

Collaborating with parents to empower literacy
learners: An evaluation of the TTAL programme

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1. Research concerning parents and literacy

a) Parents skill as language teachers

Teachers, educators and researchers have long pointed to the almost miraculous way in which children master the complexities of spoken language prior to commencing formal schooling. Parents play a dominant role in this development, intuitively prompting and prodding their children towards meaning making. From birth parents treat their babies as if they are intending to communicate with them, and hence, respond to them as "meaning makers" (Wells, 1986). The child focuses on meaning and the care giver responds to the meanings they make. In the context of this purposeful exchange, meanings develop. Thus language develops as the child actively participates in real communicative acts, and engages in a constructive process of meaning making (Lindfors, 1985).

The parent's role in this is as a listener, prompter, information giver, asker of questions, and fellow meaning maker, interested in the communication process. It seems that the key to early language development is the volume of opportunities to make meaning (Wells, 1983), the degree of one-to-one interaction with adults where the adult is talking about matters that are of interest and concern to the child (Wells, 1986), and finally, the type and nature of adult interaction with children (Snow, 1983).

b) Influence of the home on early literacy development

Consistently, research has found that school factors (e.g. resources, class sizes, classroom organization and methods) account for less than 20% of variance when predicting student achievement (Hanushek, 1981; Jencks et al., 1972 & Thompson, 1985). However, differences in family backgrounds and teachers have a significant impact on student achievement. In fact, some have suggested that the cumulative effect of home background variables alone, probably accounts for over 60% of the variance in student literacy performance (Rutter, Tizzard & Witmore, 1970; Thompson, 1985).

It also appears that the extent to which children cope with schooling is related closely to a range of cultural factors. This has been illustrated by Heath's (1983) well known ethnography in three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath found considerable cultural variation in the acquisition of oral language and the manner in which parents introduced children to literacy. By focusing closely on story reading she was able to document great differences in community styles of literacy socialisation.

Children in a white middle class community (Maintown), were socialized into a life in which books and information gained from them was seen as having a significant role in learning. They interacted with children from age 6 months in book reading events; asking information questions, relating the content to life situations, and encouraging them to tell their own narratives. In a white working class community (Roadville), children were also involved in book reading, but this centred on alphabet and number books, real life stories, nursery rhymes and bible stories. The focus for these parents was usually on factual recounts of events. Parents asked factual questions about the books, but did not attempt to relate the books to the children's lives.

The parents within a poor black community (Trackton) on the other hand, rarely provided book reading events. As well, the questions these parents asked were different. They did not ask their children to name or describe the features of their world. As well, they used oral stories of a different kind, focussing mainly on fictional stories or familiar events in new contexts.

Clearly, each of these communities was inadvertently preparing its children in different ways for schooling. Heath found that children in Maintown performed well in school. Roadville children on the other hand did well in the early grades, but had difficulty after grade three when a greater emphasis was placed on analytic, predictive and evaluative questioning. This emphasis required them to think more abstractly and independently. However, Trackton children were unsuccessful in school right from the early grades.

What was happening in each of these communities was that the place literacy assumed in their culture, was helping to prepare these children, to greater and lesser extents, to succeed or fail in the school system.

c) The impact of story reading on school achievement

There are many factors which contribute to achievement within school. For example, Purves (1973) found that one of these factors, is the extent to which children are given opportunities to read at home.

There appears to be great power in reading to young children. Children who have been read to by adults in the preschool years show more positive attitudes to reading, increased confidence and motivation to read, and greater reading and writing proficiency (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982; Grimmett & McCoy, 1980; Spiegel). In fact, the interaction of parents, children and books appears to be one of the major factors that helps to initiate children into the world of literacy (Wells, 1986).

But not only does early story reading with adults influence emergent literacy, it appears that it is a powerful factor influencing literacy achievement at school. The Victorian Ministry of Education "100 Schools Project" (a five year longitudinal study of educational and psychological factors which impact on students' literacy development), has found that reading activity at home has a significant positive influence on student reading achievement, attitude and attentiveness. These factors accounted for 30% of variance in reading achievement for 5-6 year olds, rising to 50% for 12-14 year olds (Rowe, 1990).

d) Parent participation

Not surprisingly, the recognition of the importance of parents in the education process, has led to a concern to maximize the extent of their involvement in education. But this involvement has taken many forms, and at times has been anything but helpful.

Bruner (1980, in Briggs & Potter, 1990) has pointed out that parent involvement is often a "dustbin term" which can mean all things to all people. Potter also points out that often parent involvement programmes are "shallow, ineffectual, confusing, and frustrating to both parents and teachers" (Briggs & Potter, 1990).

One of the reasons for the failure of some programmes is that many teachers have negative attitudes about parents and parent involvement. These teachers sometimes claim that parents are apathetic, come to school only to criticize etc (Briggs & Potter, 1990). This appears to be particularly evident with parents from lower socio-economic groups.

Others have suggested that the failure of some programmes to attract parental interest, may be due to parents not feeling competent to deal with school work. As well, it has been argued that this phenomenon may reflect the fact that these parents feel insecure in the school setting and fearful about participation in the learning of their children (Moles, 1982; Greenberg, 1989).

As Mavrogenes (1990) points out, teachers and principals may need to question the assumption that low-income parents do not care about their children's education. It is likely that most parents are willing to help with their children's education, but many may have little idea concerning how to go about it.

Halsey and Midwinter (1972, in Briggs & Potter, 1990) argued that the best way to overcome some of these problems and to empower working class students, was to change the nature of education to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain power over their own community. This they argued would require the transformation of primary schools into focal points for their communities, thus bringing teachers and parents

closer together, and leading subsequently to changed attitudes on the part of both parties. These schools it was argued should aim to develop self-esteem and provide students with power over their lives.

Within this context, parent participation can be introduced not simply to allow parents to learn from teachers, but to enable better links to be established between the home, school and community. In this way schools and teachers will also learn about the families of the children they teach.

Some schools have adopted a very narrow definition of parent involvement, which primarily seeks to determine what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for them. This view is often evidenced by parents filling a variety of unpaid teacher aide or custodial roles.

Parents must be viewed as equal partners. There must be a reciprocal relationship. We need to go beyond involvement and recognize the vital role that parents play in education. As Kruger & Mahon (1990, p. 4) point out, "parental involvement in literacy learning has much greater value than as an add-on to what teachers do".

e) Moving towards new models for participation

Petit (1980) has outlined a model describing levels of parent participation that is of some help in understanding what form parent participation can take.

The first level is monitoring and is essentially teacher initiated and in the form of letters, informal talks, class meeting etc.

The second level is informing, and involves the provision of more detailed information about school policies, organizational procedures, aims, expectations etc. This is usually achieved through notices, direct reporting, parent-teacher conferences, home visits by teachers, and well produced written materials.

The third level is that of participation and essentially involves some type of involvement in the activities of the classroom or school. The examples Petit provides are varied, but include schools where parents helped to produce materials, and another where the school ran a series of parent inservice workshops on reading.

Unfortunately, Petit's classification system tends to mask a great deal of diversity within the categories he selects. In particular, the 'participation' category appears to be extremely broad. Any classification of parental involvement should ideally address the issues of content,

process, and source (or initiator) of the involvement, as well as control.

Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) are also critical of Petit's classification and suggest that it does not go far enough. They suggest a fourth category which they label empowerment. At this level both teachers and parents are involved in advising, planning and administering programmes. This level is the level to which we should aspire and which few reach. It requires considerable trust and co-operation. Rasinski and Fredericks also suggest a refinement that allows for the option of a home orientation as well as a school orientation.

One of the problems with classification systems of this type is that by categorizing programmes, a great deal of internal diversity is lost. A much better way to describe programmes that have been attempted, may be to assess each project on a number of key variables, with the assumption being that on each of these there will be a continuum ranging from one extreme to another.

The key variables when looking at parent programmes appear to be content, process, source (who initiated the programme?) and control (who is in charge?). Table 1 is an attempt to describe the range of options that are possible for each of these key variables.

Table 1 about here

In setting up the TTALL programme we were mindful of the need to think carefully about each of the key variables in Table 1. We were conscious that we had initiated this programme, hence, we immediately started from a position of power. However, it was our aim to involve parents as true partners, and as a result, allow them to assume control of their own learning.

When an attempt was made to assess the TTALL project on these four key variables it became evident that the programme had the potential to involve parents as partners, not simply clients or helpers (See Table 2).

Table 2 about here

In setting up our programme we were aware of the need to help parents interact more effectively with their children. That is, to respond to their children's written and read texts in such a way that their chances of success at school were maximized.

In doing this we were aware that the home provides this type of environment when helping children to learn to speak. However, when school age is reached and literacy becomes the focus, there appears to be an immediate change. This change often involves a shift in the very nature of the relationship with their child. Shortly after school entry parents seem to change, and cease to be providers of risk free environments in which children are encouraged to experience many things, explore problems and try out new skills. Instead, many create an environment in which literacy is often practised out of context, without a primary focus on meaning, and in which risk taking is discouraged.

It is an assumption of this project that the home environment adds a great deal to school learning. Ideally, it is one in which the relationship between adult and child is an accepting, supportive and stimulating one. It was our belief that such an environment should also offer respect for the children's ability to direct his/her own learning (Bissex, 1984).

f) Attempting to involve many parents in the programme

Another major concern for us when designing the TTALL programme was that parent participation programmes typically lead to the involvement of only a few parents (often middle class women). This it would seem may lead to highly involved parents children having even higher achieving children.

As Toomey (1989) has pointed out, this in turn, may lead to a different form of educational inequality. However, Kruger and Mahon (1990) argue that such a view overlooks the benefits that all children within schools might receive if well organized participation programmes were in place.

It was this last viewpoint which led to the multi-stage model adopted in the TTALL programme. A model which begins with a programme focussed on individual parents working with their own children, then moves slowly towards the deployment of parents as resource people for other families, children, and indeed even other schools.

g) Specific parent programmes for literacy

There have been many attempts to design parent programmes of different types. Some of these have been part of research projects, others a response to local school level initiatives, and still others, system level attempts to involve more parents.

Some of the most significant initiatives have occurred in England. The Plowden report (1967) was one of a number of factors which probably influenced the significant number of initiatives that have occurred. It brought with it the concept of partnership between home and school. It also recognized that the most important factors contributing to failure of working class students were differences in language, experiences and values between home and school.

One highly successful attempt to involve parents was the Haringey Reading Project. This confirmed that reading standards can be raised substantially with parent participation in the school. The project involved 6 schools from the same multi-ethnic inner London Borough, where literacy standards were well below national averages. The project involved children aged 6-8 years of age for a period of two years.

Six classes at six separate schools were assigned at random to one of three groups: parent involvement (2 schools), additional teacher help in school (2 schools), and control schools, which received no additional help (2 schools).

It was found that children whose parents were involved in the participation programme made significant gains in reading achievement (irrespective of reading ability), while the others made little (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison; 1982).

The Belfield Primary School Experiment (Wilby, 1982) was another project which provided confirmation of the value of participation programmes. In this study, parents were involved for three years and were visited by teachers who provided lists of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' about reading. As well, children were provided with books each night which were taken home and read with parents. Parents then sent written comments back to school the next day so that teachers could follow up problems.

Similar results were also achieved with a group of working class 7 year olds in Barking (Essex). After two years children who had not taken reading books home had reading scores below national averages, whereas those who had received parent help were reading above national averages (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison; 1982).

One very practical outcome of this work has been the use of the paired reading technique. This simple technique was first designed by Morgan (1976) and was later refined by Tizard, Schofield & Hewison (1982), Topping & McKnight (1984), and Topping & Wolfendale (1985). It is a simple procedure which involves two phases. The first is a simultaneous phase where a tutor and child sit next to each other reading out loud in synchrony. The tutor adjusts the reading speed to that of the child. Miscues are picked up as the reading proceeds, the child being asked to repeat the correct word before proceeding.

The second independent reading phase, involves a similar pattern of synchronised reading, except the reader attempts independent reading when confident. This is achieved by encouraging the child to gently tap the tutor when he/she feels that it is possible to read independently. The tutor praises the child and he/she proceeds until an error is made. This is then corrected by the tutor reading the original version. The reading then proceeds in a synchronised way until the child again signals to the tutor for independent reading to begin.

The studies that have employed this strategy have been highly successful. Positive results have been found with diverse school communities covering all socio-economic backgrounds. These results have been found in as little as 4 weeks, and as much as a year. The average length of time for the initial use of the strategy is approximately 8 weeks. Gains of 3 times 'normal' (defined as one year in reading age in one chronological year) in reading accuracy and 5 times normal in comprehension are typical (Topping, in Topping & Wolfendale, 1985).

This strategy has also been tested in an Australian project called the School, Home and Reading Enjoyment (SHARE) programme (Turner, 1987). This project has again confirmed that paired reading has a positive impact on participating students and their parents. Benefits of Paired Reading were found to be evident in improved attitude to reading, and gains in reading rate, accuracy and comprehension.

But of course there have been more complex and elaborate programmes developed. One recently developed English package (Pearce, 1990) has become known as the Cambridge Programme. It is essentially an inservice programme for support teachers, teachers and educators interested in parental involvement in reading projects. The programme consists of eight separate booklets for parents and a variety of associated activities and resources.

An initial period of 6 weeks is set aside for the programme, although this is often extended. The work is individualised and varies according to the child's needs. The programme begins with an initial meeting between the support teacher, class teacher, parents and the child. Tasks are then selected for the three participants under the guidance of the support teacher. The class teacher is responsible for the daily programme in school and for selecting the most appropriate words, books, spellings, written work etc (Pearce, 1990). This programme although not yet evaluated fully has proven popular with the participants.

In Australia we have also seen programmes developed by Max Kemp (1989) at the University of Canberra. Kemp's programme involves a series of workshops with parents, designed to help them tutor their own children. Both parents/care givers are required to attend the initial sessions (at night), and later tutors assist them to implement strategies outlined in the programme. The focus in this programme is very much upon helping parents to help their own children. The programme covers topics like learning, the reading process and specific reading strategies. The second phase involves detailed diagnosis conducted by Kemp's staff/students, and the design of a short term programme seen as well suited to the child's needs.

h) Why has the TTALL programme been developed?

The TTALL programme has been developed within this rich context of previous studies. All of these projects have added to our knowledge of parent

education. The TTALL programme aims to build on the understandings acquired through many of these projects and programmes, but it also attempts to go further.

One key difference with the programme that will be described is that it has a focus on the adult rather than the child.

Most (if not all) of the programmes that we have examined, have placed the focus upon the child. That is, they may have been programmes for parents, but they were initiated because of the needs of specific children with literacy problems, and invariably revolve around these children's needs. In fact, many of the programmes involve the development of individual child programmes and support of parents as they implement these programmes (e.g. Kemp, 1989; Pearce, 1990). While we are supportive of such approaches, our programme was designed to be a more broadly based community project that hopefully has the potential to influence a larger number of people.

It has been our aim to treat parents as learners, and to see them grow, because it is our belief that to do otherwise is short sighted and patronising. If children are to be given a chance to succeed with literacy (and schooling) then parents have to be equipped to become long term supporters of their children's learning. Continued growth in children as learners is at least partly dependent upon the quality of interactions that these children experience with their parents within the home.

An additional feature of the TTALL programme is that it has a dual concern with reading and writing. Most projects have focussed on reading. Those that have addressed writing have usually done so in a very limited way.

Finally, the project has been shaped (at least in part) by the group for which it was designed, parents in Western Sydney.

2. Background to the Project

The community of Lethbridge Park is a community with many members who find it exceedingly difficult to cope with the pressures and problems existing in the urban environment. Not surprisingly, the community has high levels of unemployment, vandalism, prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse etc.

As well, adult and youth illiteracy are above national averages. Given the relationship between literacy standards and access to employment and education, ongoing efforts to raise literacy standards, and the value placed upon it by the community, are of great importance.

It was for these reasons that Lethbridge Park was chosen as the site for this project. Funding for the project was provided by the NSW Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs as part of a competitive grants scheme set up for the International Literacy Year.

3. Rationale

The purpose of this project was to design and evaluate an educational programme which it was hoped could improve the quality of parent child interactions when discussion reading and writing. Further, it was hoped that this would lead to gains in literacy standards, and a more positive attitude to schooling for both parents and children.

A secondary aim of the programme was to help equip parents to provide additional literacy opportunities in the home. It has been argued by a number of researchers that the progress of children experiencing literacy problems, depends upon the provision of significantly more reading and writing. Ironically, a number of researchers have shown that students of lower literacy competence consistently read for less time each day (Allington, 1983), read material frequently at their frustration level (Gambrell, Wilson & Gant, 1981) and experience qualitatively inferior interactions with adults concerning their reading and writing (Cairney, 1989a).

The whole project in essence was dependent on a number of important tested, and in some cases, untested assumptions:

(i) Literacy standards in areas like Lethbridge Park would be accelerated rapidly if parents placed a higher priority upon a range of experiences with reading and writing in the preschool years.

(ii) Students within the school system who are currently experiencing difficulties could be assisted if the quality of literacy interactions between parents and children were to be improved.

(iii) People who experience literacy problems require increased opportunities to read and write. Opportunities which cannot simply be provided in school time.

(iv) Literacy standards have a direct impact upon employment prospects, life chances and individual self esteem.

Influenced by the above assumptions, the TTALL project was implemented in an effort to increase community awareness of literacy, and develop parent training packages which could have widespread use within the community.

4. Objectives of the project

The major purpose of the project was to design and implement specific educational programme which sought to:

- * Raise parental participation in the literacy activities of their children;
- * Improve the quality of the interactions adults have with children as they read and write;
- * Train community resource people who could be deployed

- in a wide range of community literacy activities;
- * Raise community expectations concerning literacy;
- * Raise community expectations for education;
- * Serve as a catalyst for a variety of community-based literacy initiatives.

5. What was the format for the project?

The project was designed to be completed in three distinct stages over a period of eighteen months. The three stages were as follows:

Stage 1 - Involved identifying and training 25 parents to: interact more effectively with their own children (aged 1-12 years) as they engaged in literacy; use a range of strategies to promote literacy development; make greater use of literacy resources within the community. The initial programme requires four hours of attendance (two separate two hour blocks), and between class work with their children, for a period of eight weeks.

All parents completing the programme received a Community Literacy Training Certificate.

Stage 2 - Involved the training of 15 of the initial group of parents to acquire more advanced skills as literacy tutors. These parents were deployed in the school to work with other children.

Stage 3 - Involved training of selected the parents from stage 2 to act as community tutors. These 14 parents were trained to use a specially designed package of six one hour sessions, designed to introduce another parent and child to some of the TTALL strategies.

The training programmes at all stages within this programme were conducted by a full-time programme co-ordinator (Lynne Munsie) and selected university, school, preschool and community resource people. The programmes contained a mixture of short lectures, workshops, demonstration, and apprentice teaching sessions. A critical part of the training was the use of demonstrations of all strategies. This work was conducted in a cycle (see Figure 1) which was recursive in nature, being characterised by movement back and forth within the various stages as specific needs arose.

Figure 1 about here

At this stage of the project the Stage 1 programme has been developed and used with a group of twenty five parents at Lethbridge Park and has been replicated with 70 parents at Stockton Primary and Preschool in Newcastle. Stages 2 and three have also been completed but are yet to be evaluated. The rest of this paper is concerned with an evaluation of the Stage 1 programme at Lethbridge Park.

The content (see Appendix 1) in stage 1 covered basic child development, issues concerning the nature of reading and writing, strategies for assisting children with reading and writing (e.g. directed reading and thinking, conducting writing conferences etc) and familiarity with a basic "Text Talk Cycle" (see Cairney, 1989). The latter is a method developed for interacting with children as they read and write, and requires a scaffolding strategy for helping children to make meaning.

6. Conduct of the Stage 1 Programme

The first group involved in the TTALL programme were invited to consider involvement in the project in a series of written notices sent to all parents associated with Lethbridge Park Primary and Preschool. This was accompanied by extensive media publicity. After several weeks of advertising a public meeting was organized at Lethbridge Park Primary School. At this meeting the purpose of the programme was explained and a simple information sheet distributed requesting an indication of interest. From an initial 50 in attendance at the meeting 25 accepted our invitation to be involved for 4 hours per week. One parent subsequently dropped out of the programme because she obtained a new job which prevented her attendance.

These parents selected 9.00 to 11.00am as the preferred time for the programme, day-time being preferred because many parents are unemployed, and most preferred the safety of their homes at night. All of the parents who chose to complete the programme were not in full-time employment, except for one father who was a taxi driver working at night. Twenty four women and one man enrolled for the programme. Most of these parents had experienced only basic high school education (see Table 3).

Table 3 about here

7. Methodology employed in the evaluation of the TTALL Programme

a) Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of 25 parents and their 34 children (who became the experimental subjects) and 75 students who were selected randomly from all classes within Lethbridge Park Public School (these

served as the control subjects).

b) Evaluation instruments and procedures

The evaluation of the project has been based on a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures:

- * Pre and post-test information for all experimental and control students consisted of:
 - ACER Primary Survey comprehension (Forms BB, 1-4);
 - ACER Primary Survey vocabulary (Forms AA, BB, 1-4);
 - ACER spelling;
 - Test of reading attitudes (See appendix 2).
- * Interviews with all parents before and after the programme. These have varied in format but have included: small group structured interviews, large group unstructured interviews, and individual interviews.
- * Videotaping of parents at various stages throughout the project.
- * Field note data (recorded by programme co-ordinator and Assistant Principal).
- * Reflective journal material kept by co-ordinator.
- * Group interviews with students and school staff.

8. Results

I will describe the findings of this evaluation in two broad categories: the impact of the programme on parents; and the impact upon student literacy performance. At the outset, it is important that the latter is still proceeding.

a) Impact of the programme on parents

A variety of qualitative and quantitative measures have shown that the TTALL programme has had a strong influence on parents and the relationships they have with their children. Within the data, a number of clear trends have emerged:

- (i) The programme has had an impact upon the way parents interact with their children

Analyses of parent interviews, and the post-programme survey, suggest that the programme has led to changes in the way parents talk to and with their

children. For example, when asked if the course had changed the way they talk to their children about school work, 19 parents (79%) felt strongly that it had. The remaining 5 parents (21%) felt less strongly about this, but agreed that it had affected them.

Analysis of video footage and direct observation of parent/child interactions also suggests that by the end of the programme parents were:

- a) offering more positive feedback;
- b) providing a different focus when listening to children reading (e.g. less emphasis on phonics);
- c) asking qualitatively better questions;
- d) providing qualitatively better responses to their children's writing and reading.

(ii) The programme has offered parents strategies they did not have before

The data have also suggested that the programme has provided parents with new strategies for talking to their children about reading and writing. Post-programme surveys show that parents now use a variety of new strategies (see Table 4).

Table 4 about here

The most popular strategies are the use of personal spelling dictionaries (71%), predictable books (67%), Dialogue journals (59%), Paired reading (54%), and help with the editing of their child's work (50%). As well, a majority of parents (92%) indicated that they now listened regularly to their child reading.

It has also become obvious from the comments of parents, that the programme has had an effect upon the way they assist their children. As the following entry from the programme co-ordinator's journal shows, parents quickly began to use the programme strategies at home.

Wendy was very proud (today). Her eldest son who doesn't live at home was visiting for the weekend. Wendy related an exchange between them as he tried to do some school work:

"He doesn't like writing and wouldn't write anything." "I told him about my course and Rodney's story [i.e. a research writing exercise done as part of TTALL]. He sat down and wrote this [Wendy showed a piece of writing]. It's not very neat - bit hard to understand."

Wendy had written down the spelling errors ready for his own personal dictionary!

While simple strategies like the personal dictionary probably require little skill to implement, some of the strategies that were introduced in the programme are quite sophisticated. For example, the following journal entry from the course co-ordinator's journal shows how the research writing strategy was being applied by one mother (Tracey).

Before class today Tracey shared how she has been using the research strategy at home. She explained that her son in year 10 was required to complete a major project as part of his School Certificate requirements. He was completing a project on Ice Hockey. He had announced on Sunday that it was due on the following Tuesday. Tracey then related how she used the strategy.

"We went through the steps just like you said, you know discovery draft, then we group the information and everything. I showed him how to use the table of contents and the index. He thought it was great, really easy. We grouped the information under the headings. It worked well. I didn't have to do all the work. I thought this session [i.e. the research session in TTALL] was the best."

The use of the programme strategies at home has also been verified through the interviews with the children of the parents in the programme. For example, Brendon offered the following comment during a structured group interview.

"The programme is good fun, because she [Daphne his mother] still had a smile on her face and she told us all about it and she bringing stuff home what you sent us to do, and she just make us kids do it with her, so it be good fun and when she finished it she take it up to you."

(iii) The programme has helped parents to choose resource material, help children with book selection, and use libraries more effectively

This outcome has been obvious to anyone observing the programme sessions. Parents in the TTALL programme are now more aware of the diversity of resources available in the school and community. They are more capable of finding appropriate resources within the community library, and can now use a range of research skills that previously were not available to them.

Another more subtle (but equally significant) change has been their

increased skill at selecting and making available a variety of literature for their children.

One dramatic piece of evidence was observed at our final videotaping session. During the first video session on the initial day of the programme approximately 50% of the parents had chosen basal reading material for the child to read (many of which were appalling). However, at a video session at the end of the programme a variety of quality literature was chosen. In fact, not one parent chose a school reading book. Another interesting outcome was that whereas initially the parents largely chose the books to be read, by the end of the programme the students themselves had largely made the choice of material. Not surprisingly, it was also obvious that the material chosen was better suited to each child's reading level, with most able to read confidently.

Further evidence that parents are now more aware of the need to make wise choices when selecting resources, is indicated by the number of parents who have frequently sought advice on book selection. Some have made frequent use of the library, others bring books along to sessions to share, and so on.

(iv) The parents have gained new knowledge

When the post-programme evaluation was completed by parents it became clear that they firmly believe they have gained new knowledge (See Table 5).

Table 5 about here

One of the interesting findings from this evaluation is that not only do parents feel they have gained new knowledge about learning (100%), writing (96%), reading (100%), and spelling (100%), all now feel more capable of dealing with their children's problems.

The parents self reporting of this perceived growth in knowledge, is also supported by observations of them when working with their own children, as well as by their enthusiastic involvement in the programme sessions. The following segment from the transcript of a group session shows how one parent (Lynne) has been reflecting on her own child's progress. She offered the following response when the group was asked by the programme co-ordinator whether the course had given them new confidence.

"I was saying to Sue today earlier that I've

noticed with Stephen he is best left by himself, he will get on and write, I mean he wrote all of this [Lynne produced some draft writing] by himself, umm while I was getting tea. Now the only word I had to help him with was 'hatched', he asked for that, but the rest he just sat down and wrote. But while we've been here this morning, I had to write the first sentence (he asked me) so he could think of the story, and he just fiddled and looked around the room, watched the other kids. I, I do find that he likes to be left on his own to just get on and do it."

(v) Their families have been affected

One of the interesting outcomes of the TTALL programme has been that it is not only the parents and their children who have been affected. There appears also to have been an effect on families generally. This has been most evident in the way they spend their time.

One of the most telling pieces of evidence came from the parents' self reports at the end of the programme. This indicated that 79% of them now organized their homes in different ways to enable them to help their children with their learning.

Evidence of the impact of families has also been readily apparent in the informal comments of parents as well as in structured interviews.

For example, during an interview one mother (Narelle) described how the programme had helped her to work with her elder daughter, which in turn had influenced their relationship.

I have found this activity [research skills] really great. Its brought my daughter and I closer together. The other smart one [meaning her son] just thought he was so clever, but my daughter and I have been working really hard. She really enjoys doing the project this way.

Another interesting outcome of the programme is that it has often led to changes in the reading and writing habits of specific children within families. For example, Deborah shared informally one morning how her son had begun to read more books. The co-ordinator's journal entry records the following incident:

Deborah came in very excited this morning. Her son Grant came out last night and asked her to listen

to him read 3 books. As Deborah indicated this was a significant event:

"The first time in seven and a half years!"

A week later, the same parent shared how the use of one of the programme strategies at home (research skills) had an impact upon the whole family. Once again, the details of her informal comments have been recorded in the co-ordinator's journal.

Deborah brought in her project today [which was done as part of the programme], beautifully illustrated... Deborah had done the writing, Dad had drawn the picture, and the boys had done the colouring, the paper crumpling, and had also collected some of the information. She commented: "We all got down on the floor and worked on the project, it was great fun!"

(vi) These parents have already begun to share their insights outside the family

One quite unexpected outcome of the project has been that it has had an impact on outside family members (e.g. sisters, brothers and their children etc), neighbours, friends from other schools etc. For example, the following journal entry details one of many comments made during the programme, which show that the programme is having an impact beyond the parents involved.

My sister's friends kids can't read. My sister was telling them about the course I was doing. Anyway, they've asked me to help them out. I'm going to show this friend what to do. I'm really excited about it. I feel as if I can really do it now. I showed this friend all the books. She wants to do the course too, but I explained it was just for parents at this school. Anyway, we are making a bit of time for me to go over.

(vii) Parents have gained a greater understanding of schools

One of the unexpected benefits of the programme has been an increased understanding of the ways schools operate. When asked in the post-programme evaluation if the TTALL programme had helped them to understand how schools worked, a majority (88%) responded positively.

This common response has been confirmed by observations of the parents working in classrooms, the programme co-ordinator, classroom teachers and the school principal.

(viii) Parents have grown in confidence and self esteem

One of the interesting secondary benefits of the TTALL programme has been that the participants have grown in confidence and self esteem. The earlier reported observation that parents have shared knowledge of the programme with people outside the school is evidence of this growing confidence.

This increased confidence and self esteem has also shown itself in other ways. For example, some parents have experienced new found confidence in themselves as learners and literacy users. The following journal entry shows how this has occurred for one parent. Before one of the sessions Barbara shared how she had enjoyed the visit to the community library (part of the programme). She then offered the following comments concerning her own literacy.

I went to TAFE [Technical College] to improve my literacy but all they did was make you work on bits of paper. I still read word by word you know. My husband said I should read Wilbur Smith but they're too long and I forget what it's all about. I found Wilbur Smith on tape at the library so I have been reading the book along with the tape, it's really great. I'm enjoying reading his stories.

Parent responses to the post-programme evaluation (See table 6) also indicate that they feel more confident. Most feel more confident working with their own children (96%), and when working as a parent in the school (92%).

Table 6 about here

Another interesting finding is that most of the parents (92%) in the programme now wish to pursue further education. Some of these parents have expressed a desire to complete their Higher School Certificate examinations (two have started), others want to enter the University of Western Sydney's community access programme (Newstart), one has enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary), two have enrolled in adult literacy classes, and another has become the co-ordinator of an adult literacy programme in the community.

b) Impact upon children's literacy performance levels, attitudes and interest.

Information on student performance changes can be grouped into two broad categories: qualitative and quantitative. The vast bulk of the qualitative data are still being analyzed. Similarly, much of the quantitative data have still to be analyzed. However, some preliminary quantitative analysis has occurred.

This analysis has been concerned with the test data listed in section ?? above. These tests have targeted comprehension, spelling, vocabulary and attitudes to literacy. These data have been analyzed using analysis of covariance.

The subjects in this study were acquired in two quite different ways. Experimental subjects were chosen indirectly as a consequence of parental involvement in the TTALL programme. Control subjects, on the other hand, were chosen randomly from all classes. Preliminary analyses indicated differences between the performance levels of these two groups, hence the choice of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) techniques, and the selection of pretest scores to serve as the covariate.

Table 7 about here

A number of analyses were conducted to examine differences between the treatment and control groups on the posttest measures. Statistically significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups for the test of attitudes to literacy, $F(1,107) = 5.370$, $p < .022$, and reading comprehension, $F(1,67) = 7.946$, $P < .006$. This reflected the more positive attitude of the experimental subjects on the posttest administration of this instrument (see Appendix 2), and superior performance for the TTALL students on the comprehension test (see Table 7). There were no statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of gains on the tests of vocabulary and spelling.

The failure to find performance gain differences for spelling and vocabulary, was disappointing and may simply reflect the relatively small experimental sample and the great variability in performance. Another possibility is that more time is necessary before such performance gains are obvious. Further analysis is still occurring to tease out the more subtle performance gains which have undoubtedly occurred for many students in the TTALL programme.

No conclusive claims can be made about literacy performance at this stage. However, the results outlined above, the qualitative data in the form of parent and teacher interviews, and several case studies, suggest that the programme has had an impact. The extent of the performance gains is yet to be determined.

8. Conclusion

While a great deal of data analysis is still to be completed, and the TTALL programme is only just entering its second stage, it appears that it has been highly successful. Certainly the participants believe that it has been useful. This is reflected in the high retention rates in the course, (only one of the original 25 students failed to complete it), the self

reporting of parents and their children, and observations made during stage 1 of the project.

Returning to the original questions that guided this project, it appears from the evidence presented and analyzed thus far, that the TTALL programme has:

- * Increased parental participation in the literacy activities of their children;
- * Improved the quality of the interactions adults have with children as they read and write;
- * Raised parental expectations concerning literacy and education;
- * Had a positive effect upon student attitudes to literacy and learning;
- * Led to increased levels of literacy competence for some students.

The TTALL programme has already had a significant impact upon a number of teachers, students and parents. Next year at least 7 schools in NSW will be following the TTALL programme. This will permit further long term evaluation to occur. As well, the Disadvantaged Schools Committee of Metropolitan West Region in Sydney has agreed to fund a secondary extension to this programme which will focus on literacy, learning and study skills.

It is clear that TTALL has had an impact on the lives of the parents and children associated with the programme. What remains to be determined is how great an impact this has had, and will continue to have on the literacy competence of the children whose parents have been involved. As well, the full implementation of Stage 2 of TTALL will also be necessary before we are in a position to know whether the programme can have an impact beyond the parent group targeted for in the first stage of the programme. The latter will depend on the success of the second and third stages of the project. Stage 2 has been implemented, while stage 3 is still in preparation.

A total of 18 of the original 25 parents have completed the second phase of the project which involves an additional five two hour workshops, and considerable in-school involvement. These parents will be the major resource people for the third stage of the project which is designed to equip these parents to introduce other parents and children to the strategies they have learned.

One of our major aims in the TTALL programme has been to equip parents to work more effectively with their children. It is encouraging at the halfway mark of this project to see that individual families have benefited from the programme. We will allow Deborah, one of our parents, to have the final word:

It's [TTALL] given me a lot more confidence, you know,

he's enjoying it, it's a thousand times better than it was when it started, and I've relaxed, so it's easier. And he's writing, and he didn't before, and it's just, I couldn't be happier

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Figure 1: The Educational Cycle Used in the TTALL Programme

Table 1: A description of key variables that characterize parent involvement programmes. For each variable a continuum exists which attempts to describe the variation that might occur for each variable.

CONTENT

Advice about school policies etc ---> Advice concerning classroom programmes, aims etc ---> Advice on child's strengths, needs etc ---> Workshops/evenings about learning, specific school subjects etc ---> Education programme designed to lead to specific changes in the parent and their children

PROCESS

Information transmission by letter or notice---> Information transmission through direct contact, e.g. parent/teacher evenings ---> Workshop

activities that deal with knowledge in a variety of ways ---> Programmes designed to promote learning by involvement, observation and practice

SOURCE

School initiative unsolicited ---> School initiative following comments by parents, expressions of concern etc
---> Parent initiative e.g. course in response to parent request for help

CONTROL

School in control, transmission to distant faceless clients, e.g. school policy booklets etc ---> School in control, transmission to known clients at school providing some opportunity for parent comment and feedback ---> School in control but activities largely interactive ---> Neither party in control, mutually agreed agenda and shared responsibility (parents as partners)

Table 2: An assessment of the TTALL project in terms of the key variables seen as critical in parental involvement programmes

CONTENT Education programme designed to lead to specific changes in the parent and their children

- * Focus on parent/child interactions
- * Centrality of meaning, purpose and function
- * Development of parents as resource people
- * Parent initiated change
- * Concern for the parents as people and learners

PROCESS Learning by involvement, observation and practice

- * Intensive workshops (32 hours over 8 weeks)
- * Observation in classrooms
- * Demonstrations
- * In-home tasks with own children
- * In-school tasks with own children

SOURCE School initiative following comments by parents,

expressions of concern (initiative initially from university and school but shape and interests reflective of parents' concerns, needs etc (initial meetings, surveys, parents on planning committee and project team etc)

CONTROL 'Parents as partners' but tending towards 'Parents as initiators in control of their own learning'.

Initially it was a partnership, but as the project has proceeded parents have increasingly initiated content, process changes etc because of their perceived needs.

Table 3: Level of education experienced by parents involved in stage 1 of the TTALL programme

Year in which parent left school:

Year 7 (0)
Year 8 (4)
Year 9 (7)
Year 10 (7)
Year 11 (2)
Year 12 (3)

Parents who had experienced Post-secondary education:

Technical College (4)
Teachers' College (1)
Pre-med (Indonesia) (1)

Table 4: Parent responses on the post-programme survey concerning the strategies used with their children. Percentages are indicated in brackets.

I found the following strategies useful to my child's needs

- * Predictable books SA 11 (46), A 11 (46), N 2 (8)
- * Paired Reading SA 10 (42), A 11 (46), N 3 (12)
- * DRTA SA 6 (25), A 15 (63), N 2 (8) D 1 (4)
- * Listening to child reading SA 19 (79), A 5 (21)

I now use these reading strategies

- * Predictable books Reg 16 (67), Occas. 8 (23), Never 0 (0)
- * Paired Reading Reg 13 (54), Occas. 11 (46), Never 0 (0)
- * DRTA Reg 10 (42), Occas. 10 (42), Never 4(16)
- * Listening to child reading Reg 22 (92), Occas. 2 (8)

I now use these writing strategies

- * Dialogue journal Reg 14 (59), Occas. 9 (37), Never 1 (4)
 - * Conference writing Reg 10 (42), Occas. 13(54), Never 1 (4)
 - * Edit my child's writing Reg 12 (50), Occas. 11(46), Never 1 (4)
 - * Personal spelling dictionary Reg 17 (71), Occas. 6(25), Never 1 (4)
-

Table 5: Parent views on the knowledge they have gained as part of the TTALL programme. Percentages are provided in brackets.

I have gained new knowledge concerning:

The way children: learn SA 18 (75), A 6 (25)
 write SA 18 (75), A 5 (21), N 1 (4)
 read SA 17 (71), A 7 (29)
 spell SA 17 (71), A 7 (29)

I am more capable of dealing with problems my children
might have

SA 14 (58) A 10 (42)

My ideas have changed concerning:

learning	SA 10 (42)	A 8 (33)	N 4 (17)	D 1 (4)	SD 1 (4)
writing	SA 15 (63)	A 8 (33)			SD 1 (4)
reading	SA 17 (71)	A 6 (25)			SD 1 (4)
spelling	SA 14 (59)	A 8 (33)	N 1 (4)		SD 1 (4)

Table 6: Responses to the post-programme evaluation
concerning gained confidence and self esteem.
Percentages are indicated in brackets.

I have gained confidence:

* working with children SA 18 (75), A 5 (21), N 1 (4)

* as a parent working

in the school SA 14 (58), A 8 (34), N 2 (8)

The course has made me keen to do further study

SA 15 (63) A 7 (29) N 2 (8)

Table 7: Means (and standard deviations) for all pretest
and posttest measures

	Experimental		Control	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Comprehen.	11.43(8.2)	13.76(8.03)	15.89(7.56)	15.71(7.39)
Vocabulary	11.74(9.13)	15.79(8.36)	13.27(8.09)	16.33(8.96)
Spelling	21.73(14.99)	24.87(14.17)	20.97(15.21)	18.26(4.21)
Attitude	18.71(3.83)	20.24(4.16)	18.26(4.22)	18.12(4.36)
N = 34 (Exp)		N = 75 (Cont)		

Appendix 1: An outline of the content of the Stage 1
Education programme

Appendix 2: Test of attitudes to literacy devised for this
project