

Principles and Practices in Four New Zealand Family Focused Adult Literacy Programs: Towards wellbeing in diverse communities

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Abstract

The field of family literacy, both theory and practice, has much to offer adult literacy education. However, family approaches in adult literacy are under-theorised and underdeveloped if the holistic wellbeing of the intended participants in programs based on these approaches is the primary concern. This article discusses one dimension of a larger study which explored the wellbeing-related effects of participation in four family focused adult literacy programs in New Zealand. This article discusses the principles and practices that were common across the programs. The study found that, despite differences in program content, foci and approaches, common principles and practices reflected shared values and beliefs about literacy and about people which shaped the program design and participants' experiences of the program. I reaffirm the ideological nature of literacy, highlighting the necessity of paying attention to values and beliefs in literacy programs in order that the effects of involvement in them are in the best interests of individual participants, their families and their communities.

Introduction

Despite little progress in New Zealand on government policy to support family focused approaches in adult literacy and numeracy education, such approaches have been part of the New Zealand adult literacy milieu for over a decade. In an era in which the importance of meaningful context for successful adult learning is well understood, family is recognised as one important arena in which adults might develop their literacy and numeracy abilities. Family is named in government adult literacy policy documents as a relevant context for adult learning alongside the workplace and resettlement (Tertiary Education Commission 2008). The first use of the term 'family literacy programs' in New Zealand appears to have been in the adult literacy sector, although many examples of family focused approaches are to be found in the education field more generally (for example, Hohepa and McNaughton 2003, McNaughton 2001, Phillips and McNaughton 1990).

Early interest in family approaches in adult literacy contexts coincided with heightened activity by the New Zealand government

following the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1996 (Walker, Udy and Pole 1997). The survey showed that over 1 million New Zealand adults aged from 16 and 65 years had levels of literacy and numeracy below those thought necessary for participation in a knowledge-based economy and society. This was reflected in results such as 51% of all adults recording scores below Level 3 on the IALS scale (the level deemed necessary for participation in the economy and society) in document literacy. Disproportionate numbers of Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pacific islands people who have settled or been raised in New Zealand featured in the IALS results. For example, 70% of Māori adults and 66% of Pacific adults were below Level 3 on the measure of document literacy. The extent of the problem in terms of numbers of adults with low skills led to the development of the New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy (the Adult Literacy Strategy) (Ministry of Education 2001) and the inclusion of a foundation learning strand in the Tertiary Education Strategy (Ministry of Education 2002). These strategies led to a decade of infrastructural development aimed at improving the quality of and access to adult literacy education, mainly within the Learning for Living project (see for example, Ministry of Education 2004).

Whilst results had improved in the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) conducted in 2006, mid-way through the development period, they were still poor, both overall and for Māori and Pacific peoples (Satherley, Lawes and Sok 2008). In document literacy, for example, 43% of all adults, 64% of Māori adults and 57% of Pacific adults were still below Level 3.

Whilst working for the Tertiary Education Commission, I became interested in the potential of family approaches to relate to the concerns and interests of people in their daily lives and, therefore, to be attractive to adults and families who might not otherwise actively engage in literacy and numeracy learning. Later, I analysed 84 successful applications to the 2006 Tertiary Education Commission Adult Foundation Learning Pool. This fund supported almost all English language-based adult literacy education in New Zealand above ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) level. I found that elements of family approaches featured in large numbers of adult literacy programs in proportional terms (Furness 2006, 2009). Sixty-eight percent (57) of these programs involved different generations, expected to benefit different generations or included everyday literacy beyond preparation for further learning or work. In addition, a further eight government-funded and three privately funded adult literacy programs involved family (including extended family) and benefits to family were anticipated. Overall, research on New Zealand programs had shown outcomes participants appeared to have valued. These outcomes had been

quite wide-ranging and some ‘flow-on’ to other family members had been documented (Benseman and Sutton 2005, May, Hill and Donaghy 2004). Further, it was clear that adults are attracted to literacy education that has a family focus (May et al 2004). These findings supported the idea that family approaches might help achieve the sought-after improvement in adult literacy and numeracy levels.

Simultaneously, I was concerned about the direction of adult literacy policy and the consequent shape of funding frameworks. This concern spanned two major areas of contention in the literacy field more generally. The first was the extent to which literacy (and numeracy) is seen as a singular phenomenon and as a set of skills (the dominant view) or as a multiple phenomenon in which there are many meanings of literacy that are embedded in the uses to which the literacies are put (the social practice view of literacy). The second was the extent to which the purposes of literacy and numeracy are seen as social or as economic (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000, Graff and Duffy 2008, Street 1984, 2008). Both these areas were relevant to issues in adult literacy policy raised by Māori adult literacy educators. Deeply concerned about the failure of the Adult Literacy Strategy to include a Māori perspective, the report of the Māori Adult Literacy Educators Working Party (2001) put forward a different way of thinking about literacy expressed in the context of the differing worldviews of Māori and Pākehā (non-Māori), rights of and obligations to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi and nationhood. For Māori, literacy includes both English and Māori language; oral linguistic traditions, performance and texts; and ‘reading’ other text forms such as tribally significant land features (Hohepa and McNaughton 2002, Māori Adult Literacy Educators Working Party 2001).

In policy documents, discussion of adult literacy and numeracy has been largely skills focused but broadly couched in both economic and social terms. For example, in the Tertiary Education Strategy and the Learning for Living project, the term ‘foundation skills’ was not linked exclusively to work. Parenting and supporting children’s learning was a recurring theme alongside work, job acquisition and further education (Ministry of Education 2004, 2008). Funding streams targeted literacy acquisition in the community as well as in workplaces and industry training certificate-level education. However, the social rationale for literacy development appears to be less strong than in the past and a stronger work link is appearing (Ministry of Education 2010). At the same time, and more hopefully, commitment to improving Māori and Pacific adults’ involvement and success in education through using appropriate approaches to attract, retain and ensure their success, is being more intensely articulated (Tertiary

Education Commission 2008). This appears to leave scope for variation in program design and delivery.

These points bring me to the notions of social justice and wellbeing. Social justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of power and resources in society (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). It includes the concept of cultural justice which draws attention to the rights and obligations of ‘collectivities’ or sections of communities that may be characterised by, for example, gender, ethnicity, social class, social role and (dis)abilities (Griffiths 1998, Nairn 2007). Struggles over whose perspective (whether individual or group) counts are implicit in issues of social justice. Such struggles are evident in the wider literacy field and are relevant in relation to any study of family approaches in adult literacy education. Drawing on key concepts in the field of community psychology (my academic background), I considered that a broadly conceived notion of wellbeing and citizenship might provide a lens to view family focused adult literacy programs from the perspective of their implications for social justice in relation to those for whom such programs are intended (Nelson & Prilleltensky 2005). As well as being fundamental to humanity, the wellbeing of all citizens is also, at least ostensibly, the overarching objective of government in a modern democratic nation state (Ministry of Social Development 2008, 2010). The Ministry of Social Development has acknowledged the viewpoint of Durie (an authority on Māori health) that outcomes important in Māori wellbeing include some which are distinctively Māori (Durie 2006, Ministry of Social Development 2008).

The corpus of New Zealand research on family approaches in adult literacy education is small (Benseman 2006, May et al 2004). Government and research attention has focused mainly on programs which are adaptations of the Kenan model prominent in the US (Perkins and Mendel 1989). However, problems have been identified with this approach from a social justice perspective (Auerbach 1989). Further, there has been no widespread discussion on what the aims of family focused approaches might be, the different ways family approaches might be delivered and what approaches would be appropriate in the diverse cultural communities that characterise New Zealand. This situation poses a risk that yet-to-be-developed policy to support family approaches or family literacy more generally, and the practices that might follow, may not be in the best interests of those for whom such programs are intended. This observation foregrounds the role of values and beliefs in shaping policy and practice. Policymakers, program designers and those who deliver programs need to think carefully about what these values and beliefs are.

In the larger study to which this article relates, I explored the outcomes of four different models of family focused adult literacy programs

in relation to their contribution to the wellbeing of the adult participants, their families and their communities. In the current article I discuss common principles and practices that were evident in the study programs. The principles and practices reflected values and beliefs about people and about literacy. These programs, which differed in structure, content, aims, foci and ways they were family focused, achieved literacy gains at the same time as they contributed to the wellbeing of the adult participants, their families and their communities (Furness 2012). The overall intention of the programs to improve participants' wellbeing was clear, a strong reminder of the ideological nature of literacy work. This highlights the salience of *which* values and beliefs underpin programs. The current article underscores family focused literacy programs as ideological, showcases the relevance of values and beliefs in programs, and highlights the need for program principles and practices to be based on holistic concern for the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

The notion of wellbeing used in the larger study, and which therefore underlies this article, includes people's objective and subjective experiences of physical and mental health. It includes social-emotional, psychological and cognitive wellbeing and, for some people, spiritual wellbeing, as well as material conditions such as access to food, clothing and shelter (Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes and Moore 2003). It goes beyond meeting basic needs, being connected to what people value and see as important in life (Durie 1998, Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005, Rochford 2004). It includes different cultural interpretations of what it is and how it is achieved (Durie 1998, Mulitalo-Lauta 2001). Supportive relationships and environments and concern for the collective good are considered necessary for wellbeing at the individual and communal/societal levels (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005).

One of the difficulties in progressing the development of family approaches in adult literacy education in New Zealand has been the ambiguous use of the terms 'family', 'literacy', 'family literacy' and 'family literacy programs' and failure to recognise and accommodate different meanings of these terms. Before presenting the principles and practices, I therefore also explain the differing conceptions of family literacy seen internationally, in New Zealand and in this article.

Family literacy

Across the international literature, the term 'family literacy' has three distinct though overlapping dimensions often associated with it. These are the literacy practices that occur naturally within families, family influences on children's literacy development and programs aimed at enhancing the literacy abilities of family members (Tracey and Morrow 2006, Wasik, Dobbins and Herrmann 2001). These dimensions include the literacy

practices of family members themselves, studies of and theories about the literacy practices of family members, and evaluations of family literacy programs (Brooks, Pahl, Pollard and Rees 2008).

Meanings of ‘family literacy’ are further augmented by the varying definitions and viewpoints associated with the terms ‘family’ and ‘literacy’. For example ‘family’ may mean parents and their children, extended family and/or unrelated people with whom there is a family-like relationship (Barton 1997, Taylor 1997). The abilities and capacities of families may be viewed from different standpoints; for example, families may be seen as having strengths or has having deficits which need rectifying (Auerbach 1989, 1995, Purcell-Gates 2000). ‘Literacy’ may be defined as neutral skills residing ‘in [people’s] own heads’ (Gee 2008:2) or as social practice in which the meaning of literacy lies in the social and relational contexts of its use (Barton and Hamilton 1998). The purposes of literacy may be viewed as enhancing economic progress, enhancing social wellbeing or both.

Family literacy programs

Internationally, family literacy programs have predominantly focused on parents’ support of children’s school-based literacy skill development, emphasizing how adults can assist their children’s school learning and including how to encourage and model literacy behaviours valued by schools, a process through which adults may enhance their own abilities. Other sought-after outcomes include parents’ completion of school qualifications or gaining employment. A skills-based, economic focus has dominated programs, alongside an assumption that improving the literacy abilities of families will ‘cure’ wide-ranging social problems (Darling 1993). Despite often-made claims to the contrary, programs still tend to be based on deficit views of families and their literacies (Auerbach 1995). However, there are also programs which take a broader approach, have a strengths-based view of families (Hannon 2000, May et al 2004) and consider that societies’ problems require structural solutions to which family literacy programs can contribute. The purposes of family literacy programs may be seen as supporting children’s school literacy development and learning, supporting adults’ literacy development for their own purposes or both.

Family literacy programs in New Zealand

Literacy and numeracy education efforts entitled ‘family literacy programs’ are relatively new in New Zealand. However, as my 2006 analysis showed, many adult literacy programs have involved family members of different generations, recognised the benefits of adults’ participation in literacy development for their wider families, and/or actively sought such benefits (Furness 2006, 2009). Further, other programs with a long history in

New Zealand, such as the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), may be considered as family literacy programs in a broad definition.

The concept of family focused literacy education holds much intuitive, fiscal and culturally located appeal. Adult literacy education providers and government officials have shown interest and there is evidence that such approaches are particularly attractive to Māori and Pacific people (May et al 2004). Nevertheless, New Zealand government policy and funding has been inadequate if a flourishing family focused literacy education sector is desired. The larger study sought to add to the body of local and international research and to encourage discussion about appropriate models of family focused adult literacy programs for New Zealand. The study challenged commonly articulated conceptions about what family literacy programs are and what they are for, investigated some of the different ways family approaches were already being undertaken here, and examined their outcomes (Furness 2012). One of the purposes of the investigation was to better understand the range within family approaches that may be useful given our differing communities, before any policy development locked providers into approaches that limited, rather than expanded, the achievement of desirable outcomes for adults, families and communities.

In the study and in this article, 'family' is defined as related people and/or unrelated people who are thought of as family (McPherson 2003). 'Literacy' is viewed as social practice which includes skills. It is a multiple construct which includes many literacies and many modes of literacy (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000, Kress and Jewitt 2003). 'Family literacy' is all the reading, writing and communicating that occurs naturally in the everyday social practices of families (Hannon 2000, Harrison 1995, Leichter 1997) and in their community interactions as they go about the business of daily living (Barton 1997, Hannon 2000, Taylor 1997). 'Family literacy programs' are organised efforts which bring family members together or which work separately with adults and children for the purposes, or in the expectation of, enhancing the literacy of family members (Hannon 2000).

Methodology and method

The research approach was critical-interpretive within a social constructionist paradigm. The study findings and conclusions are *an* interpretation of the phenomenon investigated (Crotty 1998, Denzin and Giardina 2009, Denzin and Lincoln 2008). The study drew on Māori or Pacific-appropriate methodologies where relevant (Bishop 1996, Mutch 2005). This was essential to preclude continuation of the colonising effects of

past and much present research undertaken with Māori by non-Māori researchers.

Ethical and valid research in Māori settings requires enacted respect for Māori values, beliefs and worldviews and for the processes by which Māori promote, protect and develop them. This meant entering the communities in which I sought to conduct the research through *their* support structures, seeking guidance from the ‘caretakers’ of these communities on my approach, presenting myself face to face, hosting and taking care of people in these communities and conducting the research well so that it might be valued by the research community and valuable to participating communities (Mead 1996 and Smith 1992, cited in Powick 2002).

Participatory research approaches were used in all settings.

Research questions

The overarching research question was ‘What is the contribution of adults’ participation in family literacy programs to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities?’ Specifically, the study asked:

1. What program effects occurred?
2. Who was affected and how?
3. How were the effects linked to wellbeing?
4. What seemed to be the important program elements for achieving beneficial effects?
5. What ways can family literacy programs be delivered?

Participants could add questions. One Program Manager wanted to know about how important gaining a qualification was to program participants.

Program selection

Potential programs for the study were found from my 2006 analysis of adult literacy programs (Furness 2006, 2009). First, I identified the most family focused programs – those in which adults formally participated, children were also engaged in some way and both adults and children were expected to benefit – of which there were 42. Then, using a ‘theoretical sampling’ approach (Silverman 2005), I identified those programs which also:

1. Were well-established or were offered by a well-established provider;
2. Were most likely to have a time-bound cohort of learners;
3. Were geographically spread and contributed to a rural-urban mix;
4. Were primarily for speakers of English as their first language or above ESOL level;
5. Had been the subject of no or very little previous research; and

6. Varied in their school and community links.

Nine programs which best met these criteria were approached, from which three were initially selected. In one case, relevant Māori *iwi* (tribal) authorities were approached first. A fourth program which had been involved in previous research was added later as this enabled some data from a five-year period to be included and extended the geographic spread to the South Island of New Zealand. The four selected programs were well-established or were new programs offered by long-term providers and were above ESOL level. They varied in location, language focus, previous involvement in research and the nature of their community links as shown in Table 1. In this table and in the following text, ‘Benley’ refers to the Benley Whānau Literacy Program, ‘HPP-based’ refers to the Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka (HPP)-based Whānau Literacy Program, ‘Ormond’ refers to the Ormond Whānau Literacy Program and ‘Preston’ refers to the Preston Family Literacy Program. *Whānau* is the Māori word for ‘family’. All program names are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Location, language focus, research status and community links of study programs

	Location	Language focus	Previously researched	Community links
Benley	Large city, NI ^a	English above ESOL level	No	School-based
HPP-based	Rural community, NI	English in bilingual setting	No	School-based
Ormond	Small town, NI	English and Māori	No	Community-based
Preston	Small town, SI ^b	English	Yes	Community-based

Note ^a North Island

Note ^b South Island

Participants

The ‘caretakers’ of each program community spoke first with participants in the program obtaining agreement in principle to join the study or agreement for me to talk with them. Conversations with them and the relative informality of early data collection processes provided opportunities for them to get to know me. Consent processes included the right to withdraw at any time which could be done through the caretakers. Of the 19 participants in the study (54.5% of all participants in the

programs) eight were Māori, seven were from Pacific islands, three were Pākehā and one was Indian. Aged from 19-65 years, all participants were women except for a Cook Islands man. Fourteen participants were raising their children (and a niece in one case), two were raising or supporting the education of their grandchildren, two did not have children or grandchildren and one was expecting her first child. The number and ethnicity of the participants in the study from each program are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number and ethnicity of study participants in each program

	Māori	Pacific	Pākehā	Indian
Benley		4 ^a		
HPP-based	3			
Ormond	5			1
Preston		3 ^b	3	
Total	8	7	3	1

Note ^a 3 Samoan, 1 Cook Islander

Note ^b Tongan

Data collection and analysis

The initial data gathering processes with participants included social network mapping and discussion of social roles and related literacy tasks. These were further explored in the first interview in which views on literacy and numeracy, family, community and wellbeing were also gathered. This information provided reference points in interviews conducted six and 18 months later in which participants reflected on their experiences of the program and its effects. Information was gathered from program documentation and program staff on the purposes and delivery of the programs. Staff were asked for their beliefs about literacy and how people learn, and their views on the program's contribution to individual, family and community wellbeing. Later interviews with program staff explored changes they observed in participants. Participants also named other key informants (people who knew them well such as family members) whom I interviewed in relation to changes they had observed in the participants. Together, seventy-nine interviews were conducted varying in length from 15 minutes with children to two hours with adults. Interviews took place in a range of settings including school offices, in a kindergarten and in people's homes, often in the presence of young children. Almost all interviews were

audio-recorded. Recorded interviews were transcribed and checked with the interviewees.

Field notes were recorded during 54 days on site which included time spent formally observing 12 program sessions. Such observations aided understanding of how the programs worked. I also surveyed the program records of the adult participants' learning progress, their children's school progress records and records of progress of children they tutored (where applicable). This information contributed to understanding program effects.

Repeated interviews in which insights could be revisited and meaning clarified – processes of 'spiral discourse' and 'dialogical reflexivity' – enabled meaning to be co-constructed (Bishop and Glyn 1999). These approaches, combined with the use of multiple methods, allowed the researcher to build a composition or 'bricolage' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003) of what occurred and to construct an interpretation with which the participants agreed. The data collected through interviews and observations is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Observations, interviews and time on site per program

	No. of visits	Total no. of visits	No. of formal observations on site	No. of interviews
Benley	4	6	4	24
HPP-based	10	18	3	24
Ormond	12	25	3	21
Preston	2	5	2	10
Total	26	54	12	79

Latent theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was applied to all the data. The analysis was driven by my theoretical and analytic interests reflected in the research questions, along with the broad and inclusive theorisations of 'family', 'literacy', 'family literacy' 'family literacy programs' and 'wellbeing' which underpinned the research. The analysis was at the latent level; that is, it went beyond the semantic (surface) content of the data to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations – or ideologies – that were theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content. A preliminary set of codes was developed from the theory and preliminary analysis of some data then used to code all data. Next, coded chunks of data were transferred to data tables for more fine-grained analysis resulting in the codes being developed into potential themes. After checking that the themes 'worked' in relation to the coded

extracts and the entire data set, thematic maps were generated which were then further refined through repeated cycles of analysis and checking. For example, for the program analysis – the focus of this article – the process involved identifying from the data tables the key principles and practices evident in each program, then identifying themes and sub-themes, interconnections between them and, finally, overarching themes.

The programs

The *Benley Whānau Literacy Program*, located in a mainly Pacific community in a large city, was run within, and in conjunction with, the community's local pre- to Year 13 school. English was an additional language of all but one of the program participants. This program ran on two half days per week for 16 weeks. Parents, grandparents and carers were taught English reading, writing and numeracy strategies, which matched those that their children learned in school, and how to support their children with their school literacy and numeracy learning. Other content included literacy related to the adults' other roles and interests. The program took a critical stance overall, inviting participants to question the taken-for-granted in relation to schooling specifically and societal practices more generally. This was a family literacy program because it aimed to support adults to help their children's learning and to support adults' learning for their broader everyday purposes, it recognised the centrality of family in the community, and it fostered the possibility of the adults helping other children in the community in a family-like way.

The *Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka-based Whānau Literacy Program* was located in a school in a small rural Māori community. Hei Awhiawhi Tamariki ki te Panui Pukapuka (HPP) is the real name of the children's oral language program around which the adults' program was built (Atvars 2002). Adults in the school's community learned to use HPP with the school's Year One and Two children who were below their chronological age in reading and oral language development. The adults learned about the theory supporting the approach and why various skills and knowledge taught and assessed by the school were considered important. While learning and using the program, the adults were encouraged to be questioning and creative; to reflect on their own abilities, interests and goals; and to apply their learning in their personal and family contexts. Employed as teacher aides, other work in the school extended learning opportunities. This program ran in ten-week blocks with ongoing involvement encouraged. This was a family literacy program because the tutored children were usually members of the participants' extended family, the adults practiced and used the skills with their own children, a family-like

approach characterised the school and all of the community were connected to one another.

The *Ormond Whānau Literacy Program* was located in a town with a diverse population including a large Māori community. Involving mainly young Māori mothers, this program aimed to help family members to help each other. It included twice-yearly 14-16 week programs run jointly with a local trust covering topics such as gardening, cooking and budgeting. Driver's license courses, crafts days, individualised literacy and numeracy tuition and help with developing curriculum vitae and such tasks as emailing took place in the centre where participants' children were also welcome. Participants varied their involvement as their circumstances changed. This was a family literacy program because of its focus on parenting, home management and the literacies of everyday life, along with the strong family focus of program staff and inclusion of family in the centre's activities.

The *Preston Family Literacy Program* was located in a predominantly Pākehā community within which there was a small Tongan community. This program brought together a group of women on one morning a week for organised activity that emphasised communication and social skills and provided opportunities for new experiences around which skills could be practiced. Participants also had individualised literacy and numeracy tutoring connected to their personal interests and needs, and sometimes home visits. In addition, as an outreach, the Program Manager was building links with another extended Tongan family to support their English literacy development and aspirations. The participants had varying involvement. This was a family literacy program because of its focus on the literacies of everyday family and community life and its involvement with whole families.

Findings and discussion

While the programs differed from each other in content, foci and approaches, the study found many principles and practices held in common which reflected shared values and beliefs about literacy and about people (Furness 2012). Six principles and practices related to literacy and six related to people were found. Names of people in the examples given are pseudonyms.

Principles and practices related to literacy

1. *The dominant literacy is useful to have in some contexts.* The study showed that, as was their purpose, the programs taught written text-based literacy in English, the dominant literacy in New Zealand as in other Western countries (Graff and Duffy 2008, Tertiary Education Commission 2010). This included associated oral communication and numeracy. Program staff

and partners (the Principals in school-based programs) (program staff) saw these forms of literacy as useful for people in their communities to have in everyday life in New Zealand and, this being the case, as critically important components of schooling.

The Benley Program, participants of which were chiefly Pacific settlers seeking a better quality of life for their families, including success for their children in the European/Pākehā world as well as in the Pacific world, provides one example. This program mainly taught very specific school-based literacy knowledge and skills (such as how to do the ‘rounding technique’ in addition and the ‘scooping strategy’ in reading fluency as taught to the children in the school) and more general knowledge of schooling in New Zealand including expectations of parents. Participants were thus equipped with a material foundation with which they could actively support their children (for example, help with homework and talk with their teachers about their progress), as well as techniques for strengthening their own use of the English language which could help them participate more fully and critically in New Zealand life. One participant, for example, used the comprehension techniques she learned in the program to read union news on her workplace noticeboard when she obtained new employment (Aveolela, Interview 2).

2. *There is more than one literacy.* Even though the dominant literacy was seen as important to have, it was not seen as the only, or the only important, literacy by program staff. A broad and inclusive multiliteracies perspective in which literacy was understood to take many forms – multiple languages such as English and Māori and multiple modes or ‘texts’ such as written alphabetic text, oral performance and art – was evident (Cope and Kalantzis 2000, Hohepa and McNaughton 2002, Kress and Jewitt 2003, Māori Adult Literacy Working Party 2001). In the following quotation, the Principal at the bilingual school where the HPP-based Program ran demonstrates this recognition and valuing of multiple literacies in the context of the school classroom:

You’ll get the kids un-packaging [situations] in different ways and I feel that’s what we want in literacy too...we’re giving them a pathway of choice...and we’ve always said that speaking and listening go hand in hand and then the writing and the reading so Māori being a very oral language and visual language, you know it’s quite important here... We’ve got some children who are very good at producing a picture so we might sit kids around [in] a group and say, ‘Right, here’s the storyline, how are you going to express that?’ ‘I’m going to draw about that’, ‘I’m going to write a poem about it’, ‘I’m going to write a bit of transactional writing here’, and ‘I’ll do some research and add to it’ so it becomes four or five [different

contributions] and they can package it up and make a very good presentation but everyone had a part in it, so some of the better artists don't say much but their pictures say a thousand plus words and so that's alright...its really quite a holistic approach. (Interview 1)

3. *Literacy is partly technical skills.* The programs demonstrated a view of literacy as including the technical literacy implicit in the idea of literacy as a technology (Street 1984), which program staff explicitly taught. Staff noted, and I observed, that they taught the rules and the 'underlying knowledge' and used and taught the relevant technical language (Benley Program Tutor, Interview 2; HPP-based Program Observations 1-3, Preston Program Tutor Record of Programme Delivery and Student Learning for Hahana and Selena). This approach was evident, for example, in the teaching of the specific techniques of 'rounding' and 'scooping' noted above.

4. *Literacy is partly individual activity.* The programs demonstrated a view that literacy practices are in some senses individual. Program staff appeared to recognise the highly individualised sociocultural histories and personally located motivations that each person brought to their participation in the program. Staff seemed to understand that personal work is done in situations where literacy is present and that personal meaning is associated with what occurs and what changes as a result. Whilst commonalities within groups were recognised (such as shared culture, religion, parental status and desire to help children) people's individual differences were also recognised as relevant in their literacy experiences (Barton and Hamilton 2000, Gee 2008, Heath 1983, Lankshear and Knobel 2003).

The Ormond Program Manager's observation that, 'People are coming here for their own reasons...You've got the ones who want their license because they've been pulled up and they've got fines way up their arms' (Interview 1) is one example of recognition of participant's personal motivations. In another example, the Benley Program Tutor spent considerable time getting to know her students and maintaining rapport so that she could understand where literacy might help them in personally meaningful ways (Interview 1). She would illuminate these links where they were personalised beyond the primary purpose of the program; for example, bringing low-sugar recipes for a diabetic participant which he read and his wife cooked (Interview 2). She established patterns of turn-taking and asking questions of everyone as ongoing ways to monitor each learner's engagement and progress (Observations 1-4).

5. *Literacy is social activity.* The programs reflected a view that literacy is more than technical skills and individual activity; that it is social and relational activity. In different ways program staff showed they saw the technical aspects of literacy as inseparable from their social and relational

contexts of use; that literacy involves ‘how to be’ with the technical skills and, as such, it involves values and beliefs, and behaviours beyond the mechanical aspects. In Gee’s (2008) terms, it involves socialisation into particular ‘ways of being’, of being ‘particular kinds of people’. This interconnectedness was articulated by program staff, and the ‘ways to be’ in literacy events were explicitly taught. These ‘ways to be’ were understood as connected to culture and history, and to human needs.

The HPP-based program provides an example. The traumatic history of the school where this program ran had led the Principal to work very hard on modeling and building positive and warm relationships among children, parents, staff and the wider school community. The HPP-based Program contributed to this goal. The Principal commented:

We’ve got to try and get a [oral language development] program that is non-threatening to the parent and non-threatening to the child and...has all those little bits like, ‘I’m talking to you nicely and this is how it goes and we say hello to each other’ because a lot of times you’d say hello to a [child] and they wouldn’t say hello back, they’d just take it as, ‘Oh somebody said something’ so now they’re quite chatty. (Interview 1)

6. *Criticality is essential.* The programs shared a critical stance in that they all encouraged questioning. This stance seemed to be associated with a belief by staff in basic human rights; in particular, the right to know, to participate and to have a say. In the following quotation, the Benley Program Manager observes the importance of the critical approach taken in the program.

We’re not just talking about assimilating, we’re talking about transformation...in terms of them [the adult participants] looking at the education system and what works for their children...its not about fitting into Pākehā ways so its looking at the power relationships, not face on but through being critical, [taking] a critical approach. (Interview 1)

One way a critical approach was taken was by teaching the literacy and numeracy strategies and the educational language used in the school so the parents could talk to and ask questions of their children’s teachers, understand their children’s school progress reports, talk to their children about school, help their children with their learning and know as much or more than their children about aspects of schooling (for example, Aveolela, Interview 2). Further, participants deciphered and evaluated school notices and policies as a group. The tutor asked such questions as: ‘What do you think the Principal meant here?’ ‘What do you think he wanted you as a

parent to do?’ ‘What do you think about that?’ ‘Is that reasonable?’ The tutor taught the adults comprehension strategies so they could do this themselves (Program Tutor, Interview 2).

Principles and practices related to people

1. People are already skilled. Program staff showed recognition of participants’ existing abilities. They were aware of what they described as ‘gaps’ or ‘needs’ in the participants but these were seen as gaps or needs in relation to particular objectives or purposes and did not constitute the sole definition of the person. They were equally aware that participants already had skills and talents that they used in their daily lives and that they already made important contributions to their families and/or communities. They demonstrated and articulated respect for them as capable adults who, in the same vein, could be capable learners. A high level of trust and belief in their abilities and capacities was exhibited. This was a strengths-based view of adults (Auerbach 1989, 1995, Purcell-Gates 2000, Whitehouse and Colvin 2001).

Program staff gave many examples of ways they knew that participants already contributed to their families and communities that required specific skills and knowledge including cultural knowledge. These included helping with *kapa haka* (Māori song and dance performance), helping on the *marae* (whānau/iwi meeting area) during events such as *tangihanga* (funerals), working on local Māori land issues, lobbying for improved road access to their marae, being on the committee of their local *Kōhanga Reo* (Māori language immersion pre-school) (HPP-based Project Director, Interview 1; HPP-based Principal, Interviews 2 and 3), helping their island-based community members with correspondence, raising grandchildren (Benley Program Tutor, Interview 1), raising a niece (Ormond Program Manager, Interview 1) and caring for elders (Benley Program Tutor, Interview 2).

2. People are multifaceted. In various ways the programs acknowledged that people had already existing lives and that these lives were often already very busy and often complex and that some people had multiple problems with which they had to deal. People were seen as multifaceted with each part affecting the other and thus, in the context of the program, were regarded holistically (Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). Effort was made to accommodate participants’ already-existing lives and their changing circumstances and needs. This accommodation of people’s lives reflects a view of participants that does not define them solely by the problems they are experiencing but by their whole selves, a strengths-based rather than a deficit view.

Selena's experience exemplifies this complexity (Ormond Program Manager, Interview 3). Selena had two children of her own and was also raising her seven year old niece. Selena loved learning, had done well at school and had been training as a manager at Burger King. She had been participating in the program for two years and now sought to train as a midwife and was being supported in preparing for this. Her friend, who had also been attending the literacy program, was now in a relationship with her former partner and father of her children. They all lived in the same street. The friend had returned to the program and Selena had stopped attending. The Program Manager suggested Selena came on different days so that she could continue her involvement in the program.

3. *People are cultural beings.* The programs demonstrated a valuing of people's different 'ways of being' (Gee 2008): their beliefs, values, and behaviours. These different cultural ways were seen as connected to their identities, the diversity of which was acknowledged and respected. Matching the program content and pedagogy with participants' cultural ways demonstrated awareness of and respect for differences between people. Staff understood the hegemony of the dominant culture and that differences in cultural ways of being can cause misunderstandings.

This valuing of people's cultural ways was demonstrated, for example, by the Benley Program Tutor spending the first three weeks of the program on activities aimed at getting to know one another and then maintaining regular time for talking together. The pattern of talking together enabled the participants to stamp their cultural mark on the way the program operated, instituting from the outset a protocol of opening and closing lessons with a prayer. Beginning and ending activity with prayer was usual everyday practice and/or familiar to all members of the group and they appreciated it in the program (Program Tutor, Interview 1; Aveolela, Interview 3; Suni, Interview 1).

4. *Children need support.* Program staff clearly believed that children need to be supported by adults in both relational and practical ways and that parenting was a critically important part of this (Prilleltensky and Nelson 2000). The role of other adults was seen as important too especially where circumstances reduced parents' active involvement or rendered it less positive than was thought desirable. Staff demonstrated that they believed that, in general, all parents care about their children but that sometimes, for various reasons, children were not getting enough of some of the important things they needed to flourish. The approach taken was to build a relationship with the parents, to share information with them, to model supportive behaviour towards children, to support families by providing the necessary equipment for the children to use for homework, and to encourage the parents through positive affirmation of what they *are* doing

rather than to admonish them for perceived inadequacies and, in addition, to recognise, refer to and draw on the wider network of people in the children's lives as additional supports for them.

Ormond Program staff recognised that many of the young mothers on the program did not know how to 'do for the kids', sometimes because their own parents had done everything for them. Therefore, they included a good deal of parent and home-focused content, welcomed children at the centre, modeled engaging children in activities, gave ideas to parents for activities they could do with their children and, in getting the mothers together, provided a forum in which they could support each other and share the challenges they faced and ideas for dealing with them (for example, Selena, Interview 2; Selena's mother, Interview 1).

5. *Adults who are parents are also people in their own right.* Program participants were seen as *adults* by program staff irrespective of their status as parents. Within this view of them as adults (which included as already skilled, multifaceted, and cultural) their role as parents often took centre stage but was never the only aspect of their adult status of interest or concern. Even though, for many of them, parenting was a significant, even their primary, role or their primary reason for participating in the program, the program staff and partners seemed to appreciate that their parenting role was not the only characteristic that defined them. In the quotation below, the Principal of the school in which the HPP-based program was run showed her recognition and valuing of a participant's knowledge, skills and development that included and went beyond her parenting role.

I think she's had all these good skills just sitting there and it's probably [that] she's seen, 'Help, I'm super valuable!' you know? For the first time she's thought, 'Well, I'm not just a mum of the kids, I can actually have a life outside', and she's got her license, she's got her own vehicle, she's got her own home and she's doing a fantastic job, and she's just moved, she's moving on. I said to her, 'The thing is you'll move right on, you'll get a full-time job. That's basically what we're doing is we're moving you on from here, out there'. (Interview 2)

6. *Human needs must be met.* The programs reflected the understanding that all human beings have psychological, social and relational needs that are important to acknowledge with respect to everyone, all the time, not just in relation to learners in organised teaching/learning situations (Bornstein et al 2003, Durie 1998, Mulitalo-Lauta 2001, Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). Program staff articulated and demonstrated in their actions the view that relationships are fundamental to all human endeavours and that they valued

and classed as the right of all people warm, positive and respectful relationships; opportunities to extend themselves and discover their capacities; knowledge and understanding of what is happening around them and in their communities; and participation and having a say, to the extent that they wish, in their communities and society. The programs consciously, and constantly, worked within this theory/value framework. All other elements of the programs described above come together in this fundamental concern for people's general welfare and wellbeing and the 'right' treatment of people – children and adults – which imbued the programs.

An example can be seen in the HPP-based Program. Noting that HPP is based on Glasser's theory of human needs, the Project Director commented that:

At the same time as you are training adults about [HPP] you are also demonstrating and modeling that you're having fun, giving them a sense of belonging and acknowledging them, you're praising them and you're giving them choices. (Interview 1)

Together the principles and practices reflected an 'ideological positioning' (Furness 2012) summarised as: respect for participants as capable adults and people with potential and for differing ways of being; trust in people's abilities and capacities; and belief in the right of all people to have knowledge, to participate and to have a say in things that affect them, to have fair access to resources and to have reasonable quality of life within a nation's capacity to support this.

Concluding remarks

The programs in the study differed in their structure, content, aims, foci and ways they were family focused yet all were family literacy programs within a broad definition, demonstrating that family literacy programs can be designed in different, locally-relevant ways. The study also found shared values and beliefs across the programs. Overarching concern for people's whole selves and a strengths and rights-based view of people meant the programs had the holistic wellbeing of participants, their families' and communities' at the heart of their approach as both literacy and social aspirations were addressed. It was apparent that program staff viewed literacy as social practice in which skills played a part but in which relationships were paramount, that they had concern for both the interests of adults as well as children and that they were concerned for both the individual and the collective good. The ideological nature of family literacy work is apparent – theories about people and literacy were in operation in

program design and delivery. This highlights for those working in this sector the importance of critically evaluating the values and beliefs that underpin family literacy programs and other family literacy work.

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