide the interview, to gain an in-depth understanding of the facilitators and challenges that whānau experience in providing positive home literacy experiences for their children, that support their child learning to read and write as they are starting primary school. Questions regarding the August 2021 lockdown were then discussed to address the effects that COVID-19 had on the home learning environment during this time. Additionally, evaluation of the BSLA aspects of

whānau engagement were discussed including: the Ready to Read books, whānau workshops, and digital resources.

Semi-structured Whānau Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to guide the interview process. The interview protocol consisted of a set of 19 questions (See Appendix E) characterised by each of the different topics. Most of the questions were open-ended to allow the participants to talk in depth about each of the topics. Additional prompts were listed under each question to encourage participants to elaborate if necessary. The interview questions were derived by the researcher based on previous research on the home literacy environment. Initial questions started off broad, exploring daily routines and activities that occur within the home. Exploring whānau routines is a simple and effective way to ease the participant into the conversation and gather important information, including spontaneous literacy experiences that may occur, as well as identifying opportunities for potential improvement (Carter, Charrrd, & Pool, 2009). Subsequent questions became progressively more focused on the types of literacy activities/experiences that whānau engage in at home with their children, as well as any perceived challenges, and both experienced and potential facilitators to improving the home literacy environment. "Potential facilitators" refers to aspects of the environment that whānau believe would improve their situation even if they do not currently have access to those facilitators. There was also an additional focus on the BSLA project, exploring whether whānau have engaged with the project and its resources and, if so, how effective they found these to be. Immediately prior to the beginning of data collection, Aotearoa entered a country-wide lockdown due to COVID-19. Ethical approval was received to add in additional interview questions regarding the impact of lockdown on the home environment. Interview data was collected both during and after the lockdown period.

Interviews lasted between 23 minutes and 1 hour and 10 minutes. All interviews of each participating parent(s) were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribing software, Otter, was used to form the initial transcription of the audio-recording, which was then reviewed and edited by the researcher, to make sure that it was complete and accurate. Participants were given the option to review a copy of the transcript. Two out of the seven participants wished to review a copy and both of these participants were satisfied with the transcript.

Participants received a \$40 Pak'nSave voucher and a set of storybooks in appreciation of their time and participation. The vouchers and storybooks were funded through a research grant from the Ministry of Education.

Setting

Interviews were conducted either in the participants home, or over zoom, depending on geographic location and/or the participants' preference.

Data Analysis

The qualitative interview data was analysed using QSR NVivo. An exploratory analysis was used to identify themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. An inductive approach to analysis was used to allow for research findings to emerge from the dominant or significant themes contained within the raw data (Thomas, 2003).

The first step of data analysis was becoming familiar with the data set, which involved reading and re-reading each transcript thoroughly. Step 2 involved assigning preliminary codes to important features of the dataset that recurred across the 7 participants' interview transcripts. Initially 17 preliminary codes were identified which would be later be reduced to 8 themes. Themes were identified by analysing the codes, looking for commonalities within the dataset, and any additional discussion points that the researcher believed to be relevant to the research question. During this process the similar codes were

grouped together to create the larger themes. The initial themes that were identified were reviewed by the researcher's primary supervisor. Further adjustments were made based off the feedback provided until the final 8 themes were agreed upon. The 8 themes were organised into facilitators and challenges, with a separate theme discussing the participants' experiences during the 2021 lockdown period to answer the research questions outlined.

CHAPTER 3: Results

The following section presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the seven participating parents of children involved with the BSLA in their first year of primary school. The data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using the methods previously described. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms in the text below. Data analysis of the factors facilitating home literacy experiences identified eight key themes, answering each of the three research objectives. These themes are detailed below.

Facilitators of Success

Theme 1: Time. Time was reported as a facilitator of success for some but a challenge for others. In this section the positive and negative contributions of time are discussed. When it came to engaging in literacy with their child(ren), most participants were lucky enough to have the luxury of time to provide plenty of literacy and learning opportunities, through a wide variety of activities and experiences.

“It's the time with her. I'm so lucky that I've got the time. I don't work anymore. I'm just at home so [...] and I actually [...] I love it. I love being a Mum. I love the fact that I can be home and I, I really appreciate it and I enjoy it. So I feel very lucky”. – P5

However, for participant 4, who is currently a single Mother, while her husband is overseas, unfortunately she does not get to experience the same luxuries. Her most significant challenge was time. This meant not only having a lack of physical time, but also time to process and follow-up on anything coming home from school. For this participant, the home learning activities assigned by the school did not hold nearly as much value as spending time on other activities that are of interest to her children. She did however explain how reading books together is important to this whānau.

“[...] for me, the biggest barrier is time, which is why I prioritise the things that [...] are of value to me, which is the reading to my kids, which is...their emotional competency. Having that dialogue with them. So I have my own kind of value system. And I know the school have theirs and the teachers have theirs. [...] lockdown was a great example of this because we had the lesson plans plotted out, [...] I looked at the plan, and I thought that's beautiful. When that's your sole focus. But when that's another thing on top of preparing breakfast, lunch, dinner, juggling work, and meetings and appointments, and you know, everything online, of course. I couldn't even stay on top of housework[...] and that's basic hygiene. Let alone, things on top of that. So it's like, life is just an incredible juggle, of prioritising. Not getting back to friends for months, because [...] my brain's at saturation point. With everything else going on. I have to take care of myself”. – P4

Even among whānau with both parents present in the home, there was still a struggle to find the time to engage with the home learning material, taking into account other life distractions.

“You know, just the juggle of having other kids as well and the practicalities of what that means and yeah, like you're down to do Danielle's reading with her, but if the other two kids aren't on board with it, it can be pretty tough, and she can get pretty frustrated with the whole process. So that can definitely be a barrier.” – P1B

While some parents reported being limited by time, one participant spoke about the challenge of finding the right time for the child to be fully engaged when other child-factors interfere (i.e. tiredness, mood, etc.). For example, participant 2 discussed the challenge of find an appropriate time to read her daughter's school book at night.

“[...], so we obviously do our book [...] our school book at night, as well. I just found when we got home, there's no real good time... she didn't want to do it straight after school and I didn't blame her.” – P2

For many children at this age, being at school for 6 hours can be both emotionally and physically draining. Hence, why it is understandable that parents struggle to find the right time to engage in formal learning experiences at home that is convenient for both the child and the parent, among all the other tasks that need to be done before and after school. Although home-based learning facilitates school success, prioritising child enjoyment at home is necessary for their social-emotional development to flourish (Santos, Fetting & Shaffer, 2012).

Although generally, most participants reported engaging with literacy at home frequently, four participants reported reading in front of their children very rarely, if at all. When children are young, and have limited prior knowledge and skills, they pay attention and respond and mimic behaviours of their prominent models (i.e. parents). By modelling positive reading and writing behaviours, parents reinforce the importance of making learning a regular part of their children's lives (Mullan, 2010). The participants in the present study discussed the challenge of finding the time to read for pleasure, let alone in front of their children. Participant 2 explained how she used to read on the occasion, before she had children, however, she would not have considered it a hobby, even when she did have the time.

“Having said that, I've realised [...], we're really rubbish at actually reading in front of them. Well, we'll [...], read on our phones, but [...] they're not seeing that we're reading. I think that we should get better at that modelling”- PIB

“So yeah, I used to read, but it wouldn't be something, [...] you know how some people are readers, that's their hobby. Like, I have a friend that I work [...] every lunch hour she just sits in the armchair and read her novels. So, she goes through books every week, you know. Whereas [...] I would definitely be sitting on one book for a month or two. You know, a good couple of months.” – P2

“[...], just, oh, I've got books beside my bed, just don't get time to read them. [...], before children... did reading. After children... no time.” – P6

However, despite the difficulties that most of these parents reported with trying to find the time to engage in literacy behaviours for their own personal pleasure, these parents appear to be well-equipped to model a number of other positive behaviours while they got about their daily lives (which will be discussed later).

Theme 2: A positive relationships with the school. The quality of teacher-parent relationships is a vital component of successful home-school partnerships (Sheridan, 2004). Successful and healthy parent-teacher relationships hold mutual respect about the importance of the relationship in fostering the child's development by providing consistency and continuity across systems (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010; Macfarlane et al., 2014). Most participants reported having a good relationship with their child's classroom teacher, with most of them being comfortable that they could approach the teacher if they were in need of additional support.

“They will happily tell me, she's doing well, or she's at this level or whatever. And I'm like, so is that where she should be? So I suppose the door is open over there. Whaea Lisa always says if there's anything you want to chat about, and she said to me at the learning conversations, I would definitely come and chat to you if I wanted to talk with you more about Celia's learning or what's going on. And so I kind of sit in the 'no news is good news'”. – P2

“[...], but apart from that, [...] I just know that if I need to ask anything that I've always, you know, you can always approach the school and ask.” – P6

Participant 1A spoke about the school app “seesaw” which keeps parents up to date with what their child is doing at school, which both parents found to be an effective resource.

“Yeah, our school has an app called seesaw, which is quite good in that [...], the teachers are pretty good at updating it. So, usually we'll get an idea of one or two things she's been doing in her day.” – P1A

Additionally, most participants spoke positively about their child's transition to primary school. Participant 4 spoke about her daughter's negative experiences prior to school in the early childhood facilities that she attended. She reported that the more free-play based approach did not work for her, being a very introverted child.

“She only went two days a week, because I was a stay at home Mum. So, we tried all sorts of things. And then they said "Oh, perhaps she needs to go more, to get more used to it". So we'd send her three days a week, just for the mornings. But she just... I don't know she was really introverted, and just didn't really make any friends”. – P5

Now that she is at school in a more structured environment, she is much happier, and is so far loving school. Apart from the initial issues that they experienced in relation to her reading confidence, once she got past that hurdle, she now appears to be thriving both at school, and at home during learning opportunities.

The initial transition into formal education can be a difficult time for young children. Starting primary school is a big step in young children's education, and initial resistance is relatively common (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Two participants discussed their child's resistance at school drop off. They both described their children as “homebody's” to an extent, making school drop off an emotional experience. Participant 2 described her school drop off routine, and the active role she plays in that transition.

“School drop off for us is very... is quite difficult. She's an anxious child with... she's a very homebody, doesn't like new environments, or new people. And so, even though she's been at school for a year now [...], school drop off now that I have to take her across the road is quite emotional for her. So, I have to stay and do the first reading words and writing

a story with her, and then she's handed to the teacher kind of thing. She must kinda need to snuggle and (she) stays with the teacher for roll call” – P2

Participant 2 is told by her daughter’s classroom teacher that she settles in just fine during the school day, but it just appears to be that initial transfer that has been very emotional for Madison. Participant 4 also briefly speaks about her son’s resistance to school in the morning, explaining that he would rather be at home. According to participant 4, Lucas much prefers the play based stuff, for example, he loves after school care which is mostly free play.

“Sometimes he's a little bit resistant in the morning. He has been saying I don't want to go to school. I think he'd just preferred to be at home. And maybe he's just a bit reluctant with the whole transition. And maybe, school itself is quite structured compared to Kindy. You know, he's in a second term there now. So, he prefers the play-based stuff. He loves after school care, for example, which is just free play”. – P4

While no one reported having a negative relationship with their child’s classroom teacher, and in fact most reported a positive one, participant 4 spoke about the lack of relationship that she had with both her children’s classroom teachers.

“I think what [...] would be nice is probably more opportunities for togetherness or for sharing. And I know sometimes they have whanau gatherings and this and that, and sometimes I haven't been able to make it because I'm working or whatever. So in part, I would take responsibility for again, me not finding time to prioritise that. But it's about relationships”. – P4

“To be honest, I don't really have a relationship with my kids teacher's. I have the odd conversation and email correspondence, but I don't know them as people. So I'm therefore, not really called in to join with things.” – P4

However, with a background in educational psychology, she is fortunate that she holds the knowledge of being able to support her children's learning in a variety of ways that she has learnt throughout her professional career and therefore, she felt lucky that she did not need support in this area. Unfortunately, not everyone has this level of background knowledge, highlighting the importance of parents being able to have the type of relationship where they feel comfortable approaching their child's classroom teacher and seeking additional support if needed.

Regardless of the fact that most parents reported feeling supported by their child's classroom teacher, many of them would like to be more informed about ways to support their child's learning at home. As part of the BSLA, teachers have been encouraged to send out weekly handouts to the children's parents, outlining what the child has been learning at school and some fun ways to play with words and sounds at home (see Appendix F) for an example). Only two of the participants that were interviewed reported receiving these handouts. Most of the remaining participants who did not receive these handouts said that they would have liked to receive these handouts, as a way of finding different ways that they can spontaneously incorporate literacy-based activities or experiences at home. Participant 2 said she would find it useful if school was sending home a physical copy rather than posting it online how most other forms of communication occurs between home and school.

“But having that piece of paper, come home and be on the fridge or something would be a lot more in front of my face than putting it on seesaw, or school loop or something. Where yes, I read it on the app, and then it goes back in my pocket. And I don't actively go back in to go “oh there's, you know, some things” like, so as much as I see online learning is a good tool, I think sometimes... yeah ways to help is just send that as a physical piece of paper for me to put on the fridge.” – P2

Two other participants also expressed interest about these letters, but explained how they would not want to be receiving these every week. While this seems to be an appealing resource to these parents, it is important that parents are not overloaded with information, as this is more likely to overwhelm these parents rather than support them.

“[...], or those worksheets, but probably not like weekly stuff, because we’re going to probably struggle to, you know read.” – P1A

“Now that you’ve shown me those sheets, I’d be really keen to see them actually. I’m going to ask his teacher, ‘can I have a look?’ No, I don’t want one every (week)... did you say they come home once a week?” – P6

Participant 6 also spoke about perhaps being informed on the level of engagement that parents should have with the books coming home from school.

“If they (parents) need a little bit of, I don’t know, training or anything, just to know what to do with this book. [...] you don’t really get anything... you just get this book come home. And you’re like, right, you read it like every other book, and then have a look through the back, and then yeah. You kind of have to figure it out on your own. Which is fine but yeah, it’s just like, [...] the teacher is going on about how she’s doing lots of training for it. And you’re like, oh okay, that’s cool. Um, she’s got years and years of training behind her. So, yeah, maybe I don’t know... just something... there’s a gap missing.” – P6

Theme 3: Child’s reading interest and motivation. A key facilitating factor reported by all participants to some extent, was their child’s natural love of reading. As reading has been a big part of whānau daily routines of the participants interviewed, these children have all grown a love of reading, whether that’s being read to or child-led reading.

“Yeah, no, I think she has enough passion for reading books. Like she wants to read books, like when we finish, you know, I had to cut it down to, she’s meant to have three books before bed.” – P2

“Reading is huge for her at the moment. We go in there at nine o'clock and she's in the dark trying to read her book.” – P5

“[...] he used to, [...] take himself off, or read, or every afternoon, after he had an afternoon sleep.” – P6

Participant 1A discussed how their daughter loves receiving praise from her parents, motivating her to want to read. Both parents explained how this has been beneficial when engaging in reading practices together at home.

“So, she loves the idea of seeing us delight in her reading. She gets a buzz out of seeing, you know... being a people pleaser in that respect, helps her reading. And that she'll often want us to be like 'wow, great reading!' So, yeah that's where... I don't know, her nature or her default reading in that respect, it's quite beneficial for reading”. – P1A

An association that participant 5 discusses is the role that her son's relationship with his grandma plays in fostering his enjoyment towards reading, as this is a special time they get to spend together.

“And I think his grandma spends a lot of time reading. Reading to him [...] right from the get go. So, he's spent a lot of... I think that's a... reading was a special time because he got to sit with his grandma.” – P6

Ensuring that their children enjoy reading experiences at home, was something that all parents valued and perhaps explains why these children have developed a love for reading and books. For example, participant 4 discusses how she brings theatre into shared reading experiences to bring the characters to life. She explains how she learnt this technique from her mother.

“And so my mum would read stories with, you know, she would act out the role of the character in the story and put [...] those different accents, or different emphasis and the

roles and [...] had that kind of theatrical component. So it was always interesting to listen to.” – P4

The use of dialogic reading, as described in participant 4’s transcript, are commonly used techniques during parent-child shared book reading strategies, to make these experiences fun and interesting (Perry, Kay & Brown, 2008).

In the present study, multiple parents spoke about their child’s ability to read without parental support, allowing these children to explore reading independently. Given that many parents live busy lifestyles that can often restrict the time spend engaging with their child’s home learning, having a young child that is able to read independently can be seen as an advantage. Additionally, when children are able to engage in independent reading, it opens up opportunities for children to explore and learn on their own. For example, participant 3 spoke about how her daughter, can sit and read while Mum is doing something else. While not all children learn to read this quickly, for this whānau, having the ability to do so can save some time not having to sit down and support their child through their school book every night.

“And even Amy is... her reading is there. She's reading way above her age. So, she doesn't need that sitting and helping. [...] she can sit and read while I'm cooking because she doesn't need my input with anything. She just reads it.” – P3

Participant 5 reported a similar tendency for her child to read her books without support.

“Well she loves reading by herself more. So I'm not really as engaged with her. Sometimes I just sit next to her, and she just reads her books to me. She doesn't really ask me to read to her too much now. She reads to me”. – P5

In order to foster their child’s interests (whether that be reading or hobbies that they might have) three participants reported that they would make an effort to obtain the resources

to encourage their interests, allowing them to explore these interests further. Participant 4 highlighted the learning that occurs within the home is not just simply literacy, and will make sure to foster her children's learning, within the means that she has.

"It's (learning) certainly not just literacy. It's whatever calls them into action, whatever they're interested in. I would want to foster that talent. In you know, however I can, within the means that I have obviously". – P4

Fortunately for most participants, engaging their children in home learning activities or experience is usually not too challenging. Participant 2 however discussed her child's anxiety around learning, which causes her to lose control in situations deemed difficult, or if she feels as though she is not on the right track. Both parents feel like they are at a loss of what to do, unsure how to deal with her emotional episodes that are becoming increasingly challenging. Although her daughter does not appear to have any behavioural difficulties when she is at school, she is reluctant to engage in school work at home.

"She's academically, you know, ahead of the chain. But emotional intelligence, she was quite... not behind, but like, she lacks empathy. She lacks respect. So, you know, I don't think I've ever heard her say 'I'm sorry', you know. Or, you know, if you asked her to do something, she won't, you know. She's definitely hit the stage of not wanting to go to school."
– P2

A few participants discussed their child's initial anxiety around learning which often stemmed from the child's frustrations of getting things wrong. Participant 1A spoke about their daughter's ability to overcome this; however, participant 2 is still trying to work on this.

"So she has almost an anxiety around learning. And if she doesn't think she's on the right track with it, (she) will just blow and, you know, rip up the picture if it's not what she wanted. Or the story, you know, scribble it out, because she did a really bad letter."- P2

“And I think she naturally had this aversion to not wanting to get things wrong. And so, there was something's she's like, I don't want to do that, because I don't want to get it wrong. And she's come so far from that, that she does just kind of dive in”. – P1A

Participant 5 also spoke about her daughter's initial difficulties with reading, which she believed resulted from a lack of confidence. She mitigated this early, by asking her child's teacher for as many books as possible right before the holiday break so that they could help her progress with her reading at home, ready for when she goes back to school.

“ And she gave me a whole bag of like, 30 of them, and we just read through them and practised, and I think she just didn't have the confidence. She felt like, she's very... I don't think competitive is the right word... She's very hard on herself. So that was a barrier, but it was her confidence. So we just read them, practiced, and then honestly (she) just was away, was great.” – P5

The power dynamics of shared reading can have a great influence on children's motivation and engagement with an activity or experience, with children losing interest when caregivers take control during reading time (Riedl Cross, Fletcher & Speirs Neumeister, 2011). Generally, participants had mostly positive things to say about their child's learning. Unsurprisingly however, it was common among almost all participants to encounter days where their child is tired, and does not want to engage in anything school-related. Overall, participants believed that in these situations, it is best to be lenient, rather than forcing the child to do it, for the sake of getting the home learning material done. Participant 1B speaks about how she was reassured of this idea in one of the BSLA information evenings.

“She kind of also said like, you want your kids to love reading. For some if it's a total battle, just don't bother. Like don't make them hate it. And just that reassurance is quite good. Because there are days where it's just not worth the battle. And to not feel guilty. [...]

and be like 'no, no, it's more important that we keep her enjoying her learning and trying to have this battle is gonna put her off' – P1B

Most participants had similar thoughts about not forcing their child to engage with learning at home when they are demonstrating resistance. Participant 4 spoke about her child's resistance during certain tasks (not necessarily reading). In these types of situations, she discusses how she gives him choices, to feel as though he has control in the situation, which generally works in her favour. Participant 4 also speaks about her oldest son who is seven years-old, who has been having difficulties with his reading, discussing how she would like to have a conversation with his classroom teacher about easing the pressure, as she is starting to notice that he is becoming anti-reading, which she has been disheartened by. She explains that she would prefer that he learn to read when he is ready to learn, rather than putting pressure on him.

"And I'm kind of, I'm about to have some conversations with his teacher around taking the pressure off, because I can see he's already getting 'anti books'. And that just breaks my heart. Because I do know that reading ability is an indicator of future success. So I want him to succeed when he's ready to succeed. And I want him to have the right kind of input at the right developmental stage. And expecting him to read age appropriate text in his classroom, when he's struggling with that, because his brain isn't ready, is only going to turn him off reading. So on the one hand, I'm really conscious of that, and I don't want him to be turned off reading. I want him to learn to read when he's ready". – P4

Participant 6 discussed her son's inability to write his name before starting school. She explains how this was the one thing she wanted him to learn before starting school and therefore, when he was unable to, naturally, she panicked. She acknowledged that he was not ready at the time, but once he started school, he did not encounter the issues she thought he might.

“And, I was really worried because. he couldn't write his name before he went to school. And I was panicking because that's the one thing I really wanted him to learn, to achieve before he went to school. We worked worked really hard at home, and at kindy, but he just, he wasn't ready”. – P6

Theme 4: Routine. Some participants discussed putting in place checklists for both the morning and evening routines, for their child to tick off as they are going through the process of getting ready for school in the morning, and later getting ready for bed in the evening. This ensures that everything is organised and gets done efficiently, in a timely manner. At the same time, the child learns vital life skills that foster their sense of independence over time. Participant 1B speaks about the positive impact that having a routine checklist has on their child's motivation, which is sometimes rewarded with TV time, if all the tasks are completed with time to spare.

“That has been a good thing. And so she's got it all written down. There's a little picture next to each thing, but she kind of normally goes and ticks things as she does them. She likes completing things. So that's good. Yea, so in the morning, depending on the mood, that can go quickly or very painfully, slowly with arguments along the way.” – P1B

“On the fridge he has a jobs to do list in the morning. [...] just a wee magnet with what to do. And it's just wee pictures like brush his teeth, pack his lunch box. And so he just methodically goes along and does all that in the morning” – P6

Having routines in place that are catered to the child not only allows the day to run more smoothly, but also builds the foundation for conceptual knowledge and language to develop (Lee & Yeo, 2014). Exposing children to repeated, familiar events teaches them valuable skills like being organised and time management.

Generally, participants found that a more loose structure to home learning worked best for them by integrating learning activities naturally, through everyday life experiences

and environmental stimuli, opposed to setting up rigid sit-down literacy activities, which has proven ineffective in engaging some of these children. The “learning” that occurs here appears hidden to the child as a game or outdoor fun, rather than learning if presented to them in a more structured approach. Additionally, participant 2 spoke about using the environment as a learning tool, which provides plenty of opportunities for meaningful conversations to occur, in relation to what is going on in the environment both at home, and out in the community.

“If we’re doing activities, or out for a walk, you know, I’ll mention the colour of the flowers. So she’s learning you know, that kind of thing. So most of our learning with Celia through till now, and obviously, when we’re out and about is more around just actively engaging in the environment as a learning tool. We’re not ‘sit down and let’s do some maths together’, kind of people” – P2

“So, we are in the car a wee bit. So, we often play I spy with my little eye, and stuff like that.” – P5

This was how her own mother supported her learning when she was a child. For example, being able to recognise different birds was something that she learnt when she was younger, and has now passed down this knowledge to her own children as a way of encouraging learning naturally. When children are provided with opportunities to engage with environmental print and literacy-based experiences that occur naturally, this allows for spontaneous learning experiences that are not perceived negatively by children like some structured activities might (Preece & Levy, 2020). Additionally, using environmental stimuli as a resource reduces the need for parents to purchase or prepare educational material, making this an accessible resource for all whānau (Neumann, Hood & Neumann, 2009).

Another commonly reported way of spontaneously integrating literacy at home is through cooking recipes. Half of the participants spoke about their child getting involved in

the kitchen, and mentioned using recipes as a learning tool. Participant 6 explained how her son was a keen baker, and although he cannot yet read the recipe by himself, with support he is able to get involved in the process, which is something that he enjoys doing.

“Um, just learning through everyday skills. Like if we're cooking, or something, he'll get the recipe book out. And then, ya know I'll show him what we need, and just making it real practical for him at that age. He's a wee bit of a baker. So he quite likes to get in there, and help me and just, yeah. He, yeah, even though he can't read the recipe, he can recognise the numbers, and I can tell him what it is. And he knows where all the ingredients live and what needs to be used to do the baking. So, he enjoys things like that. Just making all the - at that age, just making it as practical as possible, and making... anything's a learning opportunity, if you put your mind to it, and try and make the most of things”. – P6

Theme 5: Siblings. Three participants spoke about the role of siblings, and how it assisted them in some way or another. For example, it was common for the older siblings to read to the younger siblings.

“You know, I'll sometimes ask, "Can you go read Willow (who's our one year old) her book". Now they're really basic books but she loves this feeling now that she can... " Oh, I can read a book". So, I think that kind of stuff's pretty key.” – P1A

“Um, because we've got the two year old and she likes stories, then there might be reading during the day that Celia will decide, actually, I want to come over and read the books with Gracie as well. And she's actually started reading to Gracie when Gracie wants to read to and I'm busy. Celia started saying "I'll read to you", you know, and I, if she can't read that, I just said to her the other day, just make up what you think. Because she knows the stories. So then she started kinda making up the story well enough”. – P2

Activities like this, that get the whole family involved, is an easy way for parents to be engaged with both children at the same time, and allows for both children to develop

further, some aspect of their literacy capabilities (i.e. being read to, reading to). Participant 6 described her son's transition to primary school as easy, since his sister (who is less than 2 years older) had already gone through the process. Through this process he had been present at school pickups and drop offs, and so he knew most of the students already, and had an idea of what to expect when starting school.

"So, when you're a second, or any other sibling, you spend quite a lot of the time at the school. You're there picking your other sister up, and you know, before and after school. So, he was there for... yeah, since she started, he was always there. So, school was... the transition to school wasn't a big thing. Because he knew everybody, knew all the kids and all the staff. It was yeah, it was easy for him." – P6

Challenges within the home literacy environment

Theme 6: Structured approach to learning. Three participants discussed the structured approach to learning that is implemented in most schools across Aotearoa right from the get-go. All three participants reported how this approach worked well for their children, but there was a general understanding that this is not the case for many children.

"School, by its very nature has to be structured in a way I guess, to get the most out of it, for the most kids. And she's one of those kids that the structures of school really suit, so she's kind of like a duck to water. But we are aware that there's other kids that for whatever reason, school just doesn't, you know... just doesn't sit with them". – P1

Participant 4 discussed how her youngest child fits within the bell curve in terms of his academic abilities and therefore, he benefits a lot more from literacy in the classroom. However, this was not the case for her eldest son (not involved in the BSLA), which has shaped her views about structured learning from the age of 5.

"Some kids really gel with that structured approach. And, um and others don't. And it's probably... I have more of an interest in the kids that don't, because I look at, how can we

more flexibly be inclusive of all different learning styles that are housed within a classroom where, you know? How can we include those kids that are movers in our teaching, within our teaching paradigm? Or the kids that need to be tactile to, to remember things, or visual with remembering things... ” - P4

Both of Participant 4’s children much prefer free play, which is why she tends to give her children a lot of free rein during their downtime at home. When children transition from pre-school (or other care arrangements prior to school) to primary school, there is a shift from a socially oriented approach, to a more cognitively oriented approach to teaching and learning (Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006). This is where participant 4 believes schools are going wrong, particularly during the initial years of primary school.

“I think where we go wrong in schools, and I do see it with my kids already, is too much structure and emphasis and [...] there's still a, competitiveness in the school system, where kids feel like, ‘I'm not good at reading’ or ‘I'm not as good as that kid’ or, you know, [...] it's kind of endemic to the way that we teach because of our traditional and outdated teaching approaches. – P4

Although all participants were strong advocates for reading at home. For some participants, reading was the only formal learning that would take place at home. Participant 2 held strong beliefs about the school hours being the time for her daughter to be taught when discussing her views about structured learning at home. Most of the learning that occurred at home tends to be activities based, otherwise woven into their daily routine. When participant 2 was asked about any barriers that she had encountered with engaging in home learning activities, she explained how Celia does not want to do school work at home, but also, did not think it was the place to be doing so anyway. Although participant 2 engages with the reading material coming home from school, any other learning that occurs at home is predominantly experience-based.

“I am quite a believer in the school, school hours being the time that she’s taught. After school, I’m not a big, at six, ‘let’s have homework and all that kind of thing’. So, I’m quite happy that she has a book every night and that kind of level of homework”. – P2

“I suppose again, I would say I’m not seeing barriers apart from she doesn’t want to do school type work at home. But I also don’t see it as the place to be doing, so” – P2

Participant 1A also stressed the fact that it would be unlikely that they would sit down altogether as a whānau to do structured exercises at home. Instead, there is more of a focus on reading to and with their children, and finding other ways to just help her enjoy learning.

“We teach Danielle to read, [...] we don’t do exercises[...] that’s not reading a book [...] Trying to gauge everyone in a literacy activity would be like, herding cats.” – P1A

Participant 1B later discusses their tendency to shy away from the details to avoid going against the school’s pedagogical methods.

“And also, with that idea of we don’t know exactly know what they’re doing in school, we don’t want to go against what they’re doing at school. So that’s why we kind of shy away from the details, but just trying to help her to enjoy learning.” – P1B

Participant 2 had similar thoughts about extending the learning beyond the text in the book.

‘I’m not spending a lot of time afterwards to sit on the back. [...] I’m probably not spending a lot of time looking at this to go, okay, what are the sounds I need to focus on for the week’. – P2

Participant 4 also expressed her concerns about the benefits homework had on children. Becoming a parent changed her outlook on the role of school-based learning at home, expressing her opinion that *“less is more”*. With a background in educational psychology, she has a great deal of experience and knowledge that would benefit her in engaging in literacy-based learning at home. However, due to her busy schedule, she explains

that anything going home needs to be really simplified down, for it to be achievable.

Previously, as someone who provided additional support to struggling learners, she did not understand how the parents of these children were not following up on the work that she had assigned them. Now as a single mother, she is able to relate more to these parents, and is aware of the time constraints experienced by many whānau. For many whānau, engaging with school-based learning at home is simply not a priority and therefore, participant 4 believes that it may be unreasonable to expect this from these whānau.

“And, you know, it's important for the teacher or the educator, just like me, as a teacher, you know, these parents were paying me a lot of money to spend an hour with their kid two times a week to teach them reading, extra reading. And yet they weren't following up and doing their piece of the whole thing. And it was, [...] important for me that this could make progress with their reading. And that the parents do the homework that I'd set. But what was important for them was that their kid's happy, well fed, a roof over their heads, having the toys that they might want, going on outings together as a family. It just wasn't the highest priority to be doing extra. And in fact, for me to even expect that of the parents now, from a parent perspective... (is) unreasonable. Because that's an extra thing on top of the fact that he's fed, clothed and happy is awesome”. – P4

Theme 7: Screen-time. Research on the educational value of digital literacy for children is still in its early stages, and we are only just starting to understand what the digital shift means for young children's literacy development (Bus, Roskos & Burstein, 2020). All participants discussed to some extent, their child's screen use. Generally, their views about screen-time tended to be similar across all participants (both educational and recreational). According to the interviewed parents, most children are typically allowed to watch a bit of television either in the morning, in the evening, or both, and this generally tends to increase in the weekends, when routine is more relaxed.

“Yeah, so like, if the weather's bad, they might watch a movie. [...] or if the weather's good, like if we're knackered, they might watch a movie. [...] Like our kids don't have iPads or anything like that at the moment. And I don't know if they will, but... like, yeah, we're not anti-screen time, but we're not like pro screen time.” – P1

“TV is only in the weekends, on a Saturday and Sunday morning. And no... we try really hard not to give him... we have a device, and he has access to apps and things, but he hardly would go on it.” – P6

As for device use, most parents reported minimal use. Unsurprisingly however, screen-use inevitably increased over the lockdown period for home learning purposes. One participant shared her thoughts about screen-use, specifically screen based learning, and the overuse of screens not only at home, but also in schools.

“Something that, for me is a real red flag that I have seen as a practice and my own kids school is, at the end of the day, they have screen time before parents pick up. And that screen time I have seen involves a teacher reading a story to a bunch of kids. And yeah, for me [...] there can be an over reliance on technology to take the magic and joy out of books in that way”. – P4

Research by Strouse and Ganea (2017) also found that parents of young children hold a preference for print over digital books, and report more frequent usage of print than electronic books. Parents of today face significant challenges in modern society where books are competing against technology (i.e. television, video games, iPads, etc.). Finding a balance between instilling a love of reading and ensuring that children are enjoying themselves can be difficult once introduced to the technological world (Lee & Yeo, 2014). Being a strong advocate for books, participant 4 describes the sad reality of how technology is over-used within the education system.

“And I think we need to evolve with the research on that because the Neuroscience tells us that our children's brains are not benefiting from too much exposure to yeah, screen based learning. There's definitely some stuff in terms of engaging some kids via the screen and educational software and all that. But I think there's a tendency to overuse some of these technological methods [...] which distracts us from actual human to human - as the most profound way that you can have [...] yeah spark that love of learning.” – P4

Despite her views, and limiting her children's screen-time as much as possible, the reality is that at times, screens and devices are necessary to keep the children busy during times like lockdown, when jobs need to be done.

“But now and again, as a single mum, it's my only option if I want to get anything done.” – P4

The effects of COVID-19

Theme 8: Lockdown. Lockdown was a time for most parents, across Aotearoa, where they were forced to take on an additional role in their child's learning. It is likely that some whānau, this would have been extremely difficult, particularly for those who do not have access to the appropriate resources (devices, wifi, etc.) needed to support their child's learning from home. Although the participants in this study did not experience these difficulties, they were able to share some of their thoughts about how they thought the August 2021 lockdown went for them, and their whānau, and the strategies that they had in place to overcome any challenges they had during this unprecedented time. Most parents reported positive experiences from lockdown, with most of the work assigned being optional and therefore, very manageable. Participant 5 was particularly impressed with how the lockdown went for her and her whānau. Not only was the work assigned optional but she discussed how it was fun, and varied for her daughter.

“But I was really impressed through the COVID, and just the lockdown. The online learning was changing every week. And it was really varied and fun, and all sorts of different pages they could click into. So I found them to be really great, and they’d have a story that they’d have online every day. And they’d give lists of things you could do, like send out scavenger hunts in the garden. So I thought they were really good actually.” – P6

Other participants were also impressed with the variation with home learning assigned during lockdown which often involved fun activities for the children to engage with. So, you can imagine for parents who are not limited by time, this would be viewed in a positive light, but for others this was not the case.

As these children are learning to read and write in their first year of primary school, the focus for all parents that were interviewed, was not making sure that they were excelling above their peers, but rather, that they were making good progress and self-improvement. When speaking about their lockdown experience, two participants mentioned feeling at ease knowing that their child would not be missing out or disadvantaged academically during the initial, brief lockdown that occurred in August 2021. This made lockdown for them very manageable, as it meant that they were not stressing about making sure they hand in every piece of work assigned to them during this time.

“At five, she's not gonna lose out lots. And you know, that that kind of... the relationship and the attachment stuff is so important. And that's been a really nice thing about lockdown is just getting really nice time together.” – P1B

“You know, she's gonna be a few weeks without sitting in school...I'm not going to stress about needing to do all of this home learning with her. But if she was of the age where there's NCEA or you know, like, she's really on the cusp of that learning time, I would have felt a lot more pressure [...] - how do I actually get her to succeed during lockdown and her learning? But at this age, I felt it wasn't a priority”. – P2

Two participants spoke about their initial motivation to engage with the school-based learning at home by attending zoom meetings; however, after a while these children were no longer interested in attending. Both parents respected this decision and instead, opted for a different approach to better meet the child's needs.

“There was a zoom every day and Celia again, being anxious and anti-social was not interested. So we kind of push that she had to do it - bribery. But after three or four days, and having to sit through it myself, we gave up on the zooms. But I said, she didn't have to do the zoom, but she had to be doing school activities during that zoom time, not doing anything else” – P2

“Yeah, um, towards the end, he just was over. He didn't want to do it anymore. And I...not gave up, but I just was like... as time had gone on... even though it wasn't that long this time, we just got more relaxed [...]and we only did the bare minimum, or, just did reading, cause we just couldn't be bothered.” – P6

Some found the August 2021 lockdown much more difficult to manage in comparison to the 2020 lockdown. During the 2020 lockdown, participant 4 acknowledged having her husband around to help out where needed. However, during the most recent lockdown, she was working full-time as a single parent, while her husband was overseas. This proved to be a real challenge for her to fit in home learning activities around her busy schedule, in which she believed to have perhaps over-used screen-time more than she would have liked, in order for her to get work done, and attend meetings during the day.

“And literally just, was not able to anything kind of prescribed with the kids. If anything, I just needed to feed their attention, so that I could then go and do my thing. And, and of course, used probably over my standards, I overused screen time”. – P4

She also acknowledged the frustrations that teachers had when students were not turning in the work assigned by them, but as parent being able to step into that teaching role can be really difficult.

“Yeah. So it's even though it's funny with lockdown because it was a real priority for teachers [...], and a real frustration for them that none of their students were doing all the work that was set, but as a parent, to step into a teaching role with your child is really difficult. Unless it's part of something that you, yourself value anyway” – P4

Particularly for the younger children, parental support was essential given that most child are this age are not fully autonomous in managing the assigned learning activities. Participant 6 described the lockdown experience in August in a less positive light, describing it as “*horrendous*” due to the large workloads assigned to both of her young children (5 and 7 years old), which proved very demanding. Aware of the fact that the work assigned to the children was optional, participant 6 wanted to keep some sort of routine, to ensure that her whānau did not fall into unproductive habits during this time. Participant 6 managed this heavy workload by drawing up a timetable for each day of the week, and writing down what was required of the children on each day. Having the luxury of time came in handy for this participant, which allowed her to organise and stay on top of the work that was required of her children. Unsurprisingly, after a while her son lost some of his motivation as previously mentioned. Not wanting to force him into doing anything he does not want to, participant 6 became more relaxed.

CHAPTER 4: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the home literacy environment of children in their first year of primary school to better understand the facilitators of successful home literacy engagement amidst a changing and unpredictable climate. This was addressed through semi-structured interviews with seven parents of six children in their first year of primary school. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews. Eight themes were identified from analysing the data using thematic analysis, which fit under the three over-arching aims. These were: time, a positive relationship with the school, child's reading interest and motivation, routine, siblings, structured approach to learning, screen-time and lockdown.

The findings from this study provide some insight into the triumphs and the struggles that parents experience, as well as the strategies they use to mitigate these challenges during these unprecedented COVID-19 times. Through these discussions with parents, common themes appeared identifying certain areas of the home literacy environment and the education system that may be in need of additional support. This chapter discusses an overall summary of the key findings. Subsequently a discussion of the limitations will be outlined. Finally, implications from these findings as well as opportunities for future research will be discussed.

Key Findings

Facilitators. Children are learning and developing all the time, without even realising. A common facilitator reported by parents was putting routines in place which allowed children to not only learn organisational and time management skills, but also for these children to gain autonomy over the tasks required of them before and after school. Additionally, when children are organised, this allows time to fit in meaningful tasks such as shared reading

which for all participants, has been an important part of their everyday life routines, beginning right from birth for some.

It became apparent during the interviews that making reading part of these children's daily routines has instilled a natural love of reading for many of these children. Once this love of reading is established early in the child's life, this is likely to continue to grow. For some participants, their child's love of reading has grown to the point where they have become more independent with their reading, initiating reading behaviours on their own accord.

For a few of the participants interviewed, this was the first time being a parent of a school child. This too can be a daunting experience for parents trying to gauge how involved in their child's learning they need to be. Communication between home and school is a key driver in the process of developing a positive relationship. Effective home-school partnerships occur when there is a mutual respect and understanding of expectations regarding the child (Macfarlane et al., 2014; Muscott, Szcesniul, Berk, Staub, Hoover & Perry-Chisholm, 2008; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). For most participants in the present study, a positive relationship with the classroom teacher was discussed, where participants felt as though they could approach the teacher with any questions or concerns. Consistent with findings by Macfarlane and colleagues (2014), which found support from whānau and teachers to be a vital component for success, this finding further emphasises the importance of relationships between the child, their whānau and the classroom teacher. To benefit our indigenous Māori students, this means encouraging teachers to create a classroom environment where students feel connected to their culture - making an effort to integrate a cultural approach within their pedagogical method.

When teachers are not proactive communicators, parents are less likely to reach out to teachers when they are in need of support (Taliaferro, DeCuir-Gunby & Allen-Ackard, 2009). In the present study, participants reported on the lack of communication from the classroom teacher when it comes to informing parents about what their child is learning at school, how they can support their child's learning at home (so that they can reinforce this learning at home), and whether their child is at the level they are meant to be, which for some participants appeared to be unclear.

Challenges. The year 2021 was difficult for many, in the midst of living through a global pandemic. Almost all parents that were interviewed reported both unique and common challenges that they experienced over the course of the year, as their child commenced formal education. For some, this was their first child to start school with others having more experience having gone through the transition with their older children.

Fortunately, in the present sample, none of the participants' children presented with any major academic difficulties, all performing at the level they should be. Therefore, the challenges reported in the present study are reflective of a specific population of parents who appear to be responsive to their child's learning by engaging in a range of activities and experiences at home. A common challenge among participants was finding the time to engage with literacy at home in the busy lives of these whānau. This theme resonated with most participants, as it could be defined in a broad sense including; time spent engaging in literacy with their child(ren), time spent engaging in their own literacy behaviours for role modelling purposes, as well as finding the appropriate time that works for the child's social-emotional health. Spending 6 hours a day, 5 days a week at school is tiresome for many children, particularly during that initial transition to primary school. As much as these parents would like to dedicate lots of time and energy into school-based learning at home, realistically, what was more important to these parents is that their children are enjoying their

time at home, and are engaging in activities and experiences that they perceive to be fun and interesting, in the hopes that learning occurs during the process.

Young children possess a tendency to imitate key role models in their lives (Bandura, 1997). Although most participants in the present study admitted that they were not engaging in their own personal literacy behaviours as much as they would like to, they all still appear to be role modelling a number of positive behaviours that support their child's literacy development. This includes using environmental stimuli as a tool, and discussing interesting topics with their children as they go about their daily lives.

Some parents only have a limited time to spend with their children during the week and therefore, spending quality time with their children was more important for these participants. During the interviews it became evident that parents much prefer a less structured approach where learning occurs much more naturally and spontaneously. Learning that is integrated naturally within already established routines means that parents are not restricted by time. Instead, parents can spend more time engaging in activities that are valued as more meaningful (such as shared reading), at a time that works for them.

For many children, the transition to primary school can be a difficult and daunting experience. When children transition from pre-school (or other care arrangements prior to school) to primary school, there is a shift from a socially oriented approach to a largely cognitive approach to teaching and learning. This generally high level of structure that is required of children once they enter the formal education system demands more from children in terms of not only academic abilities but also their behaviour and social-emotional competence (Margetts, 2002). For some children this may not have developed fully. Some children need that additional emotional support during this time as discussed by participant 2 who plays a crucial role in her child's transition from home to school on a daily basis.

Generally, parents had strategies in place to deal with resistance at home. When the child is not interested in a learning activity or for whatever reason, does not want to engage, it was common among participants to delay the activity and re-evaluate when the child is feeling more emotionally ready. As participant 1B mentioned, sometimes it is just not worth the battle. Additionally, as discussed by participant 4, too much pressure on children (particularly at this age) is likely going to make the child anti-reading. Research by Putwain, Becker, Symes and Pekrun (2018) found enjoyment to be positively correlated with, and boredom negatively correlated with academic achievement; therefore, it is important that children are enjoying learning at home so that they do not end up resenting it.

Lockdown. Finally, the findings revealed the effect that lockdown had on these whānau during another wave of uncertainty. Fortunately in the present study sample, all participants had access to the internet and some type of device. It is important however, to acknowledge that this was not the case for many whānau across the country, which would have made home learning very difficult. Although lockdown was a difficult time, for many whānau this experience brought them together, enabling whānau to spend quality time together to connect. Most participants had routines in place to manage the workload while also being able to allocate time to engage in fun activities that they may not have been able to do otherwise. Living through a global pandemic has been a novel experience for everyone, and learning online has provided children with a new way of learning that for some (as reported in the interviews) worked really well, and for others was a challenge.

Implications

The literature provides ample evidence to suggest that the home literacy environment can facilitate young learner's academic success (e.g. Dong, Wu, Dong & Tang, 2020; Niklas & Schneider, 2015). The present research highlights aspects of the home literacy environment that participants believed affected the way they engage with their child in both a

positive and negative light. Fortunately, most participants responded overall positively to the questions that were asked during these interviews, with some reporting no major challenges in supporting their child's learning at home.

Schools and teachers play a particularly large role in enhancing and supporting parents to provide their children with a literacy rich home environment (Alston-Abel & Berninger, 2018). Cultural and ethnic differences between teachers and whānau can give rise to additional challenges, which is why it is important for teachers to recognise, accept, include and extend the diverse set of skills of children from different cultural backgrounds (Glynn, Berryman & Glynn, 2000). As discussed in Hall, Hornby and Macfarlane (2015), parents' past experience within the education system can influence how they engage with their child's learning, with several participants reporting negative educational experiences which meant for some whānau, there is a reluctance to approach the school.

Of the participants who did not recall receiving the BSLA parent handouts from their child's classroom teacher, all but one believed that they would benefit from a physical copy that they could have in front of them and refer to during the day. Given that most participants reported implementing unstructured activities as their preferred method of learning at home, these handouts provide a fun and easy way to incorporate literacy learning without making it feel like learning, but rather experience and activities-based. At the same time, the activities allow parents to reinforce what the child is already learning at school each week. As evidenced by participants' responses in the present study, it appears that not all BSLA teachers are providing these handouts to parents. Perhaps greater emphasis on the importance and desire for this information from whānau would increase uptake of this aspect of BSLA whānau engagement. A further recommendation for the BSLA is to directly address whānau concerns about highly structured school environments for new entrants. The BSLA is a structured approach to learning, which many participants did not believe was the ideal way

for young children to learn. Greater engagement around the proven benefits of taking this type of structured approach to teaching early literacy skills in schools may help to alleviate any whānau concerns.

When discussing home literacy, participants generally believed that this learning had to be structured, equivalent to homework, which some parents did not like. However research by Bomarito (2017) suggests that homework does not yield benefits for young children, and causes additional unnecessary stress for whānau. Rather, young children need to be exposed to a range of different activities and experiences that introduce them to concepts that support their learning, while at the same time promoting fun and engagement (Burgess, 2011). Through discussion with these participant regarding the types of activities that occur within the home, it is evident that learning is occurring all the time through even the simplest of tasks such as getting ready for school in the morning. This further emphasises the need to provide parents with resources and tools to be able to incorporate literacy learning into their already established routines.

The sibling relationship can be used as a resource for learning literacy and language concepts when a wide variety of literacy materials are available in the home (Segal, Howe, Persram, Martin-Chang, & Ross, 2018). Some participants in the present study briefly discussed this. More parents should be aware that the sibling relationship is a context in which both teaching and learning can occur spontaneously; therefore, easing the pressure, particularly for busy parents who are limited by time. Most parents had other children who are relatively close in age, and although some may not yet be at the age where this can occur without parental support, it is something to consider as the child gets older. Additionally, utilising these relationships within Māori whānau could be an effective strategy to promote Māori engagement. Interdependence and the role of extended whānau is highly valued for many Māori, alongside the importance of a holistic conceptualisation of wellbeing

(Rolleston, McDonald & Miskelly, 2021). In a study by Rolleston, McDonald and Miskelly (2021), participants discussed flourishing from a holistic perspective where individual success is dependent on collective action. Collective wellbeing is demonstrated through shared experiences and relationships with others that provide a sense of belonging and understanding of responsibilities within the whānau. When whānau work together and share ideas, they are supporting each other to succeed.

Qualitative research by Neuman and Guterman (2017) distinguishes two dimensions of structure: content and process in elective home education (EHE) environments (commonly referred to as home-schooling). Process refers to the pedagogical approach, or timeframes allocated for learning, and content refers to the subject matter to be learned. Some responses from this study resonated with participants responses from the present study. Participants found spontaneous learning to be more desirable, while externally dictated learning was seen as undesirable and even ineffective. While this type of learning context is different to the participants interviewed in the present study, whose children all attended conventional primary school education, however, it acknowledges the importance of promoting the type of learning that is catered to the child rather than going through the process of “getting it done”.

When parents encourage literacy behaviours at home while giving children control over what they do, children are more likely to gain an interest in these activities (Saracho, 2017). Parents can do this by making it part of their day-to-day routines, which was commonly reported by participants in the present study. For many of these whānau, learning is integrated in shared activities on ways to handle day-to-day events where children are guided by their parents but not forced. Having established routines both before and after school ensured that tasks are completed in a timely manner, allowing for additional time for free-play. The process of completing such tasks builds the foundation for conceptual knowledge and language to develop (Lee & Yeo, 2014). Additionally, exposing children to

repeated, familiar events teaches children valuable skills such as time management and being organised.

Research on the educational value of digital literacy for children is still in its early stages. We are only just beginning to understand what the digital shift means for young children's literacy development (Bus, Roskos & Burstein, 2020). Parents today face challenges in modern society where books are competing against technology (i.e. television, video games, iPads, etc.). Finding a balance between instilling a love for reading and ensuring that children are enjoying themselves can be difficult once children are introduced to the technological world (Lee & Yeo, 2014). One participant in the present study expressed her concerns about the use of digital books in school *taking away the magic and joy* from print books. In the technological revolution that we live in, this can be hard to control, particularly when this is happening whilst the children are at school. Perhaps schools need to put guidelines in place to ensure that screen-use is kept to a minimum, and only used as an educational tool rather than a recreational one.

Lockdown is a prime example of how technology has come to consume the way we live our lives. With parents working from home, and children learning from home, technology has become an essential resource for a number of reasons. With most of the school-based learning being online, those without access to internet and/or devices simply missed out. Parents in the present study believed their children were at an age where they could afford to miss out on learning during these lockdown periods. However, those who do not have access to essential resources (e.g. devices) will continue to be subjected to intergenerational disadvantage if action is not taken (Hunia et al., 2020). Despite efforts by the Ministry of Education to send out printed learning packs and devices to low SES communities, these students still continue to fall further behind (Mutch, 2021). Māori communities across the motu have been disproportionately affected by this digital divide,

putting additional stress on our most vulnerable population in Aotearoa (Hunia et al., 2020; Mutch, 2021). Fortunately, this was not the case for any participants in the present study, placing these whānau at an advantage, enabling them to undertake online learning at home. Regardless, participants in the present study still experienced a number of different challenges as discussed in the results section.

Many of the participating whānau with younger children were required to provide one to one support, given that most children at this age are not fully autonomous in managing the assigned learning activities. Despite most schools offering a flexible and often optional approach to home learning, some parents still have full-time obligations such as work commitments, that are less adaptable, making it extremely difficult for parents to do both. Perhaps more workplaces should offer this flexible approach to allow parents to spend more time with their children. While some participants felt as though getting through all the tasks would help keep the whānau motivated and productive, other parents were reassured by the fact that their child is at an age where missing out on school is not going to have a dramatic effect on their learning. While there was no one-size fits all approach to home learning during lockdown, most parents managed to push through in spite of these challenges.

Limitations and Future Research

This study adds new insight to the existing research on the home literacy environment by exploring and identifying facilitators of learning success as well as the challenges, including how whānau overcome these challenges. Additionally, due to the events that occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were able to share their experience of lockdown in the context of Aotearoa. The present study did however, encounter limitations along the way which affected certain aspects of the research process.

Aotearoa demonstrates one of the largest gaps in academic achievement between high and low achievers (Greaney & Arrow, 2010; Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006), with

international and national surveys of literacy indicating that indigenous Māori and Pasifika students are generally performing at lower levels compared to their Pākeha counterparts (Marie, Fergusson & Boden, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2017; Sutherland, 2019; Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2006). Unfortunately, in the present study there was a lack of Māori participants to warrant conducting a separate case study analysis, as originally planned. An important component of Kaupapa Māori Research is acknowledging Māori knowledge, worldviews, perspectives and practices (Pihama, 2010). The present study implemented a qualitative approach as it allows participants to share lived experiences rather than responses being restricted by a set of predetermined options. It may be the case that Māori were discouraged out of fear of being judged for not doing what they think is expected of them, to support their child's learning at home. Future research should therefore aim to get Māori whānau engaged in other ways that encourage discussion in an environment where Māori feel more comfortable. Perhaps conducting focus groups with Māori could break down those power imbalances between the researcher and participant by allowing a group of people from similar backgrounds to talk freely about their experiences within a safe, shared space.

Another major limitation of the present study was the impact of COVID-19, affecting the research process in a number of ways. Not long after ethics approval was received, Aotearoa was put into a strict level 4 lockdown. This meant that interviews could not go ahead in-person as originally planned. Fortunately, after an amendment to the original ethics application (See Appendix G) interviews were able to go ahead online over zoom. The ongoing effects of COVID-19 impacted the schools that were more affected by lockdown restrictions, such as Tāmaki Makaurau and Waikato where a number of BSLA schools are located. This meant that some teachers had to delay the start date of the program or opted out entirely as they were not able to continue with the BSLA content online. Additionally, it is likely that a number of whānau did not have access to the internet or email and therefore,

may not have been able to respond to the recruitment email. These limitations were unfortunately out of the researcher's control.

The participants in the present study appeared to be relatively involved in their children's education and, therefore, are likely only representative of a certain population of parents who actively make the effort to take part in a research study on the home literacy environment. These participants reported substantially more facilitators than challenges and took on more of an active approach in their child's learning. While it is encouraging to see that some parents are actively seeking ways that they can support their children's learning at home, it is harder to identify gaps that may be in need of more support. However, the findings from the present study do provide insight into the different ways that parents manage home learning, particularly in the current climate of living through a global pandemic. Results from this study can be transformed into strategies that aim to build resilience in our disadvantaged population groups. This again emphasises the need for future research to investigate ways in which we can engage whānau who appear harder to reach.

Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to explore the facilitators and challenges to successful home literacy engagement at school entry, the critical period when children are learning to read and write. The results from this study suggest that parents much prefer a loose structure to home learning as opposed to the structured approach to learning that is present within most classroom settings. Parents can make use of simple tasks that occur naturally, to teach children a range of valuable skills that they may not necessarily gain exposure to in the classroom (such as learning to be independent when completing required tasks at home). The present study also provided insight into the experiences of whānau whilst learning and working from home during lockdown, and how most participants in the present study managed to persevere when times were challenging. This study can be used to inform

parents about how literacy is framed and valued among different whānau, and how literacy experiences can be integrated into everyday life routines, particularly for busy whānau who are limited by time.

In Aotearoa, Māori have been persistently more susceptible to experiencing hardship across a number of domains including education (Reid, Taylor-Moore & Varona, 2014). Identifying facilitating factors to successful home literacy engagement, while acknowledging the challenges is a step towards ‘Whakapawera’ (overcoming hardship) through ongoing resilience rather than simply accepting the absence of hardship (Rolleston, McDonald & Miskelly, 2021). Although the home literacy environment is a well-researched topic, there is still a need for further research that targets our most vulnerable populations which include but are not limited to; whānau from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and Māori and Pasifika whānau, given the present and persistent disparities in achievement in Aotearoa.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



Te Kāhui Pā Harakeke
Child Well-being Research Institute



BETTER START
LITERACY APPROACH
Te Ara Kōwhiri

Eke pānui, ake tamaiti
Set sail on reading, uplift the child

WHĀNAU RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS WANTED

WHO? Parents/primary caregivers of children in Year 0/1
WHAT? Participate in an interview to discuss the challenges and helpful strategies that **you** think support your child's learning within the home
WHY? To help us promote positive learning experiences within the home for whānau and tamariki across Aotearoa

Participants will receive:

- 1x \$40 Pak'n Save voucher
- 1x set of storybooks

What Does Participation Involve?

- A 30-40 minute interview in person or via zoom
- Share your thoughts about the home learning environment – What are the challenges? What works well? What has been your experience with the Better Start Literacy Approach?





If you are interested in participating contact:
Phoenix-Rose Mansell - prm95@uclive.ac.nz
or
Megan Gath – megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz
(University of Canterbury)

This project has been approved by the UC Human Ethics Committee (HEC Ref: 2021/74)



Appendix B: Human Ethics Committee Approval



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2021/74

20 July 2021

Phoenix-Rose Mansell
School of Health Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Phoenix-Rose

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal “Exploring the Barriers and Facilitators to Home Literacy Engagement at School Entry” has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 12th July 2021.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DS' followed by a stylized flourish.

Dr Dean Sutherland
Chair
University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Child Well-Being Research Institute
Telephone: +64 3 369 1054
Email: megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz
June 2021
HEC Ref: 2021-74

**Exploring the Barriers and Facilitators to Home Literacy Engagement at
School Entry
Information Sheet for Whānau**

Kia Ora, my name is Phoenix-Rose Mansell and I am a Masters student studying Child and Family Psychology (CFPY) at the University of Canterbury. As part of my second year of the CFPY Master's degree, I will be running a study which will eventually lead into a thesis. The aim of my study is to explore whānau engagement with the Better Start Literacy Approach, with a specific focus on the types of activities and experiences that support your child's reading, writing and oral language at home, as they are starting primary school. Examples of the types of activities/experiences that whānau might engage in with their child at home include shared reading, word games, or even simply pointing out words/letters in the environment.

You have been invited to participate in this study as you have a child in his/her first year of primary school, and is currently involved in the Better Start Literacy Approach, a new and interesting way of teaching literacy in the classroom that focuses on individual sounds of the letters and words your child is learning.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be to participate in an interview either via zoom or in-person, discussing the challenges you face, as well as useful strategies that help you to engage in your child's learning at home. The interview will be video-recorded for later transcription and analysis. The (zoom) video component will be deleted and only the audio recording will be retained and stored in a password protected file on UC's computer network.

The following questions are examples of the types of questions you can expect in the interview; "What challenges do you experience in supporting your child's learning at home?", "What type of activities/experiences do you think supports your child's reading, writing and oral language at home?", "What kind of support do you think would help you better engage in your child's learning at home?".

The duration of the interview will take approximately 30 – 40 minutes. Your time and participation will be gifted a \$40 Pak'n Save voucher, as well as a set of children's storybooks, which will be sent to your home address. Funding for these costs will be provided by the Ministry of Education.

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, the gap between Māori and non-Māori academic achievement is getting wider and therefore, this study will help to identify areas that may need more support, so that we can work towards closing this gap. A case study analysis for Māori will help us to identify any challenges or helpful strategies that our Māori whānau experience in engaging in home learning with their child. This research project has received advice from the University of Canterbury's Kaiārahi Māori (College of Education) to ensure that the tasks carried out in this research project is respectful and sensitive to everyone involved.

We understand that for many whānau, there are a number of challenges or barriers involved with engaging in activities/experiences that support their child's learning at home. Additionally, we understand that not everyone will have access to resources (e.g. books) at home to support their child's learning. Discussing these topics helps us identify and understand areas that parents/caregivers find difficult but also, useful strategies that work for you when engaging with your child. Your participation is voluntary, and so if you do not feel comfortable answering certain questions, you can decline to answer. Throughout the research process you are more than welcome to raise any concerns that you have about the project, and we will be sure to support you through these when necessary. If you decide that you no longer want to be involved with the project, you can withdraw at any time, and all your information will be removed.

The results of the project may be published however, your data will be strictly confidential throughout the project and your identity will not be made public under any circumstances. If we quote any of your responses in the final report we will use a pseudonym (a fake name). No individual person (including yourself) will be identifiable from the research results.

To ensure confidentiality, your data will be given a unique research code and will not be associated with your name or identifying information. Interview data will be saved and stored onto the UC server within a restricted folder with password protection. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this data which will be securely destroyed 5 years after completion of the research project. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

If you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcript to review, this will be provided to you via email, once the interview has been fully transcribed. Once this is sent to you, you will be given 4 weeks to review the transcript and give suggestions of any changes you would like to be made (if appropriate). Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcript and/or the summary of results of the project. There will be a space for you provide your contact details on the consent form if you choose to give permission for the researcher to contact you for further follow-up questions after the interview.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for part two of the Master of Science in Child and Family Psychology by Phoenix-Rose Mansell under the supervision of Megan Gath, who can be contacted at megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to review and complete the outlined consent form. Please sign, scan/take a photo of the consent form, and return via email to: megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Child Well-being Research Institute
 Telephone: +64 391 054
 Email: prm95@uclive.ac.nz

**Exploring the Barriers and Facilitators to Home Literacy Engagement at
 School Entry
 Consent Form for Whānau**

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what is required of me if I agree to take part in the research.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided.
- ☐ I understand that this interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor, and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants.
- ☐ I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after five years.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher Phoenix-Rose Mansell at prm95@uclive.ac.nz or supervisor Megan Gath at megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)
- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- ☐ I would like to receive a copy of the transcript to review.
- ☐ I agree to be contacted for follow-up questions if necessary
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email address (*to receive a summary of the results or a copy of the transcript to review*):

Phone number: _____

Please return this signed consent via email to: megan.gath@canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

A. (Topic) Routines/activities/hobbies/interests - day-to-day life experiences

1. To start off I want you to run me through a typical school day for (*child's name*) to give me more of an idea of the types of activities your child is involved in before and after school (*does not have to be literacy related*) ☐

Prompts:

- What kinds of things does he/she really love doing (*i.e. hobbies/interests*) ☐
- And is there anything that he/she doesn't particularly enjoy doing? ☐
- *How do you manage that?*

2. How does your child's routine change in the weekend? ☐

B. Literacy Development

1. In your opinion, how important is it that your child learns to read and write in their first year of primary school? ☐

Prompts

- What role do you think language and reading plays in your child's life? ☐
- How important do you think **early** reading success is for your child's future education? ☐
- Why do you think this? ☐
- What types of home learning activities or experiences **do you think** supports your child learn to read and write at home? ☐
- Where do you access books for reading to your child at home: e.g. library, have them in the home, from whānau (**only ask this question if they discuss book reading as an activity that they engage in**) ☐

2. Tell me about the types of reading and writing activities that your child was interested in *before* they started primary school ☐

Prompts

- How early in your child's life did you begin to engage in these activities or experiences? ☐
- How often would you engage in these activities/experiences? ☐

3. Now that your child has started primary school, have these activities/experiences changed? (If at all) ☐

Prompts:

- Some parents prefer to work these activities into their everyday life routines – is this something you like to do? ☐
 - If so, how? ☐
- Does your child enjoy school? ☐
- How did he/she adapt to starting school? ☐
- Do you have high expectations for your child's learning? ☐
 - Do you see this as a good thing or not so good? ☐

4. What type of early childhood education did your child receive before starting primary school? (i.e. home based, home care, kindergarten, play center, etc) ☐

E. (Topic) BSLA engagement

1. Did you attend one of the Better Start Literacy (reading) workshops at your child's school? ☐

Prompts:

- If **no**, tell me about the challenges of attending these types of workshops ☐
- What might help you be able to attend in the future? ☐
- If **yes** – how did you find the workshop? ☐
- Did you find it useful? ☐
- Has it changed anything about your behaviour or interactions with your child? ☐

F. (Topic) Home Literacy Environment

1. Tell me about the types of reading and/or writing activities that you personally like to engage in at home (for pleasure) (role modelling) ☐

Prompts:

- Do you find that your child shows interest in what you're doing? ☐

2. Has your child been bringing home the new ready to read books (Ready to Read Phonics Plus books) that the Ministry of Education has recently released? (have some to show) ☐

If **yes**, follow up with:

- Tell me how you find reading these books with your child? ☐
- What do you think about the integration of Te Reo Māori in the books? ☐

Prompts:

- What aspects did you find useful? ☐
- What does **your child** like about these books? ☐
- Did you try the teaching notes at the back of the book? ☐
- Tell me about how that went for you and your child ☐



- Have those changed the way you read other books with your child in any way?

If **no**, follow up with:

- What type of readers are coming home from school? (*series name of readers*) ☐

3. As part of the Better Start Literacy Approach, teachers have been sending letters out to parents each week to show what your child has been learning in class, with some fun activities that you can do at home to support your child's learning. Do you recall receiving these letters? ☐

If **yes**, follow up with:

- Have you found these letters helpful (in terms of keeping up to date with what your child has been learning at school) ☐
- Have you tried using the suggested activities? ☐

4. Apart from English, are there any other languages spoken within the home? ☐

G. (Topic) Barriers and Facilitators

1. In the past or present, have you experienced any barriers that have affected your ability to successfully engage in home learning experiences/support your child's learning at home? ☐

Prompts:

- Structural - e.g. *time, having a quiet space* ☐
- Child-related - e.g. *receptivity (i.e. Having back and forth conversations), interest* ☐
- Personal - e.g. *beliefs about the home learning environment, lack of knowledge* ☐

- How many people are there in your whānau living at home? ☐
- How does this impact home learning experiences? ☐

2. What are some helpful or useful strategies that you use to improve the learning experiences that support your child learn to read and write at home? ☐

Prompts:

- How do you try to make these experiences more enjoyable for your child? ☐
- What kind of support do you think would help you to be able to better engage in learning experiences at home? ☐
- How does your child's school support you with how to engage in home learning activities in the home (if at all)? ☐

5. During lockdown you probably had to take on more of a role in your child's learning, how did that go for you? ☐

Prompts:

- What were the major challenges?
- What worked well for you?
- Did you feel supported? – e.g. by your child's teacher
- What did this experience teach you?

H. (Topic) Social-emotional Development/Child Behaviour

1. How does your child's behaviour affect these home learning experiences? ☐

→ Can be positive or negative behaviours

Prompts:Negative:

- How do these challenges affect your ability to successfully engage in these activities with your child? ☐
- When your child does not seem interested in an activity, what do you do? ☐

Positive:

- Do you feel as though your child is eager to learn? ☐
→ How do you think this affects the interactions you have with your child?
- Is your child a self-directed learner at home (e.g. does she choose to read books on his/her own)? ☐
- **It is common for children to struggle to be still and pay attention for too long – do you think that this is a challenge for your child?** ☐

If yes, follow-up with:

- How do you approach these types of situations?

2. Shared reading can be a good opportunity to teach children about feelings and emotions as they start to learn how to express their own needs and feelings, as well as how to interact with others – is this something you try to teach your child at home?

I. (Topic) Parental Beliefs/Attitudes/Expectations

1. In your opinion how important is it for you to engage in experiences that teach your child to read and write at home ☐

Prompts:

- What role do you think you play in your child's learning (if at all)? ☐

- Many parents don't feel confident teaching reading and writing skills to their children, what has your experience been? ☐

Appendix F: BSLA Parent Handout

This week your child's class is reading



WORDS

Some new words
your child is learning

SOUNDS

Some new sounds
your child is learning



'm' as in mud, man and moon
'd' as in duck and dog

Some fun ways you can play with sounds at home

- Use playdough, modelling clay, pipe cleaners or even blocks to make the shapes of this week's letters. Practice making the 'm' sound when you're creating your letters.
- Talk about how the letter looks, and then brainstorm some words that start with its sound. Your child may remember some of the words from class to start you off! When your child finds a word encourage them to say the name and the letter sound.
- e.g., mug starts with an 'm' sound.
- Write the target letters down around your home, perhaps on your windows or on big pieces of paper - draw your child's attention to them every time you see them and practice the sound.
- Hide objects or toys that start with the same letter as the one you are targeting and go on a 'letter' treasure hunt - see who can get the most toys, or objects, that start with each letter. When they find them get them to yell out the sound!
- If you are reading a book with them, see who can find any words that start with a 'm' or a 'd' the fastest. If they are able to, get them to read the word aloud, or support them in doing this. Practice making the 'm' or 'd' sound.

Appendix G: Human Ethics Committee Approval for Amendment 1



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2021/74 Amendment 1

26 August 2021

Phoenix-Rose Mansell
School of Health Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Phoenix-Rose

Thank you for your request for an amendment to your research proposal "Exploring the Barriers and Facilitators to Home Literacy Engagement at School Entry" as outlined in your email dated 23rd August 2021.

I am pleased to advise that this request has been considered and approved by the Human Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Sutherland'.

Dr Dean Sutherland
Chair, Human Ethics Committee