

# The *Shine* Literacy Initiative

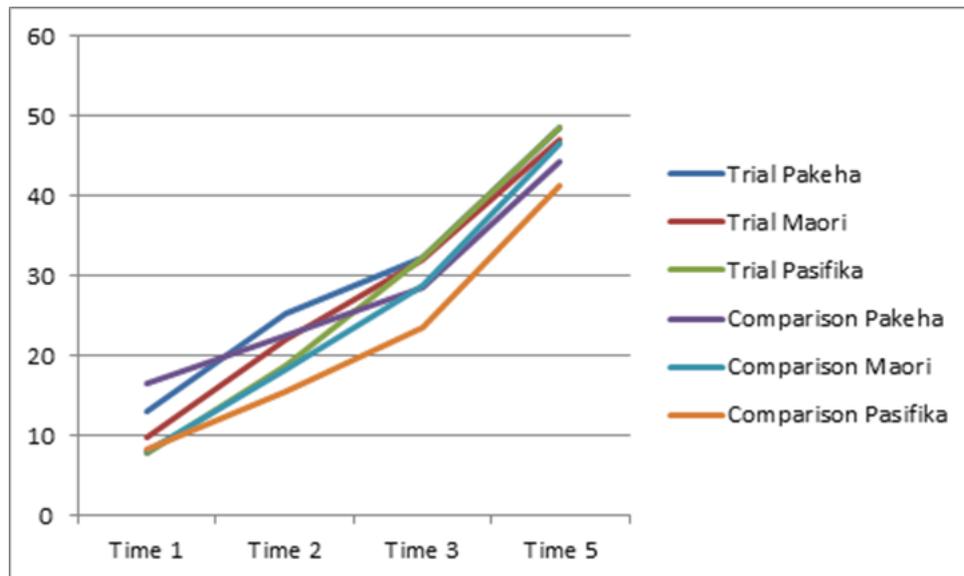
[literacysuccess.org.nz](http://literacysuccess.org.nz) October 2017

## Overview

Research from the Shine Literacy Project clearly shows that we can significantly increase achievement in writing and reading in the first three years of primary schooling in New Zealand. The best way to begin is by focusing on teachers and improving teaching strategies. Then other issues such as disabilities, adverse social conditions, cultural factors and environments that limit children's learning can be identified and addressed more effectively.

The example below demonstrates that it is possible to achieve equity for children even if they start school with less knowledge than their peers.

**Figure 1: Phonemic Awareness Results Over Two Years**



This and similar results have been achieved by applying the six principles that shape the *Shine* Literacy Initiative which are:

- Equity
- Efficiency
- Development
- Relevance
- Collegiality
- Contribution

In the Literacy Initiative these principles mean:

Equity	Reducing or eliminating the 'Matthew Effect' among children in Years 1-3 who participate in the Initiative
Relevance	Introducing, explicitly and logically, the way the sounds of English translate to writing and reading
Efficiency	Using short, focused daily practice and systematic assessment to develop each child's competence and confidence
Collegiality	Maintaining an active network of professional learning by sharing teaching practices and results
Development	Encouraging teacher-led enquiry, and improving systematic observation, standardised assessment and use of data
Contribution	Integrating the contributions of teachers, resource providers, computer application developers and community organisations.

The diagram in the Appendix summarises the scope and contribution of the Initiative to the *Shine* Education Initiative <https://shineporirua.org.nz/>.

## Equity

### Motivating concerns and objectives

The Initiative was motivated by three concerns:

- Up to a quarter of children in New Zealand were underachieving in writing and reading
- There seemed to be a 'Matthew Effect' contributing to that underachievement
- New Zealand was falling in the relative ranking of countries that measured literacy achievement<sup>1</sup>.

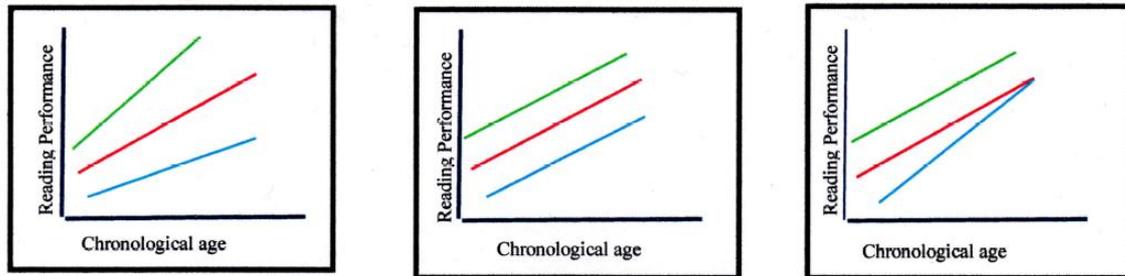
In effect New Zealand children were being failed by their education. This was particularly evident for children who start school less prepared for reading and writing. The main aim of the Initiative is to shift achievement from the left in Figure 2 below to the right for all demographic groups. Research shows that if

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<sup>1</sup> PIRLS research shows that in 2001 New Zealand was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> out of 35 countries with an average score of 529; in 2006 N.Z was ranked 24<sup>th</sup> out of 45 countries with an average score of 532; in 2011 N.Z. was ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 49 countries with an average score of 531. In 2011 we were second to bottom among the English speaking countries that participated in the survey. (PIRLS 2010/11 In New Zealand, Megan Chamberlain, Ministry of Education NZ)

this does not occur during the first three years of schooling it becomes very difficult to achieve in later years.

**Figure 2: Three developmental patterns describing the development of inter-individual achievement differences in reading<sup>2</sup> (and writing)**



The first pattern depicts an increasing achievement gap – the ‘Matthew Effect’. The third pattern shows a decreasing achievement gap – the objective of the Initiative.

### The response

The response to these concerns has two dimensions:

- Identifying entry-level proficiency at the beginning of Year 1 and optimizing each child’s learning to make best use of Tier 1 (whole class) teaching and thereby reduce the need for teaching at Tier 2 (small group) and 3 (individualized instruction).
- Monitoring for differences among learning trajectories that can be attributed to bias related to culture, gender or socio-economic circumstances.

Research findings overseas provide strong guidance on appropriate responses<sup>3</sup> that link teacher knowledge to literacy instruction. A local research project was used to validate the approach (see ‘Relevance’ below). The findings confirmed there were measurable benefits for all groups in the trial population, this includes all cultural groups from both high and low decile schools<sup>4</sup> (see, for example, Figure 1 above).

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<sup>2</sup> Pfof M., J. Hattie, T. Dorfler and C. Artelt ‘Individual differences in reading development: A review of 25 years of empirical research on Matthew Effects on reading’. *Review of Educational Research* (2013:4)

DOI:10.3102/0034654313509492

<sup>3</sup> Carreker, S., Joshi, R. Malatesha, Boulware-Gooden, R. ‘Spelling-related teacher knowledge: the impact of professional development on identifying appropriate instructional activities’, *Learning Disability Quarterly*, June 22, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The ethnic distribution in the study was: Pakeha 46.3%, Maori 21.2%, Pasifika 18.5%, Asian 11.6%, European 1.5%, Other 0.8%. Decile Ranking of

This result is attributed to the following features of the ‘Sounds Like Fun’<sup>5</sup> approach developed by Joy Allcock<sup>6</sup>, a literacy consultant from Porirua. This research-based approach explicitly teaches the knowledge and skills that are essential for literacy success from a child’s first days at school. It implements the ‘Literacy Learning Progressions’ developed by the Ministry of Education<sup>7</sup> and does not ‘wait for failure’ to identify learning problems. The main features are:

- Teaching from **words** to **sounds** to **print**
- Using children’s **oral language** to learn about the alphabetic code – teaching from the **known** to the **unknown**
- **Explicitly** teaching children **how the alphabetic code really works** – that letters are used to record sounds in lots of different ways
- **Learning to write** as a platform for learning to read
- **Transferring** knowledge to reading and writing
- **Using assessment data** to track progress and to tailor instruction to meet learning needs

Note the integration of writing and reading.

Many, perhaps most, children can reach a basic level of competence with reading and writing by learning implicitly, particularly those who live in households with a print culture. However some are seriously disadvantaged by this mode of learning. ‘Sounds Like Fun’ is a strengths-based approach that builds on each child’s oral language knowledge. Research shows that no child is disadvantaged by explicit teaching that uses oral language knowledge as a foundation, and the approach is particularly advantageous for children who have not had a lot of exposure to print or who live in a predominantly oral culture.

## Relevance

### Child focused, teacher enabled

The core of the Initiative is the specific focused teaching strategy introduced and discussed during meetings of the professional learning and development (PLD) network. The PLD content is of immediate and ongoing relevance to teachers and particularly for children whose learning is causing concern. Relevance is demonstrated in four ways:

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schools in the research project: 1 19.7%, 2 15.1%, 3 7.3%, 4 3.9%, 9 3.9%, and 10 50.2%.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.spelling.co.nz/Products/sounds-like-fun>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.spelling.co.nz/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/Introduction/Understanding-the-Literacy-Learning-Progressions>

- Brief practical additions to the teaching programme which do not disrupt the existing curriculum
- Clear references to learning theory and research findings
- Systematic analysis of student confidence and competence to identify issues and effective responses
- Teachers' responses which shape teaching in the classroom.

Examples of practical additions to the teaching programme are referenced under 'Efficiency' below.

### **Learning theory and research**

There has been debate about the relative merits of print recognition and phonics as learning strategies. It is invalid to present this as an either-or argument. The primary principle adopted by the Initiative is that each phase of learning is strengths-based, that is it begins with what children know. Initially that is the sounds of words they have heard. It is critical that children engage in exploring what is being said and how it is represented as print. Encouraging engagement is a skill used by the teacher supported by parents and others who care for and talk to children.

There are five elements in the process of moving from language to literacy. These relate to: breadth and depth of vocabulary, whole word recognition, and knowledge of the alphabetic code and spelling system used in written English. The sequence in which elements are introduced defines the strategy. For example strategies for learning to read include:

- Beginning with word recognition and relating that knowledge to the pronunciation of a word (breadth of vocabulary) and then the meaning of the word (depth of vocabulary)
- Beginning with the sounds of the alphabetic code and using knowledge of the spelling system and sentence and text level cues to work out the meaning of words, thereby increasing knowledge (breadth) and meaning (depth) of vocabulary
- Beginning by using the sounds represented in the alphabetic code, then combining the sounds to pronounce words, thereby increasing vocabulary.

Similar strategies have been defined for learning to write.

### **Systematic analysis of assessment data**

The local relevance of this approach has been monitored through four phases of analysis led by Joy Allcock. The first phase was a local trial conducted at one school (Titahi Bay) from 2010 to 2012. Gaps were identified in the knowledge and skills of teachers and students. The school community committed to targeted instruction to understand and acquire the skills that were lacking.

There were significant improvements in attainment against National Standards<sup>8</sup>.

This was followed by a formal Research Project to establish whether the results could be replicated across a range of schools and communities. The research was designed, analysed and reported by the Education Institute of Massey University<sup>9</sup>. There were two phases in the Project:

- In 2014-2015 a programme of professional learning and development ran in participating schools and data was collected from participating ('trial') and comparison schools – a total of 249 children. The report for the first year assessed children's learning at three points: school entry, after 16 weeks and at the end of Year One<sup>10</sup>.
- In 2015-2016 eleven comparison schools joined the trial schools after eighteen months and the Project followed the original cohort through Year Two with a second cohort beginning in Year One. The final report from Professor Chapman<sup>11</sup> confirmed the earlier findings and also estimated the value added during the time children attended school. The value added was particularly significant for children who were less prepared at school entry.

The current phase running through 2017-2018 is described under 'Development' below.

### Teachers' responses

The formal analysis has been supported by the response of teachers and Principals. Some excerpts from teachers' contributions to community meetings follow:

Rachel Woodley of Postgate School explained that 41% of their 5 and 6 year olds identified as Maori, and 38% as Pasifika. She told the meeting that 'In 2012 our school was not in a good state, with two thirds of our 6 year olds under-achieving. But our latest ERO (Education Review Office) report shows that after 3 years of exposure to the Shine programme our Maori students are achieving at the expected level, while our Pasifika children are achieving at above the expected level. ERO described us as a "high performing school". We have our Principal Adam Campbell to thank for this, for having the courage to go with the programme.'

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<sup>8</sup> NZ Education Gazette 25 February 2013 pp.6-8

<sup>9</sup> The research was led by Professor Chapman and Distinguished Professor Tunmer with assistance from Dr Alison Arrow

<sup>10</sup> <http://literacysuccess.org.nz/Introducing+early+literacy+skills>

<sup>11</sup> The written report is at [https://cdn-flightdec.userfirst.co.nz/uploads/sites/literacysuccess/files/pdfs\\_and\\_pp/end\\_of\\_year\\_1\\_report.pdf](https://cdn-flightdec.userfirst.co.nz/uploads/sites/literacysuccess/files/pdfs_and_pp/end_of_year_1_report.pdf). A video record of the report to those who attended the meeting to review the Project is at <https://literacysuccess.org.nz/results?src=nav>

Sarah Pupuke of Paremata School explained that their 5 and 6 year old children regarded the Shine programme as a fun activity which made it more effective. She said 'We call the programme "It sounds like fun", and that's exactly what it is. In just 20 minutes a day we can make a huge difference to these children. They get hooked into the process. They begin to understand the connection between different words through the sounds within the words. After these sessions the children will often tell us about other words they've thought of which contain the sound. And sometimes children will arrive at school the next day with a whole list of words containing the sound.'

Barri Dullabh from Discovery School also commented. 'The biggest thing is seeing that kids just get it. Children who haven't had a real understanding of letters and sounds and how they link are now able to do it. They're really confident. I've seen light bulbs go on for them. They see themselves as writers and learners as well. I think that's where I've seen a lot of wins.'

Professor James Chapman (College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University) summed up the approach used in the research study like this. 'This approach is based on solid and contemporary research and has many features that are superior to the "standard" approach to literacy instruction adopted by most schools. Because the evidence and indications from this study point to improved literacy learning outcomes, schools would do well to consider replacing or supplementing their current approach to literacy instruction with this approach.'

## Efficiency

### Classroom teaching

The 'Sounds Like Fun' approach can be used as a supplement to any teaching programme. It does not disrupt existing teaching plans. Results can be achieved with instruction that takes only 10 minutes a day. The approach is very clearly structured. Essential practices are specified in detail and introduced in a logical sequence<sup>12</sup>. Instruction is based on the language used by the children in the group.

For children to gain full advantage of the learning approach teachers need to understand the conceptual foundations and develop astute observational skills. This can be done progressively with about three days of PLD a year. The most productive sessions are based on a full day of teacher release. It is essential that there is time for peer sharing and support and a process that allows those joining the group to learn from members with more experience.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example video comment on [spelling.co.nz](http://www.spelling.co.nz) and the demonstration lesson at <http://www.spelling.co.nz/Products/sounds-like-fun>

## Assessment logic

Schools use a great variety of assessment instruments during the first three years of primary schooling. Three problems have been identified with current practices. These are:

- Often the assessment instruments do not measure the acquisition of essential skills required to begin to write and read – there is a tendency to measure the *outcome* of using those skills
- Schools use a variety of assessment tools which means they cannot compare their findings and consequently are not well placed to learn from others' experiences
- The data generated in this environment does not provide information to enable teachers to develop successful interventions to improve writing and reading – assessments are often summative rather than formative.

The Literacy Initiative is working towards defining a logical sequence of assessment for the first three years of schooling that will do four things. It:

- Focuses on the foundational competencies required for children to be confident writers and readers – the Literacy Learning Progressions describe these as 'constrained' skills<sup>13</sup>.
- Locates each child within the population distribution for their age
- Identifies children of concern in terms of specific learning objectives and thereby minimises the need for 'recovery'
- Defines the priorities for the PLD programme in terms that are shared by all teachers across the participating schools.

Assessment is used to improve children's learning and inform teaching practice. It is not used to assess teachers or schools. There are no limits on the other assessment instruments schools choose to use.

## Data management

The Literacy Initiative has collaborated with Beagle Innovations<sup>14</sup> to develop a customized set of reports located within the large suite of assessments in the Beagle application. The introduction of the system requires careful coordination. Some teachers are adept at using digital tools and quickly move their assessment data into the application and generate reports. Others require support to gain fluency with this aspect of the learning cycle.

Teacher management and use of their own data is a critical aspect of moving from the research project to normal teaching practice. During the research project independent assessors completed all assessments and professional researchers provided the analysis. The Initiative has progressed to the point

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<sup>13</sup> <http://literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/> pp.4-6

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.beagleinnovations.com/>

where PLD has been provided to enable teachers to assess children in their own classroom or school, to analyse achievement outcomes, and identify changes to practice to meet needs. This is excellent evidence of the Teaching As Inquiry process in action<sup>15</sup>.

The roles of consultant, coordinator and lead teacher are very important. Careful analysis is required when setting norms, understanding the barriers children face to becoming literate, and the different context of each school. For example, it is important that age related expectations are realistic given the distribution of competence in the first three years of schooling.

Coherent and precise reports for each child enhance teachers' ability to respond to children and their parents. Beagle differs from the Student Management Systems currently used in schools. It provides detailed analysis of student results, student achievement profiles, and insights from comparing different assessments. Consequently it produces information that enables teachers to identify strategies to address student needs.

### Use of resources

The implementation of the Literacy Initiative is proving to be a more efficient use of resources consistent with the Response to Intervention Framework<sup>16</sup>. The Initiative focuses on Tier 1 instruction and minimizes the need for intensive and expensive small group or one-to-one instruction later at Tier 2 and 3. It has also proven to be effective for older children who have gaps in their literacy knowledge.

## Collegiality

### Knowledge

The Shine Literacy Initiative systematically provides the specific knowledge of the Deliberate Acts of Teaching required for students to become successful readers and writers. This core set of knowledge is acquired in a small number of focused sessions and is the essential basis of the *Shine* Literacy Initiative PLD that changes teacher practice. We assessed teacher knowledge in this area and found significant gaps in most teacher knowledge. After a year of involvement in the Initiative teacher knowledge and confidence in literacy instruction was greater among trial teachers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The New Zealand Curriculum, Ministry of Education, 2007, p.35  
<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>

<sup>16</sup> [www.rtinetwork.org](http://www.rtinetwork.org)

<sup>17</sup> Shine Literacy Project Interim Report, March 2016, page 3.

## Motivation

The essential motivation for teachers is direct evidence of children's success observed in their own classroom. When teachers have the clarity and confidence to experiment with their teaching practice, using sound principles and specific practices, they find children respond. At that point the positive feedback that sustains the Initiative begins. The core motivators for the Initiative are, in order of importance:

- Children's enthusiasm and success in the classroom
- Confirmation for teachers of the success of their teaching practice evident in raised student achievement
- Shared experience and learning in the PLD network
- Teachers' confidence and knowledge gained through professional support and recognition
- Community support – professional and local – with obtaining resources
- The realisation of a shared vision that contributes to children's well being.

There are many pressures and competing demands on teachers in junior classes. Their contribution is critical to the learning trajectory of most of the children they teach. A local cycle of motivation is essential.

## Roles in the learning network

The network originated with some core relationships based on long professional associations and respect. There are some essential roles in the network that supports teachers. These include: a literacy consultant, coordinator, lead teachers, IT developers, and various aspects of governance and administrative support. The scale of the network is outlined under 'Development: Resources'.

Parents and other adults who interact with children also have an important and well-defined role<sup>18</sup>. Many parents appreciate being given a clear outline of the roles of parents and teachers and their respective contributions to the learning process. Meetings with parents are arranged by participating schools.

## Development

### Integrated professional learning and development

As outlined under 'Efficiency' (above) the Initiative aims to ensure that:

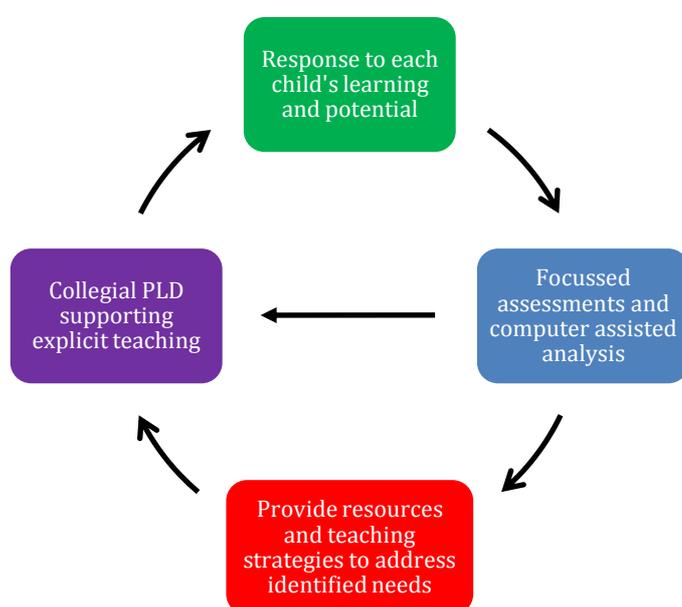
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<sup>18</sup> One way of describing the difference is by using the image of 'buckets of knowledge', with parents contributing to the first two buckets, see the video clip 'From Language To Literacy' <http://www.teachmetoteach.co.nz/spelling> for an explanation.

- Teachers who enter the Initiative are introduced to the relevant ‘Deliberate Acts of Teaching’
- Assessments are selected that allow teachers to identify specific learning needs
- Computer assisted analysis provides direct and clear information about how children’s need can be met
- Resources are provided at the appropriate time and there is no wasted effort.

This implies a continuous process of refinement and development. The cycle is summarised in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: The elements of the cycle of development**



### Resources

The table below summarises the resources required to sustain the *Shine* network of about 30 schools for a year. In the *Shine* case a substantial proportion of the resources required are gifted as unpaid time, supported by charitable grants, or provided at heavily discounted prices. Estimates of costs will depend on the local context.

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Estimated cost</b>
Consultant	20 days p.a.	\$20,000 p.a.
Coordinator	0.5 f.t.e.	\$36,000 p.a.
Participating teachers	3 release days p.a.	\$900/teacher/annum

Lead teacher	1 teacher per school, 4 release days p.a.	\$1200/teacher/ annum
Participating principals	2 half days p.a.	- - -
Principals' governance group	4-6 Principals, 2 half days p.a.	- - -
Classroom resources	One set/class	\$450/classroom
Student materials	One set/student	\$10.00/student/p.a.
Assessment instruments	One set/school One set/student	\$400 \$2.50/student/p.a.
Data management	One licence/school/p.a.	\$1,000 p.a. (average, costs vary based on school roll)
Video production	20 hours p.a.	- - -

## Potential

This approach has the potential to settle into a cycle of teacher-led enquiry that strengthens local commitment to early literacy. We are developing the ability of lead teachers to replicate similar PLD networks and thereby increase the breadth and depth of the field of study.

The Literacy Initiative is promoting innovation in practice by engaging lead teachers in working systematically to identify students of concern by:

- Evaluating the purpose and effectiveness of assessments currently in use
- Working collaboratively to develop assessments in two identified areas of need:
  - Creating rapid assessments for key dimensions of oral language ability
  - Refining an application that analyses writing samples and reports the main features of a child's competence and confidence
- Developing the ability to analyse information produced by Student Management Systems and the Beagle database to identify trends and needs.

Formal assessments produce quantified results and they also assist teachers to make systematic and astute observations. Focused observation ensures that students of concern are identified and supported before they have lost confidence in their own abilities and fallen well behind their peers.

Systematic assessment allows participants to test working assumptions that influence teaching in the first years of schooling. For example, there is a current

belief that more children are beginning school with poor oral language skills. In the absence of a relevant instrument for oral language assessment the Initiative is developing and trialing an assessment to test to this belief.

If the Initiative can be sustained it will be possible to transfer what we have learned to younger and older cohorts of children. It will also continue to support teachers by providing best practice based on the findings of international, national and local research and development.

## Contribution

### Community leaders, associations and foundations

Community support has been critical to the development and progress of the Initiative. Community leaders and local organisations provided immediate and ongoing support for the Initiative. The Porirua Foundation provides a focal point for managing grants from charitable trusts. The introduction of the Beagle data management system has been seeded with local funding, led by Plimmerton Rotary. The current phase is financially supported by the Todd and Wright Family Foundations. The teacher and classroom resources have been provided at a very substantial discount by the suppliers. The consultancy by Joy Allcock and additional leadership from teachers has been provided on a voluntary basis.

### Interface with public agencies

The Literacy Initiative has encountered some problems that are common at the interfaces between community networks and public agencies. The Initiative is a product of the *Shine* Education Summit held in Porirua in 2013. It was one of three local activities proposed to strengthen local educational pathways. The proposals were based on age cohorts: Years 1-3 (literacy), Years 4-8 (digital enablement) and Years 9-13 (vocational pathways).

The *Shine* Summit was an attempt to compensate for the lack of a local integrating forum in the structure of the education sector. Cathy Wylie, a keynote speaker, reminded the gathering of about 200 people that the strategy known as Tomorrow's Schools left a structural weakness<sup>19</sup> that has not been addressed in Porirua. This Initiative is an initial response to that issue. In some respects it provides a template for a more comprehensive strategy. It has drawn together a group of like minded people and the results have shown how a community can bring about positive change. The next steps include finding ways of involving local and national government and extending the network to other communities with the same interests.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Tomorrow's Schools' D. Lange 1988 pp. 14-15 and 'Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education' 1988 B. Picot et. al. ISBN 047704863 pp. 53-56.

## Appendix: The structure of objectives of the Shine Literacy Initiative

