

Winter Update

A Better Start – National Science Challenge

National
SCIENCE
Challenges



Literacy and Learning Theme

Kia ora koutou, ngā mihi nui ki a koutou,

It has been a busy and exciting term with excellent progress being made across the research projects. The community seminars discussing the importance of bilingual language development and ideas for parents and teachers to help facilitate emerging bilingualism in preschool and young school-age children have been very well received. They have provided a great way to help translate research findings into everyday practice. We are actively working on the dissemination of early research findings across the projects and we look forward to sharing our findings with you at our Literacy and Learning Symposium on October 26th—27th.

The recent A Better Start contestable funding round (co-funded with “Cure Kids”) resulted in another exciting project joining our research platform. Professor John Everatt (world expert in dyslexia across languages) is leading research investigating the effects of positive reading intervention outcomes on enhancing self concept and resilience in children with literacy learning difficulties.

Research such as ours would not be possible without the support of our schools, whānau and stakeholders, so a huge thank you to all involved.



Professor Gail Gillon, Pro-Vice Chancellor of College of Education, Health and Human Development, and A Better Start Co-Director



Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni., Professor Angus Macfarlane and Professor Gail Gillon with colleagues from National University of Samoa.

A Better Starts visits National University of Samoa

Professor Gillon travelled to Samoa last month with Professor Angus Macfarlane and twelve pre-service teachers, under the leadership of the Kaiarahi Pasifika, Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni.

This educational trip is an on-going Pasifika development initiative for the College of Education Health and Human Development, taking students to the Pacific, where they have the opportunity to experience and immerse in the culture of Pasifika communities.

Before travelling to the village where the cultural itinerary program was set up, the touring party visited the National University of Samoa (NUS) where they were welcomed by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Fui Le'apai Tu'ua 'Īlaoa Asofou So'o, as well as the Head of Faculties and key staff members of the University. The main part of the program was the presentation given by Professor Gillon about the 'A Better Start' project. Professor Gillon's presentation was well received by the National University of Samoa. The Vice Chancellor spoke highly of the need for such projects to help the learning and well being of their young children in Samoa. Exciting opportunities for the piloting of a Samoan language test of phonological awareness were also discussed.

Whānau Workshops and Questionnaires

Whānau involved in the project have been invited to attend a Reading Workshop at their child's school. The purpose of these workshops is to broadly replicate particular project activities that are happening in the classroom at the same time. Whānau will be able to explore fun ways to use dialogue, vocabulary, and praise when supporting their child's literacy development at home. The workshops also provide childcare and refreshments, and all those who attend will receive a picture book as a kōhā (gift). Whānau have also been invited to complete a questionnaire about their child's learning and development. One-on-one questionnaire support, as well as questionnaire 'drop-in' sessions at school, are being offered to assist whānau if they need support with any questions. The questionnaire is also able to be completed online if whānau prefer the electronic format.

Mana Māori

The A Better Start Māori community has been active during this winter season.

A Better Start doctoral student, Melissa Derby, successfully completed her doctoral confirmation in May. The proposal and oral presentation was reviewed by two academic staff. The research focus - on the emerging literacy of bilingual (Te Reo Māori and English) children in an early childhood centre in Christchurch – attracted considerable interest. This was taken a step further at the World Indigenous People’s Conference on Education in Toronto, Canada in July. Melissa took a leadership role in a presentation – which on the conference program included her supervision team – entitled *Ko te kai a te rangatira he kōrero: Restoring Māori Literacy Narratives to Create Contemporary Stories of Success*. Interest in the findings of her study were expressed by several Indigenous groups in North America, particularly since many face similar experiences with literacy attainment that we face in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Recently we opened our doors to another Māori doctoral scholar. “Nau mai Teariki Tuiono ki E Tipu e Rea – Welcome Teariki to A Better Start”.

Intervention Update

We are very excited with the progress of the integrated phonological awareness and vocabulary programme— approximately 220 children across 3 schools have completed the first phase of the class or large group programme and we are now moving into phase 2 where children who struggled to improve these vital skills for literacy success at the large group instructional level will receive additional support in small group activities (groups of 5 children). The second group of Year 0/1 children (over a further 4 schools) to enter the project this term have made a great start and we have enjoyed visiting the schools and working with the teachers in the implementation of the programme.

We are currently analysing the phase 1 data with early indicators suggesting that many of the children who received the large group or class programme last term have made fantastic progress in their early developing phonological awareness skills. This will provide them with a strong foundation to build their reading and spelling knowledge.

Giving our children the best possible start to life.

E Tipu e Rea—Grow and Branch Forth

Literacy and Learning Symposium October 27-28 at UC



Planning is now underway for our upcoming Literacy and Learning Symposium, hosted by the University of Canterbury. This year’s symposium brings together international and national researchers across fields of literacy, education, language learning, psychology, public health and speech language therapy, to highlight the exciting interdisciplinary developments in facilitating young children’s literacy success and healthy wellbeing. International speakers include Professor Laura Justice from Ohio State University, speaking on fostering reading at home: overcoming barriers that impede parent-child reading; and Professor Ilsa Schwartz from University of Tennessee, speaking on the oral and text-based vocabulary used by kindergarten teachers.

Poster presentations are welcomed from researchers in relevant areas.

Professor Laura Justice

[Click here](#) to register now and secure your place for this exciting event!

Keep up with the latest from A Better Start