

Benseman, J. (2004). "I'm a different person now." An evaluation of the Manukau Family Literacy Program (MFLP).

The basis of family literacy

Family literacy programmes began in Israel, the US and England in the 1970s and 1980s (Thomas, 1998). The term family literacy has been in circulation in many overseas countries for some time now, but is a relative newcomer in New Zealand. There have been some programmes in New Zealand using this term, but few have been constructed around the four key elements or the instructional intensity of overseas programmes. A number of local reading programmes have involved parents, but the adults' involvement in these programmes has been largely built on the assumption that they already have good literacy skills.

The concept of family literacy is built around a series of assumptions and arguments peculiar to the situation of combining the teaching of adults and children in one programme. Some of these assumptions and arguments are backed by research findings; others are yet to be proven.

The first assumption behind family literacy as a form of educational provision is that "greater benefits to both adult and child learners will be attained by taking an integrated family literacy approach than by independently addressing adult and child needs through separate, high quality adult literacy and child intervention programmes" (Padak, Sapin & Baycich, 2002). The authors of this statement point out that this assumption is still largely untested¹, although it is testable using a large-scale, interdisciplinary effort involving adult literacy, family literacy and early childhood professionals. In the US, family literacy has been advocated as a much more effective form of provision than conventional adults-only programmes (Seaman, 1992).

A second argument is that many children who are struggling with literacy come from homes where the parents themselves also have literacy difficulties and therefore provide a significant 'two-tier catchment area' for literacy programmes,

¹ One US study has shown family literacy to produce demonstrably better results than stand-alone programmes (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996).

because "... however high the aspirations of a parent might be, illiterate adults² cannot model what they do not know" (Mikulecky & Lloyd, 1993, p. 36). While this assumption is sometimes criticised for its 'deficit' connotations, there is ample research evidence to show that there is a high correlation of literacy skills between generations of families (Sticht & Armstrong, 1994). For example, data from a national longitudinal study in Britain showed that 72% of children whose parents had reading problems and low incomes were in the lowest score reading group (ALBSU, 1993). The report concluded (pp. 18-19),

The results suggest that children from families where parents have basic literacy problems are likely to suffer from a diminished opportunity to acquire literacy and numeracy skills. The disadvantage is compounded in families with a low income or where the parents achieved very low levels of educational attainment. Parents without these basic skills are less able to help their children learn literacy and numeracy skills during their early formative years. The group who are most at risk of growing up with the lowest levels of basic skills are children from low-income families where the parents have poor reading abilities.

A third argument behind family literacy is that parents, and especially mothers (Sticht & McDonald, 1990), are not only influential in their children's literacy development, but are more likely to exert an even more positive influence when they are able to enhance their own literacy skills (Benjamin, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Mansbach, 1993). The desire for adults who have been unsuccessful in their own schooling to ensure that their children don't have the same experience is understandable and reasonably well documented (Benseman, 1989). In a discussion about the development of learning motivation in families, Smith and Spurling argue that the biology-led phase of life that occurs with parenthood "remoulds the parents' own awareness in such ways that their whole approach to motivational assessment can be altered" and that parenthood is "of central importance in the whole motivation story, and has profound effects on wider social realities" (Smith & Spurling, 2001, p. 54). In other words, adults who may not be motivated to learn for themselves, find that the experience of being a parent not only increases their learning aspirations for their children, but through active involvement their own learning motivation increases, which in turn helps their children's motivation – thereby stimulating a positive learning spiral for both generations.

² American literature often uses the term 'illiterate', whereas it is both more acceptable and more accurate to refer to adults with reading difficulties, as few adults are totally illiterate.

Manukau Family Literacy Programmes (MFLP)

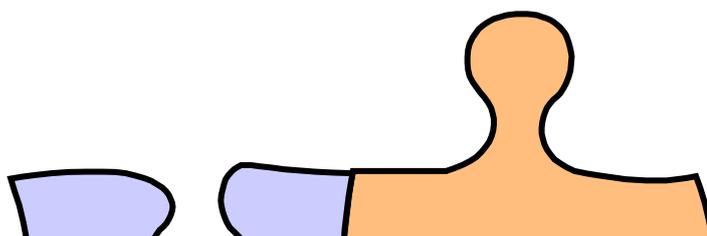
The MFLP grew out of an initiative by the Literacy Taskforce of the City of Manukau Education Trust (COMET). The initial planning for the programmes was undertaken during 2002, culminating in two pilot sites starting operation in 2003 at Bairds Otara and Rowandale in Manurewa. Four sites are planned for 2004. The MFLP has been broadly based on the following educational components (usually referred to as the *Kenan Model* of family literacy):

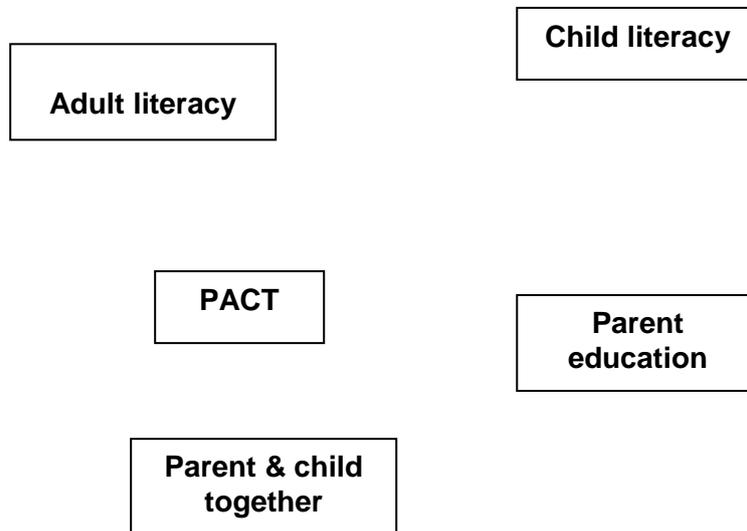
1. An adult education component designed to extend basic education skills, including teaching adult participants to: think critically and creatively, solve problems, set goals and achieve them and acquire successful interpersonal skills
2. Children's education to promote the growth and development of young children and to engage parents in their child's educational programme in order to foster meaningful involvement that will be maintained throughout the child's educational career.
3. Parent and child together time (PACTT)
4. Parent time to provide instruction on how children grow, develop and learn to read and write, address issues critical to family well-being and success, connect parents with a wide array of community resources and provide parents with opportunities to network and develop mutual support systems with others in the programme.

These four elements are shown in the diagram below. Figure 1 also illustrates what is sometimes referred to as the fifth element of family literacy programmes – integration. As Potts (No date, p. 4) says

Integration has become a critical, defining characteristic of family literacy services, working to create a system for delivery of curriculum, instruction and assessment. Rather than providing stand-alone, isolated services such as early childhood education or adult basic skills education, family literacy programmes bring parents and children together to learn, weaving key strategies and message throughout the four primary components.... Integration of these components is used intentionally as a cohesive system to promote learning within the family unit.

Figure 1 – Kenan Model of Family Literacy





PACTT

Overall evaluations of the PACTT for their pupils were very positive - 4.5 on a five point scale. Other general comments they made about PACTT included:

It is so rewarding for the parents to see what is going on in the class. It has so many positive effects – knowledge of the curriculum, PACTT parent expertise on the topics we are doing, PACTT parents can have better knowledge of how to help their child (in class and with homework etc.)

Vary PACTT throughout the week to immerse parent in a more 'holistic' view of classroom, i.e. in all aspects of learning. PACTT slotted in immediately into our daily routines. Acceptance from other children good, although, also noticed a certain 'why not me?' from non PACTT children.

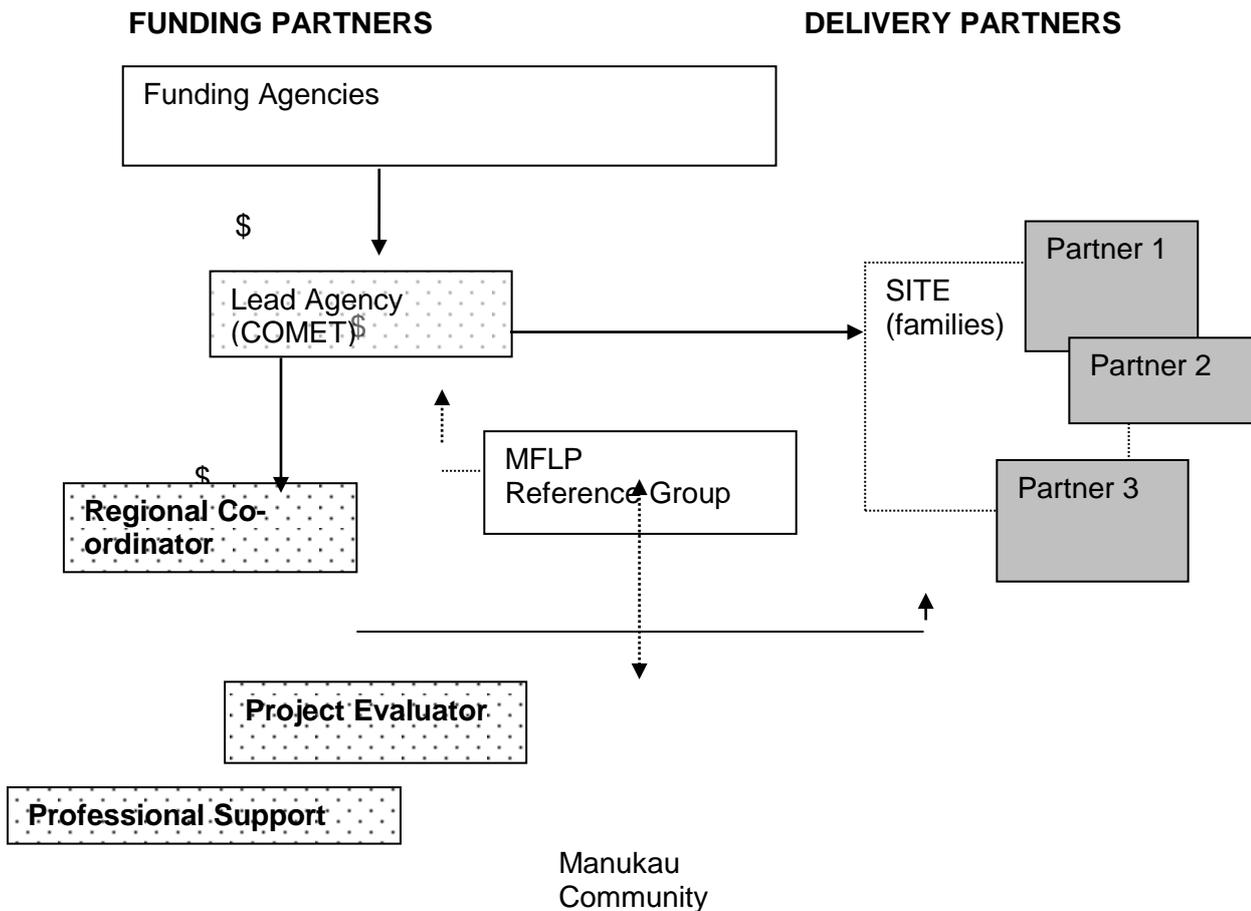
My children loved having their mums come in. I really enjoyed having them come in so bright, bubbly and eager. The rest of the class also anticipated their arrival and them being in the room. We missed them when they didn't come.

Each MFLP site involves three partner institutions – an early childhood centre, a primary school and a tertiary provider.³ The kindergartens and the primary schools work with the child participants (one per parent) enrolled in the programme and link with the adult components for key parts of the programme such as Parents and Child Together (PACT). The tertiary providers employ the adult educator who is responsible for teaching the adult participants, as well as some involvement in other components of the programme. Both the MFLP trial programmes are located on primary school premises – Bairds Mainfreight and Rowandale Primary.

The overall management structure of the MFLP is summarised in the following diagram provided by COMET.

³ Both tertiary providers and some of the other participating agencies have developed Memoranda of Understanding with COMET.

Figure 2 – Manukau Family Literacy Programme Management structure



FACILITATION PARTNERS

The Bairds Otara programme

The curriculum for the adults' Baird Otara programme included *Future Focus* (career planning), *Communication*, *Study Skills*, *Foundation Education Computing*, *Parenting in Aotearoa* and *Personal Money Management* or *Introductory Mathematics*.

The adult educator has taught most of the programme, although other Manukau Institute of Technology staff have taught some components such as maths and computing (often on-site at the nearby polytechnic campus).

The Bairds Otara site has employed a teacher aide (as has Rowandale) from 11.15 am to 2.15 pm daily to help primarily with supporting the kindergarten children,

some administrative tasks involved in running the programme and the transitional period between school and kindergarten. British research has shown that employing such a staff member is one of three key features of achieving impact in adult literacy programmes (Brooks et al., 2001).

Rowandale

The Rowandale site programme started on May 12th; this site's adult programme has been built around AUT's *Certificate in Introduction to Early Childhood Education*. The Certificate's curriculum covers "child development, observations and play with young children, tikanga Maori, communication studies, personal and career development and practical experience in a range of early childhood centres" (AUT brochure). The Certificate is intended to staircase on to a *Certificate in Early Childhood Education* and then other AUT bachelor degrees such as *Early Childhood Teaching* or *Montessori Early Childhood Teaching*, as well as other social service qualifications. Like Bairds Otara, the Rowandale programme is offered at no cost to the participants.

Recruitment of participants

Starting a pilot programme from scratch is not altogether easy, especially when it comes to recruitment of learners in the early stages. The MFLP has used a range of recruitment strategies. Of these strategies, the most successful was active recruitment ('shoulder tapping') by teachers. It is also clear that as the programme gains momentum, current and past students of the programme become important recruitment agents. For example one person in the second intake at Bairds Otara said, "I could see the person she [student in first intake] was becoming, she showed me what I could do. I thought you had to be brainy."

Data summary of MFLP participants

Over the course of 2003, a total of 37 adults and 37 children participated at the Bairds Otara (two intakes) and Rowandale (one intake) sites.

	Bairds Otara Intake 1	Bairds Otara Intake 2	Rowandale	MFLP total
<i>Initial intake</i>	11/11	12/12	14/14	37/37

Adults/children

No. withdrew	1	3	3	7
% attendance	92%	82%	90%	88%
of adults*				
Men	1	2	1	4
Maori	7	5	1	13
Pasifika	4	7	11	22
No qualification	9	6	12	27

* Does not include attendance data from those who withdrew

This summary shows that the recruitment of participants for the MFLP has been very successful in attracting predominantly learners who have been historically under-represented in New Zealand tertiary education and are the focus of current tertiary education policy (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Case studies of learners

Case studies of individual students are a useful way of illustrating the types of learners involved in a programme and an indication of what happens to them as a result of their involvement. Because the MFLP has a relatively small number of project participants, the following case studies have been 'semi-fictionalised' in order to preserve individual anonymity. While each of the case studies still accurately reflects the characteristics and actions of MFLP participants, none of the case studies is a single individual from the programme. Some of the detail is based on actual occurrences; some is similar to what has occurred.

Three case studies are presented to illustrate three broad types of adult participants in the two MFLP sites. Each of the case studies represents an 'outlier' of people who represent either extreme results (both positive and negative) or particular issues (in this case, withdrawal from the programme). This approach is based on *success case study* evaluation methodology developed by Robert Brinkerhoff (2003), who argues that such case studies are a powerful and valid mechanism for drawing out the key features of a programme that either make it successful, or conversely, unsuccessful. The lessons learnt from these case studies can be used as a basis for maximising the positive aspects of the programme and minimising the less successful aspects.

Mele is a 29 year old single mother⁴ of four children. Born in the Pacific, she attended school until she was 18, but did not gain any qualifications. After working part-time in some manual jobs for several years, she migrated to New Zealand, where she met her partner and have raised their four children. Since her arrival in New Zealand she has worked from time to time on a part-time basis, but has spent most of her time raising her children. Since her partner left her to go to Australia, she has been on a benefit, although her mother is nearby and offers support and childcare when needed.

Mele was approached by one of her teachers at primary school about enrolling in the MFLP. Initially she was very reluctant to enrol, but was convinced because she was keen to be able to help her children with their homework, especially her youngest child who had just started school. The MFLP was the first educational programme Mele had done since leaving school, so she was very nervous at the beginning of the programme. Her English fluency was not great and she had difficulties with writing and spelling. She had never used a computer prior to joining the programme.

At the beginning of the programme, Mele had difficulties with the payment of her benefit, which was only resolved after many phone calls and a case worker visiting the programme. Then, during the programme, one of Mele's children developed a serious health problem that necessitated her not attending for several weeks while she managed her health care. Although her mother was able to help with many of the on-going absences of her child, Mele continued to miss occasional sessions and needed additional help in order to complete the course requirements.

At the completion of the programme, Mele felt a lot more confident about speaking English, especially with strangers. Although she was extremely nervous about making a presentation to the class, she was able to achieve this milestone and sees this as one of her greatest achievements. One of her older children had experienced bullying and she was thrilled that she was able to approach this child's teacher to raise the issue – something she felt she would never have been able to do before. Mele is now able to perform basic functions on a computer, but does not feel that her writing or spelling have changed much. Mele's nominated child in the

⁴ Because the great majority of participants are female, all the case studies are female.

programme, Sam, has been very excited to have his mother at school in the programme. He has looked forward to her PACTT visits, much to the envy of his classmates and has taken on a new interest in reading since Mele started PACTT. He now has several favourite books and his teachers have commented on his improved attention span in class.

Mele completed the course successfully, but has no plans to do any more tertiary study. She thinks she will “probably look for some sort of job,” but is unsure about anything beyond this. She says that her most important priority is “helping her kids with their homework.” She is also thinking about coaching a school sports team next year.

Miriama was born in a small country town in Northland. She is in her early 40s and has four children with her husband. As the oldest daughter, Miriama left school in the Third Form to look after her sick mother. When her mother died, she felt it was too late to return to school, so drifted through a series of seasonal jobs before moving to Auckland, where she met her husband. As a mother of four children she has been active in many community and school activities, as well as occasional part-time jobs working in supermarkets and fruit-picking. With her youngest child, Ben, now at primary school, Miriama has felt that “my time has come now” to make up for what she missed as a child. She was not clear about what she wanted to do, or even how to go about finding out what her options are, although her family’s very limited resources were a very real constraint to her options. A leaflet that Ben brought home from the school about MFLP seemed to be an interesting option, especially as it coincided with her desire to “do something different” and the zero enrolment fees were an added incentive in making the decision to enrol.

Like most of her classmates, Miriama found the beginning of the course an uphill struggle as she came to grips with organising new routines at home to fit her studies into the family routines (including some re-allocation of family jobs to free her time up) and doing things she hadn’t done “since I was at school – and that was some time ago!” Within a short time however, Miriama quickly established herself as a hard-working, able adult student who was intent on making up for lost ground. She re-discovered her love of books and enjoyed making time to read to

Ben at home – something she wishes she had done more of for her other children when they were young.

Miriama completed the MFLP programme in her stride and has enrolled in a business qualification at the local polytechnic – “I want to carry a suitcase, not a shovel.” From being behind his peers, Ben has made steady progress and is now “up to scratch” according to his teacher. Asked what the best thing he does with his mother, Ben replies, “going to the library with her on Friday night.”

Mary was born in New Zealand, is in her mid-30s and has been living on and off with a partner for the past five years. They have two children together and she also has a child from a previous relationship. There has been a history of violence in her present relationship, which has been fuelled by her partner’s serious substance addictions. Mary was expelled from school when she was 14 and recalls her schooling as a time of “extreme frustration” apart from sport and “hanging out with my mates.” Since leaving school she has worked in a series of jobs, but most of them were “dead-ends” and low paid.

She joined the MFLP because she saw it as a “second chance to get an education” and “get a better job a bit further down the track.” She also saw it as her best chance of escaping her relationship in the long term. Her nominated child, Tanya, has not been to any early childhood programme and she has enrolled her as part of enrolling in MFLP. Tanya is a very quiet, ‘clingy’ child who stays very close to her mother whenever possible.

Tanya’s enrolment at the kindergarten has not been easy, but she really has really enjoyed her mother visiting during PACTT. She has been growing steadily in confidence, especially in speaking. Mary has been very energized by her progress in the programme. She has now formulated a long-term plan to become “either a teacher or a social worker” and has been particularly excited by several tertiary study options. Although she says that her “brain was pretty rusty to begin with,” she is now making steady progress in her academic skills. She has particularly enjoyed her re-discovery of maths – a subject she loathed at school, but now finds challenging and satisfying, “because how they teach it here.” Mary has made

strong friends among her fellow students, with whom she readily shares her dreams and concerns. She especially likes the discussions about their children and what they do to help them with their learning. She also says that she now enjoys “sitting round the table doing our home-work together” with her other children.

Half way through the course, Mary disappeared from the course without any explanation. The adult educator found out through a friend that financial issues had prompted a series of beatings by Mary’s partner and she had gone into hiding in another town. Mary’s children were being looked after an aunty and Tanya had been withdrawn from the kindergarten. Mary had asked her friend to pass on to the MFLP staff that she still hoped to go on to polytech, but that “it may take a while to sort things out.”

The following section summarises the findings of the programme evaluation (Benseman, 2002, 2003) on the participants. Full details of the findings can be found on the COMET web site (<http://www.comet.org.nz>).

Programme impact on participants

Although the main purpose of the evaluation was to monitor the planning and development of the MFLP program, some impact data was also collected as part of this process. The data reported below came from interviews with all of the adult participants (at the beginning of the program, at its completion and also several months later in the case of the first Bairds Otara intake), project staff, staff from participating institutions and other key informants linked to the program.

Initial motivations and expectations

Asked what had motivated them to enrol in the programme, the adult participants from the three intakes identified a range of factors:

Personal motivations

- A ‘second-chance’ - “I hate sitting at home and wanted to get out of the house”
- Academic - “To improve my English”

- Self development - “I want to try things out for myself” and “I want to know where I am”
- Vocational - “to get a better job”
- Life transition - “It’s the right time in my life to get back into my schooling”
- Personal ambition - “It’s for me - and for my kids”
- Dissatisfaction with present situation - “It’s boring at home”

Family/children motivations

- Keeping in touch with what’s going on in schools
- To be able to help their kids (in some cases due to specific behaviour problems or subjects such as maths and reading)
- Wanting greater involvement with their child
- “I want to model education things for my kids”

Characteristics of the course

- “It’s free”
- in the local school.

Learner assessments of the course

The adult students’ evaluations of the programmes at both sites were overwhelmingly positive and more than matched their initial expectations.

I’ve enjoyed it very well. What I’ve learnt, it’s eye-opening for people like me who didn’t have a good education. I recommend it for anyone, no matter what age you are.

I never thought I’d come back to school, but now I’ve got the confidence to go further, it’s brought me closer to my children and I’m a better person all round. I’m doing something for me – and my children, a role model.

I had high expectations, but it’s been even better. I have a future now. I’m totally different and I’m very proud.

I love the course, it’s just awesome. Before this, I never knew what I wanted to do.

A common comment was how different the programme had been from their schooling experiences.

I thought it would be more like school, I certainly didn't think I'd enjoy maths, but I have.

What I'm getting here, I didn't get at school.

I love it. I never liked school. You don't have the teacher down your throat all the time. It's changed me.

Most commented how difficult they found the course at the beginning, but how these difficulties steadily decreased because of the skills of the adult educator in helping them build a belief in their abilities, offering support in their various crises and teaching the various academic skills.

It was good, but *hard* work.

[Following a major domestic issue] I was going to quit because of it, but I went home and thought about the course, [adult educator] and the class, and I told my Mum, 'I'll go back' and I have.

Maths is a bit hard, but it's cool!

The only concerns expressed about the programmes were that they were "not long enough" (both in terms of overall duration and per week), the non-involvement of children not enrolled in the MFLP and inadequate time for some assessments.

Overall impact on learners

The participants also talked about ways in which they felt the course had changed them as individuals. For some these changes had come about through academic achievement, both in skills and positive attitudes towards learning.

I read the dictionary now, I know how to put them [words] in sentences and it's all helped my reo. I certainly speak better.

Before I was at home, watching TV. Now I can see that education is the number one thing, especially for my kids. I have a totally different insight into life itself – beside the education, it opened up things I never knew existed. I'm not going to do what I was, that's for sure. I'm doing things different with my kids, I'm getting a lot of praise from my family – they think it's great, they can see it's changing me.

Before I couldn't write properly or add and do all that, but now I see myself moving on.

I've learnt how to do a CV, write an essay even. Getting somewhere, getting the certificates. Just achieving – better than sitting at home.

In some cases the programmes have challenged long-held beliefs and perspectives on issues.

It's very exciting. I've learnt a lot about myself, the things I'm capable of, my qualities. There are things I've never thought about before.

It's making me think about things I've taken for granted.

Gains in general self confidence were commonly reported.

It's given me a lot of self-confidence and learnt how to deal with things. I sit and do my homework now, so I don't get much time for my partner – he says 'it gets a bit lonely'. So now we make times to go out for a meal or things and then Saturday and Sunday is family time!

Confidence in myself, self-esteem and just how to understand my children more.

Most reported now seeing education, both for themselves and their children, in a different light.

I understand how valuable education is for myself and others.

One thing I've learnt is, 'if anyone can help me, then why not?'

I've achieved and found what my career I was after and looking for. I've conquered what I've always dreaded at school [maths] and I feel I've achieved.

And for others it has been their changed relationship with the school.

I never used to have anything to do with the school, I just used to be abusive to the teachers, never used take the time to talk to them [this student plans to do voluntary work at the kindergarten].

I think I'm quite neat now, I'm quite proud, like being able to walk into the staff room and talk to staff. Stuff like that.

Self-ratings of literacy skills

In interviews at the beginning of the program, each adult participant was asked whether they "had difficulties with any of the following – maths, reading, spelling, English or writing?" If they responded 'yes' they were then asked to rate their level of difficulty on a 1 (considerable difficulty) to 10 (no/few difficulties) scale. Their initial responses were as follows:

- maths – 16 participants
- spelling – 7 participants
- reading – 7 participants
- English and spelling – 7 participants
- Writing – 5 participants
- Reading, spelling and writing – 3 participants.

They were also asked to rate their self-confidence on the same scale. At the conclusion of the programmes, these self-assessments were repeated. The table below summarises their ratings at the beginning of the course and at the end, showing a clear gain in the students' areas of difficulties and their self-confidence.

	A - Literacy skill rating at start	B - Literacy skill rating at end	C - Self confidence rating at start	D - Self confidence rating at end
Average self-rating	4.6	7.9 (+3.3)	5.7	9.6 (+3.9)

Broader impact on parenting and participants' families

Because the MFLP has a parenting component, participants were asked about what the courses had meant to them as parents. A common theme reported by participants was how they have re-valued their relationships with their children and now use a broader range of parenting strategies.

I was a sux parent. I was never interested in helping them, but now I go and ask them what they're doing. It's just great.

'm more observant and take time to look at the overall picture – you don't assume, jump to conclusions. I push my kids harder, I don't want them leaving early like I did.

I've been pretty hard on them, always saying 'no' and disciplining them. But now we do other things.

There are some things in the course that if I had known ten years ago, she [older daughter] wouldn't have got into trouble.

I like it 'cos sometimes I yell and smack, 'cos I talk to them over and over. It's a big change for me. My four-year-old never used to listen to me, but I'm making progress now.

For some, the changes in how they now discipline their children has been profound.

I used to beat the living daylight out of her, but we've learnt other ways of doing things. I still find it hard not to lose my temper, but I've got three pictures on the wall that help me. One is of a cross, one is a man looking at a girl and another one [not explained]. When I get angry I go and look at the pictures and they help me. The cross is 'cos I don't want her to end up dead, the man is 'cos I don't want to have to go back to her father and the other is 'cos I don't want them to take her off me. It works.

I used to smack my kids, now I order them. They [older children] were shocked when I said I wasn't going to [smack] any more. Now I tend to listen and not get angry.

I used to think you did it the way we did it back in the islands. Now I stop and listen to what they want to tell me. I've stopped yelling and listen. I have a feeling I can move on and set a better example for my kids.

Many recounted specific examples of things that they do differently now.

I've learnt to put things down – they [things] can wait, but she [daughter] can't. I don't yell at her so much. I used to just plonk her in front of TV, but now we read and so on. We've grown so close.

Our routines have changed. The two older kids are eager to do their homework, they do it together. They're full of questions, spend a lot more time together.

I get them into bed early now.

Most also reported that they now felt better able to help their children with their schoolwork.

I really enjoy it – [we're] friends and [I'm] a good teacher. It's really helped me and my family with their homework and how to cope with them. No more yelling and that.

Enlightening. It's opened my mind up to how they [kids] learn. Now I watch what they do now, rather than yell at them to clean it [painting] up.

Especially my son doing Intermediate maths. Sometimes my kids think I can't do it, but I look at it and work it out and they come back next day and say I'm right – "Wow Mum, you can do that!"

[Name] is getting on really well with her schooling. I was quite pleased with the comments from her teacher too. She [daughter] was pleased

and said 'And you too, Mum!' It's changed her a lot, knowing she can come to me for her homework.

Often these changes have occurred because of new understandings of their child's educational processes and what the kindergartens and schools are doing.

Reading was a problem, but this term PACTT in reading time I was able to see what the teacher does – he's really jumped ahead. He loves being the one whose mum comes in, he doesn't want it to stop. We went on a camp together – we could never have done that before.

I didn't know why they [children] didn't know before. I didn't realise it was because of what I was doing. It's up to me is what I realise now.

I always wanted to know how to help his development, I read to him and things, but I was never quite sure. But I know, now.

Impact on children

All of the participants also felt that their enrolled children had benefited from being part of the programme. Specific (unprompted) changes they mentioned included improved completion of homework, greater motivation to go to school, becoming more out-going and less shy, better concentration, improved reading skills, improved listening, more asking of questions, better communications with parent ("we click now") and greater interaction ("she's no longer a loner, she wants to do things with me"). One participant who also has older children said that she now knows how to interact better with her grandchildren.

Cool. I like it when we go home now. He used to take off to the park until 10 [o'clock] or so, but now he reads a book and works on his homework. He loves reading books, he reads different now, more confident. I really like going into his classroom.

It's been really helpful. Before he couldn't read, do his colours, count. But now he's amazing. When I read them out, he knows all of them now. The older ones, they feel good when I'm doing my homework. They come and watch and we ask each other. We share over talking every night.

They've improved with me here, coming to school. I'm not allowed to wag a day!

She's come out of her shell. She's settled because of PACTT [kindergarten child]. She's speaking clearly about her feelings – she used to cry, but doesn't now. She's made a lot of friends, opened up, she's not shy.

Even in cases where the improvement with their children had not been profound, parents still felt optimistic about their prospects in the longer term.

There's been a little bit of change, especially in maths – but we're both excited!

He even sits still now when I tell him.

Future ambitions and subsequent outcomes

One outcome that clearly emerged from all three intakes of adult participants was how quickly they identified future options and plans. For most, this was the first time that they had done so in their lives.

I should be..... where I want to be!

It's put me back on track to tertiary studies. It's re-ignited the flame that I had before having children.

I've always been interested in early childhood education, but I didn't know how to get there.

It's given me a pathway for my future – I don't know what I would be doing otherwise, but now I know I can do other courses.

Not sure yet [about two part-time tertiary courses], but I tell you what, I have no intention of staying at home like I was before.

By early 2004, the following outcomes are known about the 2003 participants. Of the first intake:

- Eight went on to further study at MIT. Three did not proceed due to family responsibilities, but one of these successfully completed her course after her new baby arrived in July.
- Two completed six further credits in Foundation Studies, and of these two, one has been admitted to the Management Diploma course in 2004, and the other has been accepted for the Diploma of Teaching at MIT. Another went into fulltime work in the second half of last year, and is re-entering MIT this year.
- One has made a positive move overseas to move away from a violent relationship, another has moved out of the area, and two have re-entered fulltime work in better jobs than previously.

Of the second intake:

- Three have been accepted into the Auckland College of Education for teaching, youth work and social work qualifications
- One is in fulltime work, one in part time work, two are employed as teacher aides at the school,
- Four awaiting the July 2004 intake for AUT Dip Tchg Pasifika in Manukau. (two are working regularly as untrained relievers in childcare centres in the interim).
- Four are standing for the Board of Trustees elections.

Of the third intake:

- Seven entered MIT courses (MIT Certificates in Automotive Technology; Computing, Business Management, and Advanced Communication)
- Two are at home with children or ill family members.
- The destinations of two others are currently unknown, but one of these is pregnant.

Feedback from project partners

Feedback on the project was also recorded from several other sources, including the tertiary partners and a number of people who have a professional involvement with the partner institutions and their staff. Again the feedback was very positive, despite the difficulties in developing a pilot programme. Some of the benefits identified included:

- increased enrolments in early childhood centres and tertiary institutions
- improved attendance of the nominated children
- better communication between parents and the kindergarten staff – “they are more articulate and involved in talking to the teachers”
- greater awareness and understanding of what the kindergartens are trying to achieve – “it’s opened their eyes that we are more than just about playing”
- greater self-confidence of individuals in dealing with teachers; “they (parents) are more confident in expressing themselves [to us]”
- better relationships generally with parents
- parents being seen by children as ‘heroes’ for their learning endeavours
- increased physical presence of participants, their partners and relatives around the school (including school assemblies and in the staff-room)

- a feeling of becoming a “learning community” and a “sense of achievement” with the participants
- increased knowledge about the enrolled children and their siblings because of the parents’ close involvement – “we know so much more about the kids”
- closer links between the kindergarten and new entrant classes.

All of the participating kindergartens and schools have commented positively on the relationships that have developed with each other as a result of MFLP – “we now know their staff first hand and the sorts of things they are trying to do in their programmes.” Although the kindergartens and schools are physically close on both sites, all the feedback indicated that they had never had as close a relationship as they now do. Teachers from kindergartens said they felt that primary teachers had greater respect for what they were doing; the primary teachers also reported that the reverse was true for them. Although this effect mainly concerned the primary schools and the kindergartens, some also commented that they also felt they were in much closer contact with the tertiary institutions – something that had been non-existent previously.

This evaluation did not set out to gather data about changes in the nominated children’s school performances. Nonetheless, many of the teachers also commented about the MFLP’s effect on the nominated children. The feedback was generally positive, although there were also a number of conditional statements made about some of the children’s progress. Teachers identified a number of children who had clearly made significant progress in their foundation skills, self-esteem and general attitudes towards learning. Even in cases where teachers felt there had not been significant change, they usually added that “it is too early to tell at this stage, given the time they’ve been in it” and were still optimistic about long-term improvement. Several teachers reported noticeable changes in the relationships between some parents and their children – “they’re more intimate, it’s like they share a secret now.”

One occasion that epitomised the impact of the MFLP was the assembly in the Bairds Mainfreight Hall on April 9th to award the first lot of certificates achieved by the adult participants. On hearing that Manukau Institute of Technology was about to award the certificates, a Bairds Mainfreight staff member suggested that the event be held in front of all the primary school and kindergarten pupils and staff.

The event became a full-scale graduation ceremony, with the adult participants as the centre of attention (comments after the event indicated that most had never experienced anything comparable ever in their lives). Children of the participants were clearly delighted to see their parents graduating as shown by one class sending their own certificate to the Family Literacy room after the ceremony expressing how proud they felt of their achievements. A morning tea for the participants and their guests completed the morning's celebrations.

Issues that have arisen in MFLP

In the course of developing the MFLP, a range of issues have arisen requiring clarification, modification of the programme or resolution among the programme partners. Some of these issues (such as workload in the beginning stages, co-ordinating timetables and communication difficulties) have been minor and have simply arisen from the planning and running of the programme:

Other issues have been more substantial and required on-going consideration. Some of these issues are probably unique to the Manukau project, but others are likely to arise in other family literacy programs; these latter issues are therefore reported here. For a full description of all the issues, readers are directed to <http://www.comet.org.nz>

Working across conventional educational boundaries - where does family literacy 'fit'?

Family literacy does not sit readily within conventional educational structures, and this is true overseas (Padak, Sapin & Baycich, 2002) and in New Zealand. This difficulty is largely because traditional educational systems are very age-bound and family literacy transcends these traditional boundaries. This lack of 'fit' can be seen in problems of accessing funding, finding appropriate staff and co-ordination between the different educational players involved. Family literacy cuts across these stratifications, which generates challenges in various ways.

Firstly, it requires early childhood, school and adult educators to work together in ways that few have done previously. It requires them to understand each other's terminology, ways of working, bureaucratic structures and philosophies. While this has not led to any real conflict or misunderstandings, it has taken time for each of the parties to get to know each other and work things through in ways that are different from what they have done previously. Collaboration among the various stakeholders is certainly a strength of family literacy, but requires conscious effort to establish and maintain in the programme.

Secondly, funding sources do not always 'fit' readily into family literacy. Because of the mixture of ages, no one agency or funding source can cover all of the programme needs, which necessitates some degree of 'shopping round' and 'mixing and matching' of different funding sources.

Programme aims

Because family literacy involves a wide range of stakeholders (both funders and programme participants), it is inevitable that each group comes into the programme with a matching array of agendas and aims. While it is a strength of family literacy that programmes can achieve a range of different impacts, it is also true that this diversity of interests needs to be watched. Probably the most important strategy in this respect is to constantly clarify and specify what each stakeholder's aims are for the programme so that the overall agenda is on the table for all to see and debate. The identification of the programme aims will vary from site to site according to the needs and interests of the various bodies, but should be made explicit early on and be revised throughout the planning process.

Recruiting staff

As the research literature review shows (Benseman, 2002, p. 7), the adult educator is a key component in making family literacy programmes work successfully. A successful adult educator needs a wide range of skills to fit the multi-faceted requirements that are involved in a family literacy programme. Fortunately, the MFLP has been successful in locating very skilled practitioners who have considerable experience in such areas as special education, early childhood education and parent education.

Locating and securing the adult educators was not straightforward however for a number of reasons. Because 'family literacy educator' is an unknown occupation in New Zealand, it is not readily recognised by people who may have appropriate skills. Secondly, the short-term nature of the contracts offered to teach the courses mean that potential people with appropriate skills in permanent positions are reluctant to take on short-term employment with no future guarantee of employment. Thirdly, because the employers for the positions are a polytechnic and a university, they also bring their own requirements into the mix of issues – for example in the case of AUT, the requirement of a bachelor degree, if not a masters, excludes many people in a field where many experienced practitioners do not have this level of qualification.

Although the adult educators are employees of the tertiary partners, there can be some degree of confusion over 'split loyalties' to their employing body versus the family literacy organisation. This difficulty is best resolved with a Memorandum of Understanding between the organisations involved.

The appointment of the MFLP co-ordinator at the start of the project was not straightforward. The initial strategy of advertising (twice) attracted a total of only five applications, none of whom was judged to be suitable. A second strategy of publicising the position through the networks of COMET's Literacy Taskforce produced a much higher quality group of applicants, which led to the appointment of the present co-ordinator. Personal approaches and using networks are probably the most fruitful means of recruiting staff for programmes.

Funding of the tertiary education component

From the outset, the MFLP was planned to fit as much as possible within existing funding structures so that future family literacy development would not be dependent on one-off grants. The most difficult element of the programme in this regard has been the funding of the adult educator position. It has required a tertiary provider to fund a full-time teacher (approx. 25 hours contact time) off-site for a minimum of 20 weeks in the first instance, and later extending to 40 weeks over the full year.

The tertiary education component for both MFLP sites to date has come from large tertiary institutions. In order to access existing mainstream funding sources however, both institutions were invited to locate the MFLP within the parameters of an existing, pre-planned course. In the case of Manukau Institute of Technology, this has been a bridging education course and with AUT, it has been an introduction to early childhood certificate.

In both cases, these courses were used as the best options available because there appears to be no other funding sources that would enable the programmestaff to either pre-plan their own curriculum or develop it in conjunction with the learners over the course of the programme, which is what was originally envisaged for MFLP. In both cases, the content of the course structures that have been used has certainly matched the intent of the family literacy philosophy reasonably well, not least because of the willingness of the teachers to adapt and modify their teaching to the needs of the students.

It is interesting to speculate the degree to which using existing Early Childhood and Bridging course structures has influenced the two MFLPs and how they have operated. For example, to what extent have the students been selected for the

programmes in keeping with bridging/early childhood anticipated outcomes? Given the 'dual' themes of Family Literacy and Early Childhood/Bridging in the publicity material, which did the participants actually respond to? In other words, to what degree has the need to access funding in the form of existing courses shaped or even diverted the ideals originally envisaged for MFLP?

The answer to this speculation at this point is probably, "to some degree," but not to the overall detriment of the programme. For example, one teacher noted that when she moved on to course content that was not directly linked to the participants she detected a fall-off in their degree of interest and motivation. Certainly, it would be interesting to have at least one future site where the funding was not tied to a specific course and monitor what effect such a 'clean slate' had on the content and tenor of the course. Another alternative would involve the planning of a specific family literacy course that was then put through formal programme approval procedures in its own right.

The recruitment process

Starting a new type of educational programme almost invariably means some teething problems in areas such as recruitment of learners. The short timeframe to start the Bairds site in late January in particular did not make the process of participant recruitment and selection easy. Subsequent intakes have been somewhat easier, helped by the growing recruitment skills of key staff and increasing momentum through greater awareness of the programme in the community. Experience to date shows proactive recruitment by 'shoulder-tapping' to be the most effective strategy. This matches US experience (Padak, Sapin & Baycich, 2002), but is different from Britain (Brooks, 1996, p. 102) where publicity letters were the most successful recruitment strategy.

Selection of appropriate adult students

A fundamental question for any educational programme evaluation is whether the recruited participants match the intended, or target, population. The original intention of the MFLP was to recruit adults with poor literacy skills and their children. Initial interviews with the adult participants showed that while all of them have had fairly limited and/or negative schooling experiences, at least a third appear to have quite reasonable levels of literacy skill and probably only about half would approximate the types of learners found in conventional adult literacy programmes. However, there is no doubt that the participants were appropriate

candidates for the course in terms of other factors such as having children who are struggling with their schoolwork, difficult home situations, poor self-images, health issues, employment difficulties and so forth. Certainly none would have fitted readily into any conventional tertiary programme before attending MFLP.

In the process of getting the programme underway, a number of other influences have come into play that have probably influenced the nature of the student group to some degree. The first influence has come from the need to locate the MFLP within an existing tertiary course. This requirement has meant that while the partner tertiary providers have opted into MFLP as a family literacy programme by agreeing to participate as programme partners, they still need to satisfy the various requisites and agendas associated with the course being used. For example, there have been concerns that potential students will cope with the academic level of the courses which are offered at Levels 3 and 4 (with a possible pressure therefore to not accept applicants with low or very low literacy skills).

A second influence has been the various funding sources. While the Ministry of Education has the most obvious literacy agenda in funding the MFLP, WINZ's intentions are more diverse. Firstly, they clearly have a greater concern supporting people who are registered with them for a benefit and have less interest for example in potential participants where a partner may be working, but the household still has a very low income. Their interest is also primarily about work outcomes rather than literacy *per se*. Gains in literacy skill may be valued, but probably don't count as much if they are not accompanied at some point by work outcomes. On the other hand, it is possible to have positive work outcomes after the programme with minimal or no literacy gains, which is likely to be an acceptable outcome for WINZ.

These competing agendas are a simple fact of life for the MFLP because of the diversity of agencies involved and do not necessarily detract from the original intentions of the programme. It is important however to have each of these agendas transparent to all of the partner organisations, rather than assumed or implicit. The debate over what the programme goals are is a related issue and needs to be complemented by an agreement over the criteria for selecting students. While some eligibility criteria are easily made explicit (e.g. having a child enrolled at the kindergarten or school) and are reasonably straightforward, others are less so. It is useful for these other criteria to be made explicit and transparent

so that there is a common understanding across all the programme partners. The criteria can cover a range of elements (which is appropriate given the broad dimensions of family literacy) and applicants would not necessarily need to meet all criteria. It is probable that applicants will not meet all of the various criteria, but they should at least meet a reasonable number of them.

It is important to realise that family literacy is a multi-faceted programme that seeks to address a range of issues ranging from poor literacy skills to various social skills.

It is interesting to note that all of the adults with reasonable literacy skills in the MFLP were challenged considerably by other elements of the programme. In some cases there was clearly an impact in terms of parenting issues and in other cases, on the nominated child. Overall therefore, it is reasonable to state that the MFLP has been successful in recruiting a group of adults with high needs, although these needs have not always been in terms of literacy skills.

The criteria for selecting participants should therefore also be reasonably open across a range of variables and are not tied too readily to any single criterion.

PACTT

Overall, all three forms of the PACTT component of the programmes at both sites have worked well. Despite initial difficulties sorting timetabling issues, Tahī and Classroom PACTT ran smoothly for most of the project. Feedback from both teachers and the adults indicated that they would like Tahī PACTT to be a bit longer as it often reduced to approximately 10 minutes by the time the parents arrived and fitted in with the classroom routine. Parents reported that they valued Tahī PACTT for the way that it made their children “feel special” – usually to the envy of the other children in the classroom. The most frequent feedback on these sessions was around the positive value of working intensively with their children and getting to know what was going on in their child’s current schoolwork. Several commented that they especially liked being able to watch how the teachers taught their pupils. “I always knew that I wanted to show my daughter how to read and so on, but I never actually knew how you do it. Now I do.”

A second suggestion was that the time be varied occasionally in order to expose parents to how teachers teach subjects such as science and art. Several teachers also suggested that more careful planning could allow for better co-ordination of

programmetopics across the kindergarten, primary school and the adult programmes.

As with most American family literacy programmes, the MFLP has required that each participating parent officially nominate one child to be the focus of the various family literacy activities such as PACTT. The reasons for nominating of a single child in the programme are not readily available in the literature, but appear to be done for a number of reasons. These reasons include the minimising of administrative arrangements (changing the children in the programme would necessitate constant re-arranging timetables etc.) and the assumption that involving multiple siblings would 'dilute' the impact of the programme. The assumption is that the impact of the programme on the parent and the nominated child will inevitably filter down to other siblings, largely due to changes in the adult's parenting skills.

Some parents reported some unease about being able to only have one child nominated for the MFLP who takes part in the Tahī PACTT activities. This issue mainly concerned parents with more than one child at the same school or kindergarten. However, even those parents with one child at the school and one at the kindergarten for example still reported the non-PACTT child feeling left out and/or envious of the nominated child. One partial solution for this issue was where the adult educator endeavoured to alternate non-PACTT children from the school in activities that are not part of the on-going literacy programme (e.g. art). This variation has been rated positively by those involved and does not detract from the overall functioning of Tahī PACTT.

It should be noted however, that the development of the other forms of PACTT (and especially Whānau PACTT) has been much more successful in this regard, because of their involvement of the wider family members.

Length of programme

It is clear that the fixed length of the programme does not always fully match the participants' learning needs. For a small number, the present programmes are not long enough; these people would benefit from a longer period of involvement (this is particularly true for people with English language difficulties and for high need literacy students). For another group, consideration could be given to moving them more quickly on for example, to some form of tertiary education (such as a couple

of foundation courses). This change would not necessarily mean a total withdrawal from MFLP, but would recognise their quick gains in confidence and self efficacy (i.e. belief in their abilities as learners).

Participants' on-going personal crises and their impact on MFLP

Throughout this pilot project, one of the distinguishing features has been the extent and intrusive nature of the crises in some of the participants' daily lives. The crises have included physical assault, custody issues, accommodation problems, major health trauma, police-related incidents, benefit difficulties, family disputes, and underpinning or alongside many of these problems, money issues. Talking about her home situation, one participant whose husband had recently been arrested, said, "we live in an unsafe environment. We're being harassed by Police and the neighbours, we've been robbed five times, the front fence crashed into three times, so I've put my kids with my mother."

This situation is certainly not true of all the participants, but a significant number have had considerable issues and crises that have resulted in on-going absences, difficulties completing course requirements and withdrawal from the programme. In many cases, the crises have not directly concerned the learners themselves, but people (almost always family members) for whom they have responsibility. These various crises have placed considerable pressure on the project staff and especially the adult educators at both sites. These adult educators have demonstrated real commitment to the programme by their efforts to help resolve the issues, which are well beyond the normal expectations of staff roles. Nonetheless, they see these demands as 'part and parcel' of family literacy and as one adult educator said, "I would not expect it to be any other way."

While these crises are an indicator that MFLP is indeed recruiting appropriate people for the programme, they still require considerable energy and time from project staff that could otherwise be focussed on educational activities. The present model of MFLP does not include provision for such a support social worker, but future developments could consider this possibility. Consideration also needs to be made however of one adult educator's comment that she considered that her involvement in working these crises through with her students helped give her programme its distinctive flavour, was integral to her credibility with the students and an important reason behind the overall impact of the programme.

‘Ownership’ of the MFLP

The issue of ‘ownership’ is probably inevitable in a programme involving a number of institutions involved in various roles. Each institution has its own legal requirements, administrative procedures and need to promote its work, some of which mesh readily and some that don’t. For example, it is important that any promotional material or public presentations gives due recognition to all participating institutions (including COMET) and not convey the impression that the programme is confined to only some of the partner institutions.

This issue has been consciously debated and discussed within the MFLP. The issue has eased somewhat over the duration of the programme as mutual understanding develops and common procedures have evolved. The development of Memoranda of Understandings between COMET and partner institutions has been an important step in this respect.

General principles of the MFLP

As a result of its development to date, a number of key principles have been adopted by the MFLP:

- tuition is free to participants
- recruitment of adult participants will be aimed at the greatest need
- participants need to commit their involvement to the duration of the programme
- high levels of attendance will be encouraged
- facilities will be comfortable and appropriate for adults, as well as children
- child participants will be between two and seven years of age
- the programme follows the Kenan Model of Family Literacy’s four components
- programme planning will be given high priority and carefully co-ordinated across all four components
- professional development for staff will be integral to the programme
- all participating institutions will be fully informed of programme developments
- each site recognises the contribution of each participating institution, but none is seen as dominant

- the programme needs to be adapted to the unique circumstances and needs of each individual site
- technology and Internet will be incorporated wherever possible
- in order to ensure that the programmes are sustainable over the longer term, existing funding sources and structures are used wherever possible.

Key features of the MFLP

In addition to these policy components, a number of key operational and educational features of a successful family literacy programme have emerged, based on MFLP experiences to date:

- a lead agency to plan and co-ordinate the overall project
- a skilled adult educator who understands and copes with the multi-faceted demands of family literacy
- a programme of reasonable duration and intensity built round the four components of family literacy – parent education, child education, adult education and parent and child together (PACTT)
- regular professional development that involves staff at all levels of involvement
- sustained commitment from all of the partner institutions
- clear understanding between all participating institutions of their respective obligations and responsibilities
- adequate funding to ensure all components of the programme are available
- regular and on-going management/operational meetings and communications to ensure smooth functioning of the daily routines
- an adult-appropriate teaching space in a central location
- physical proximity for early childhood and primary school partner institutions⁵
- public celebration of key events and achievements (e.g. graduations).

⁵ The proximity of the tertiary partner is probably less important; for Rowandale the isolation of the adult educator from AUT was seen as both a plus and a minus and the closeness of Manukau Institute of Technology at Bairds Otara was evaluated similarly.

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