



CASE STUDY 2

OTARA PRIMARY SCHOOL LINKS LITERACY SUCCESS TO EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Developing a network of successful education partnerships is one way Wymondley Road School is boosting the literacy achievement of its mostly Māori and Pasifika learners.

In 2004, the decile 1 school of around 200 students became part of a schooling improvement project called Otara: The Learning Community (OTLC), involving 13 schools in South Auckland and a network of education partnerships.

Wymondley Road School had been steadily improving the literacy and numeracy achievement of its learners since the late 1990s, when the Education Review Office (ERO) found too many students throughout South Auckland were underachieving in the crucial areas of literacy and numeracy.

ERO recommended a raft of changes, most of which were put in place through two successful projects: Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) and Analysis and Use of Student Achievement Data (AUSAD).

Yet, principal Tone Kolose (who joined the school in 2002) and OTLC coordinator Nicky Knight agree that student achievement in literacy has really started to take off at Wymondley Road School in the past two years.

Reading comprehension data for 2005 show the achievement of learners in years 4 to 6 has shifted to an average score from a below-average score in the previous year (stanine 3.21 to stanine 4). Meanwhile, writing data shows a higher percentage of learners are writing at the level appropriate to their age.



“ Our children need to be literate... ”

Wymondley Road School principal Tone Kolose and Otara: The Learning Community coordinator Nicky Knight.

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Tone and Nicky attribute the results to the ongoing impact of SEMO and AUSAD on teachers' practice, as well as the latest OTLC project, which is taking the gains an important step further.

Tone explains: "We've really consolidated what we've learned and continued to build on that. Our long-standing education partnerships are a good example of what we've taken into the OTLC work."

Nicky says the partnerships are many and varied – each one crucial to lifting student achievement within this community.

Together, the partners share a common vision for their community and have agreed on what's needed to achieve that vision. All partners have high expectations for their learners and a strong belief and commitment to discussing and using the latest research evidence to inform teaching practice.

"The partners have regular contact, with the teachers and support teachers within Otago having access to high-quality professional learning opportunities" says Nicky.

They're also focused on enhancing the involvement of parents in education and working together using a method called co-construction to come up with joint solutions and to make decisions.

One of the partners is the Otago Boards Forum, a group of school trustees who developed a strategic vision for the Otago community and who raise, administer and monitor some education funding for their schools. The group is responsible for a series of parent education programmes and lifting the profile of literacy within their community through the popular Otago Literacy Day.

Local business and the Ministry of Education are other partners. As is a number of principal associations, who lead and implement the board's strategic vision within their schools.

Meanwhile, academics from Auckland University's Woolf Fisher Research Centre research and evaluate schools' progress, upskill teachers and contribute valuable research evidence about teaching practice to each school, with the help of lead teachers and consultants like Nicky.

"It's my role to turn the all-important research findings into something practical that classroom teachers can use," says Nicky.

For example, Auckland University research was published last year advocating the OTLC make better use of data to improve student achievement. Nicky soon turned the theory into action.

"Our teachers were collecting data, but really needed to understand what to do with it to make the shift – so that's been a major focus of my work," says Nicky.

She says Wymondley Road School teachers are now expert at taking data from asTTle (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning), PROBE (Prose Reading Observation Evaluation), running records and STAR (Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading) and using them to understand where students are at, why they are there and where they need to get to next.

"Using data in this way and getting into classrooms to observe and identify best practice has become embedded in everything that teachers do here. It's an approach that's resulted from our education partnerships. And it's why we have data showing that more than 50% of our students in years 4 to 6 are writing at or above the national norms – this represents a significant improvement on last year," she says.

Tone says all results are shared with their partners, enabling their wider network to celebrate success and, better still, learn and develop together.

While he's aware partners will come and go from the network (many of the OTLC researchers are due to finish up in 2009), Tone is keen to retain the partnership approach that's seen his school and his community flourish in recent times.

"Our children need to be literate and numerate to succeed in life – it's clear that working effectively together is helping them achieve that."