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# Summer reading to overcome the summer effect

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# Introduction

The school in which this project took place, Papatoetoe Central, was concerned about research evidence that indicated students' reading achievement dropped after long summer breaks. This drop in achievement, known as "the summer effect", has been reported in schools in New Zealand and internationally (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2010; McNaughton, Jesson, & Kolose, 2012). Papatoetoe Central, a decile 4 school, is situated in a low income urban area in South Auckland; its student population comprises 9 percent Māori, 14 percent Pasifika, 51 percent Indian, and 18 percent Chinese, with the remainder European New Zealanders and other ethnicities. A high number of students have home languages other than English, with 153 funded for English language learning. The school has a good relationship with the Papatoetoe Library—the local public library—and maintains strong relationships with parents through newsletters and events. The Papatoetoe Library had previously implemented the Auckland-wide children's summer holiday reading programme, "Dare to Explore", which some students from the school had attended. The project reported here, the Papatoetoe Central School's summer reading programme, provided a targeted programme for its students that would complement the public library's holiday programme.

## Rationale and purpose

The widely documented summer effect on reading contributes to the widening gap in achievement, especially for students in low income areas (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2007). One explanation is that children in low decile homes are likely to have less access to texts than children from more affluent homes over the long summer break (Allington et al. 2007, cited in McNaughton et al., 2012). A meta-analysis of studies of a wide range of classroom, home, and library-based programmes has reported that such programmes appear to reduce the impact of the summer effect (Kim & Quinn, 2013).

In New Zealand, there is little research on the outcomes of summer reading interventions other than a study which suggested that distributing free books to students' homes over the summer break benefited low ability reading groups (Turner & Tse, 2015, p. 22) and McNaughton et al.'s 2012 study. This latter study, however, argued that, because there was considerable variation in the outcome patterns of the summer effect, reading interventions "should be contextualized, capitalising on practices already present" (McNaughton et al., 2012, p. 2). McNaughton et al. also noted the importance of maintaining students' interest and engagement in reading over the summer break.

Thus the aim of the current project was to raise students' reading achievement through boosting students' engagement with reading over the long holiday period. The project focused on enhancing students' reading enjoyment and engagement. Greater reading engagement and more positive attitudes to reading have been shown to result from students reading for pleasure (e.g., Cremin, 2010). Furthermore, positive correlations between attitudes to reading and literacy achievement have been regularly reported. (e.g., Gambrell, Marinak, Brooker, & McCrea-Andrews, 2011; Petscher, 2010).

It was decided to focus on Year 5 students, who would be making the transition to Year 6 after the summer break. Year 6 would be their last year in primary school, after which they would enter intermediate school (Years 7 and 8), where attitudes to reading have been shown to drop markedly (National Education Monitoring Project, 2000, 2004, 2008).

The project's aim was, therefore, to develop and investigate a collaborative community-based programme to address the summer slide through integrating the diverse experiences and resources of the principal, teachers, students, and whānau of Papatoetoe Central School; the librarians at the Papatoetoe Library; and the local community, all working with a university researcher consultant. The purpose of the summer reading programme was thus to contextualise a programme for the students at Papatoetoe Central.

# Research question

We did not locate any research, and certainly none in the New Zealand context, on holiday library programmes that integrate school-based pedagogical knowledge with librarians' knowledge of children's literature to ascertain the impact on student reading achievement and attitudes. Nor did we find any research on summer holiday programmes that was informed by students and their whānau voices.

The project question was, therefore:

To what extent can student reading achievement and attitudes to reading be enhanced through a collaborative school, home, and community public library summer reading programme?

There were five sub-questions:

- What impact will engagement in a summer reading programme have on (a) student reading achievement; (b) student attitudes to reading; and (c) student identity as readers?
- How will student involvement in planning the content and organisation contribute to active engagement in a summer reading programme, especially for those students whose achievement is most likely to be affected by the long summer break?
- Will the involvement of students' families in the planning of the organisation and implementation of a summer reading programme contribute to their active support of the programme, and to active engagement of their children?
- To what extent can the community, for example the local Community Board, support and take an active part in a summer reading programme?
- What might the effect of a school and library collaborative reading programme be on teachers' and librarians' knowledge and use of literature as a literacy resource?

The project builds on current international and the limited national research on the summer reading effect; the school's expertise in curriculum and pedagogy; the librarians' knowledge of and expertise in literature for children; a university consultant's research experience; and the opinions of students and whānau. It is argued that the intervention contributes to knowledge on how to enhance students' low levels of engagement with reading over holiday periods, investigates the programme's effect on students' literacy achievement and motivation towards reading, and provides a basis for strengthening school-based professional, community, and academic partnerships.

## Research design and methods

### Research design

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to address the main research question and the sub-questions. The research design incorporated elements of a mixed method design (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative data were gathered to inform the development of, and to evaluate, the summer reading programme. Methods included focus groups with students, whānau, and classroom teachers; interviews with teachers, the school principal, the public library staff, and a community representative; and observations of the summer reading programme in action. Quantitative data were collected to measure reading achievement and attitudes to reading. The quantitative data were gathered using Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR) and the National Education Monitoring Project's Attitude to Reading Survey.

The research project had five phases.

## Phase 1

Early in Term 1, 2014, the summer reading programme project team was established; this team comprised the school's principal and the university researcher (project leaders), the manager of the Papatoetoe Library (who was replaced later by an Acting Manager), and the children's librarian at the time (soon after a new children's librarian was appointed and participated in the project) the school's Year 5 team leader, and the project's reading support teacher. A reference group was also appointed to advise on planning and implementation. Ethical approval for the project was obtained in April 2014.

Librarians from the Papatoetoe Library outlined the existing Dare To Explore programme and provided advice on how the summer reading programme could complement their existing programme and extend its content and structure to provide a programme contextualised for the Papatoetoe Central students.

We developed the processes for establishing student focus groups and whānau focus groups to inform the content and structure of the programme in Term 2, 2014, and to provide feedback on the programme in Term 1, 2015. Student achievement data and attitude to reading data had been collected in February 2014.

## Phase 2

In Term 3, 2014, separate student, parent, and teacher focus groups were held, and consultation with the library and the reference group continued. The purpose of the focus groups was to (a) ensure "ownership" of the summer reading programme by students and parents through acknowledging their interests and needs, and (b) incorporate teacher knowledge of literacy learning into the content of the summer reading programme to maximise students' learning. As a result of school-based teacher professional development classroom programmes, new approaches were included in the classroom reading programmes for Year 5, in preparation for the summer reading programme. These included cohort-wide "read-aloud" sessions, a stronger focus on comprehension during guided reading, and additional assistance for new English language learners provided by the project's reading support teacher. (For more on these reading programme changes, refer to the section on preparation for the summer reading programme.)

## Phase 3

In Term 4, 2014, preparation for the summer reading programme continued: the enriched school-based reading programme was maintained; information about the upcoming summer reading programme was included in parent newsletters; students were involved in activities to reinforce their "ownership" of the summer programme. These ownership activities included providing summer reading programme bookmarks; renaming the programme the "Summer Reading Patch", and visiting the Papatoetoe Library. Before the end of the term, books, funded by the Lion Foundation, were distributed to all students to read over the holidays. End-of-year student reading achievement was assessed. Then, over the holidays, from January 5 to January 30, 2015, the summer reading programme was implemented by the project's reading support teacher and the Papatoetoe Library's children's librarian. A meeting was held mid-programme to consider any amendments required. Observational data on the programme were collected.

## Phase 4

In Term 1, 2015, data on student reading achievement (school-wide) and student attitudes to reading were collected to evaluate academic and attitudinal outcomes. Focus groups and interviews were held to assess the responses to the programme of the students, whānau, librarians, and community.

## Phase 5

In Terms 3 and 4, 2015, the project was reported at a local workshop of the Papatoetoe Cluster Seminar (August 6) and at two conferences: the New Zealand Literacy Association, October 1–3, and the New Zealand Association on Research in Education Conference, November 18–20, as part of a symposium led by Sue MacDowall entitled "TLRI literacy projects: What have we learnt and where might we head?"

## Participants in the project

Participants in the project were the 115 Year 5 cohort of students, the four teachers of this Year 5 cohort, the Papatoetoe Library's children's librarian, the project leaders (the Papatoetoe Central School principal and the university researcher), the project's reading support teacher, the parents, and a community representative.

The project's reading support teacher was a part-time (one day per week) fully registered teacher who worked throughout the year with groups of students with a view to getting to know the students well and preparing them for the summer reading programme. She worked with English language learning students and those with high-level literacy capabilities. These students worked on group research projects, extending their reading and writing skills. She was also responsible for leading the summer reading programme throughout January 2015.

Participant information sheets, parental consent forms, and student consent forms were distributed to all participants at the beginning of Term 2. All the consent forms for the 115 Year 5 students and their parents/guardians were returned, with a high percentage (98 percent) returning them promptly. The parents of all the 41 students who attended the summer reading programme consented to their children's participation.

## Preparing for the summer reading programme

Participation in the summer reading programme project, from the word go, shone a spotlight on reading in the school, highlighting what it meant to be a reader and emphasising how all students could not only succeed in reading, but love reading. At the beginning of 2014, the Year 5 teaching team collaboratively reflected on their existing reading practices and team approaches. A full review of the strategies used within the school reading programme was carried out. This evaluative process led to a number of major changes. These included:

- the appointment of a teacher to a 0.2 hours per week position to supplement and enhance the existing reading programme and to support and extend all ability levels (the project's reading support teacher)
- newsletters, specifically about reading programmes in the school, were sent to parents each term
- the comprehensive use of e-big books and audio stories
- the introduction of student personal reading diaries
- the designing and creating of bookmarks for the school market day
- class visits to the public library
- the introduction of a group novel to be read aloud to the participating classes.

The reading support teacher took 45-minute guided reading sessions, with an emphasis on using literature. There were six groups of targeted students from the Year 5 cohort who met every Thursday during the term. Groupings were reviewed at the end of each term. All "below expected level" and "at expected level" students were in the targeted groups, but a group of middle-ability and high-ability students was also included. The focus was on understanding text and comprehension of extended texts for all groups.

The "read-aloud" of the group novel was a particularly important and innovative approach, focused on creating a shared experience of literature. The Year 5 teaching team evaluated a range of novels and then presented three novels to the Year 5 children, who made their choice; this gave the children some say in what would be read aloud to them.

The revised class-based reading programme was implemented progressively throughout the year and was viewed by the Year 5 teaching team as a component of the summer reading programme.

## Summer reading programme: Structure, content, and delivery

The summer reading programme was held for 2 hours a day, 5 days a week, from January 5 to January 30, 2015. It was led by the project's reading support teacher and supported by the Papatoetoe Library. Sessions alternated between morning and afternoon, starting and finishing in the children's area of the library. Student

involvement in the activities was encouraged but not compulsory. A teacher aide, a university student, was engaged to provide additional support.

Each day followed a similar structure.

The sessions started with an introduction by the project's reading support teacher, the teacher aide, and the Papatoetoe Library children's librarian, during which they:

- outlined the available activities for the day
- reviewed previous activities
- provided information on coming events
- introduced new books and provided information to assist better use of the library.

The reading for each day started with a period of quiet reading, peer discussion, and group discussion with the reading support teacher, with a focus on comprehension.

A range of activities from which the students could choose were introduced over the four weeks of programme. Activities were related to the books the students were reading. These included Readers' Theatre (an pedagogical approach in which a story is presented to an audience with narrative and dialogue); drama, in the form of play writing and role play; poster competitions; creating illustrations and a graphic novel; Lego constructions; and research reports with graphic elements. Additional activities included working with a 3D printer, an interactive discussion with a children's writer, and a scavenger hunt on the last day.

Once activities were introduced, students could work on them until they completed that activity, or they could switch to a new activity. They were able to continue with more than one activity.

From the third week of the summer reading programme, a book was serialised and read aloud over several days to conclude each day's session.

## Data collection and analysis

### Data collection

Quantitative data were collected in Phase 1, Phase 3, and Phase 4 to provide measures of possible relationships between students' reading achievement and attitudes to reading before and following the summer reading programme (Table 1).

Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR) (Elley, 2003) undertaken by the school as a part of their usual records of student achievement, were accessed from the school assessment database.

The National Education Monitoring Project's (NEMP) Attitude to Reading Survey (Crooks, Smith & Flockton, 2000, 2004, 2008) was selected to provide quantitative measures of students' enjoyment of reading, self-confidence and self-efficacy in reading. It was administered by the Year 5 teachers. Only questions pertinent to the research questions are reported.

**Table 1: Standard assessment tools**

	<b>Data collection times</b>
STAR	2013: year end 2014: Phase 1, 3, and 4
NEMP	2014: Phase 1 and 4

We developed schedules for classroom observations and summer reading programme observations at the library. Neither formal observations were implemented, however: the classroom observations could not be scheduled due to timetabling constraints, and the library observations could not be implemented because

gathering reliable and systematic data was not possible as student activities were spread widely in the library. Informal observations, however, were undertaken by the university researcher on seven occasions.

Qualitative data were collected to (a) inform the development of the summer reading programme and (b) evaluate the participants' views of the effect of the programme. Data were collected from focus groups, a survey of parents of all students in the Year 5 cohort and interviews.

**Table 2: Qualitative data collection**

<b>Data source</b>	<b>Phase 2: Programme development</b>	<b>Phases 3 and 4: Evaluation</b>
Year 5 student groups	Focus group	Focus group
Year 5 teachers	Focus group	Focus group
Parents	Focus group	Survey of cohort parents Telephone interview
Community representative	Reference group	Telephone interview
Librarians		Interview
Reading support teacher		Interview
Principal		Interview
Implementation of summer reading programme		Informal observation

## Data analysis

STAR data were analysed using descriptive statistics (SPSS) to investigate students' reading achievement. Following the summer break, data were examined (a) for 2014 Year 5 students who participated in the January 2015 summer reading programme and (b) for the entire 2014 cohort of Year 5 students. These reading achievement data were compared with STAR data gathered before and after the 2013/2014 summer break.

Descriptive statistics using SPSS identified means and inferential statistics reporting the probability of significance in relation to cohort data only.

Focus group data were transcribed and coded, and themes were identified to (a) inform the development of the summer reading programme; (b) identify themes in students' responses during observations and following the programme; and (c) identify themes in teachers' responses following the programme.

Observations, interviews, and parent surveys were transcribed (where relevant), and analysed, reviewed, and summarised for patterns of responses.

# Findings

## Student attendance

In all, each of the 41 students (36 percent of the Year 5 cohort) attended one or more of the 19 sessions. The numbers of students at each session ranged between eight and 19 students, a mean of 12 students (68 percent).

Thirteen students attended more than 50 percent of the sessions; these students are referred to as "high attenders", while the remaining students who attended the programme are referred to as "low attenders".

## Student reading achievement

The mean STAR data for the Year 5 cohort suggested there had been less of a slide over the summer period in which the summer reading programme was held in comparison with the previous summer period (2013/2014). Table 3 shows that the overall mean stanine for the cohort was 2.0 stanines lower after the 2013/2014 summer break, whereas it was only 1.2 stanines lower after the 2014/2015 summer break. Moreover, after the 2014/2015 summer break, STAR scores showed an increase for sentence (+0.5) and paragraph comprehension (+1.3), whereas after the 2013/2014 summer break there had been a drop in the scores for both these subtests.

Over both periods, there were gains in vocabulary and word recognition (less marked in 2014/2015).

**Table 3: Cohort differences in mean scores overall in summer periods 2013/14 and 2014/15 (STAR test)**

	Cohort	Stanine	Vocabulary	Word recognition	Sentence comp.	Para comp.
2013/ 2014	Year 4 end	6.6	4.8	8.4	6.3	11.6
	Year 5 beginning	4.6	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.5
	Difference	-2.0	+1.7	+0.3	-0.4	-3.1
2014/ 2015	Year 5 end	6.7	5.0	7.5	4.2	10.2
	Year 6 beginning	5.5	5.3	7.7	4.7	11.5
	Difference	-1.2	+0.3	+0.2	+0.5	+1.3

Similar STAR data were recorded for a subgroup of students: those who had attended the summer reading programme regularly (the high attenders). Table 4 shows a drop in their mean overall stanine scores of 1.9 after the 2013/2014 but a drop of only 1.2 stanines after the 2014/2015 summer break. There was only a small drop in their STAR scores for paragraph comprehension, and a small increase in sentence comprehension. The differences, however, were less marked than for the entire cohort.

**Table 4: Differences in high-attenders' mean scores in summer periods 2013/14 and 2014/15 (N = 13)**

	High attenders	Overall stanine	Vocabulary	Word recognition	Sentence comp.	Para comp.
2013/ 2014	Year 4 End	6.8	4.9	9.3	6.7	11.3
	Year 5 Begin	4.9	7.5	9.3	6.3	9.5
	Difference	-1.9	+2.6	0.0	-0.4	-1.8
2014/ 2015	Year 5 End	7.0	5.3	8.5	4.5	11.1
	Year 6 Begin	5.8	5.8	8.9	4.9	10.8
	Difference	-1.2	+0.5	+0.4	+0.4	-0.3

These data suggest that the experiences of the whole cohort from the changes to the school reading programme had helped lessen the impact of the long summer break on reading achievement. The data for the high attenders' subgroup also appeared to reflect the influence of the school programme changes, but for them the improvement in STAR scores was not as great, despite having attended the library-based summer reading programme.

## Student attitudes to reading, reading self-efficacy, and identity as readers

Data from the NEMP Attitude to Reading Survey are presented in Table 5 for both the full cohort and the high attenders to compare attitudes to reading and self-efficacy from the beginning of the project until shortly after the summer reading programme. Only selected questions, those more directly indicative of students' feelings about themselves as readers, are reported here.

The Likert scale used in the NEMP Attitude to Reading Survey uses the following responses: ☺ = 1; half smile = 2; half frown = 3; ☹ = 4; don't know = 5

The five questions were: (a) How do you feel about how well you read; (b) how good does your teacher think you are at reading; (c) how good do your parents think you are at reading; (d) how do you feel about getting a book for a present; and (e) how do you feel about going to the library. (In Table 4, these five questions are labelled respectively as student view, teacher view, parent view, book as present, and going to library.)

**Table 5. Attitude to reading survey: High attenders and Year 5 cohort**

		Student view	Teacher view	Parent view	Book as present	Going to library
High attenders (N = 13)	2014	1.7	3.0	1.2	1.9	1.2
	2015	1.1	2.9	1.4	1.9	1.2
	Difference	0.6	0.1	-0.2	0	0
Year 5 cohort (N=115)	2014	1.4	2.6	1.8	1.6	1.3
	2015	1.4	2.4	1.9	1.5	1.3
	Difference	0	0.2	-0.1	0.1	0

The Year 5 students' data from NEMP in 2014 suggest they already had positive attitudes to reading. Thus it is not surprising that, when assessed in 2015, there appears to have been little change (Table 4).

There is one exception. The data suggest that the high attenders had greater self-efficacy in reading and identified as readers more strongly in 2015 than in 2014. When asked "How do you feel about how you read?" in 2014/2015, 11 out of the 13 students recorded a smiley face, whereas only six of these 11 students scored a smiley face in 2013/2014. It has not been possible to establish whether this would constitute a significant difference because of the small sample size.

## Summary of students' reading achievement and attitudes to reading

STAR data suggest there was less slippage in reading achievement following the long summer break of 2014/2015 than for the previous summer. As the difference is more evident for the whole cohort than for those students who regularly attended the holiday reading programme, it would appear that the changes in the school reading programme, which the entire cohort experienced, may be the critical influence. Students in this cohort already had very positive attitudes to reading as determined by NEMP prior to the year in which the summer reading programme was implemented, and this was still evident following the summer reading programme. Of particular interest, however, is that the high attenders of the summer programme expressed greater self-confidence in themselves as readers following the holiday break. Given that 76 percent of the cohort comprises English language learners (ELLs) with home languages other than English, less "summer slippage" is encouraging.

## Students' perceptions of effect of the summer programme on reading achievement and attitude to reading

Three themes arose from the students' perceptions of the effect of the summer programme: motivation to attend; enjoyment of the activities and structure; and perceived benefits to them as readers.

### Motivation

Most of the high attending group, when asked why they had spent so much of their summer holidays at the programme, gave aspirational responses, such as "because I don't want to get three months behind in my reading"; "so I can learn more about reading and move up the school another level" and "I wanted to make my reading better so I can experience what's going on". One girl was very focused, saying she attended "[so I can] do lots of reading to help me become a doctor".

Students in the low attending group gave similar reasons, such as, "Well I just really like reading so I wanted to come—it looked like fun and it was"; "To read different books not the same books every day"; "Like it is good for your reading and you can bring along some friends, you can read with them and have some fun", and similarly, "I came to read more books to make my reading level higher and meet some new friends". However, for one boy the motivation was simply, "There was nothing to do at home".

Reasons from the low attending group for not attending the summer programme on a regular basis consistently referred to family arrangements, such as the family went away, difficulties in getting to the library, and family issues such as visitors and a death in the family.

### Enjoyment of activities

Students in both groups were unanimously positive about their participation in the programme and the "fun activities". They commented on their enjoyment of a number of aspects that had been suggested in the pre-summer programme focus groups, such as choosing for themselves the activities and the mode of working (whether in small groups or independently); being able to do practical activities related to the books they had read, such as Lego constructions, posters, and character illustrations; and being able to dramatise the stories they read. A group of the students particularly enjoyed writing their own plays inspired by books they had read, with one student saying "It will help you in your writing and reading. You actually write it and then do a performance to the audience, it's just like visualising a book".

Students also said they enjoyed opportunities to read and finding out about a wider range of books and listening to stories read by people because, as one student commented, "I liked reading different books like I hadn't heard about those books before and I liked it when they were reading it to us", to which another student added that it was "inspiring ... if someone is reading it we can understand what it means." For some students, opportunities to read and be read to were a highlight. When asked to identify what she enjoyed most during summer reading programme, one student said "Fun activities, more time to read and I like to hear stories read to us".

Another student, when asked what she particularly enjoyed about the summer reading programme, replied: "*How we start off reading, it refreshes your mind a bit and takes you into a whole new world*".

Research activities were commented on by several students; as one boy said, "The best thing I have been doing was when me and my friend did a diagram about our research on motorcycles. We learnt so much new stuff". Another student who had worked on her own claimed that the "Best thing about what I did in doing the research was actually ... while doing research getting some information ... and my one, it was about reptiles and mammals. Then I liked introducing it to everyone".

Several students commented on the comprehension discussions. One student, a low attender, liked "doing like comprehension work and that so when they came round and asked me some stuff about the books I was reading I liked that. ... Like who the characters are, what's, like, happened so far in the book", because, "I'm not good about like remembering things and that helped me".

## Student perceptions of benefits of the summer reading programme

Some students explicitly commented on their self-efficacy as readers. One of the high attending students asserted: "I have improved my reading a bit more because the books that I have been finding are more interesting than the books I get at school and the ones I usually get (from the library)", continuing "I think that's because these books I never knew. I usually stick to one topic 'cause I can read it but now I have found there are more interesting books that I can read".

Students' advocacy for summer reading programmes was enthusiastic; most comments indicated the students intended to urge their friends and family to participate so as to "improve their reading". For example, one student suggested he would tell his friends "If you want to get better at reading or something go and give it your best". He went on to say he would challenge them not to "just watch TV and sit there, don't be lazy—try doing different stuff that you have never done!" Another student's advice to his friends would be to "get involved, it would help you understand more of your reading and, like, it's quite a lot of fun", because if they went to the library and read more books it would help them to not "drop down in their reading ... in the summer holidays".

One of the low attending group, when asked why she liked the programme, replied "It was really fun and there was a lot of fun activities but while you are having fun you are also improving your reading ... because you are reading heaps of books and doing reading activities".

## Parents' and whānau perceptions of the summer reading programme

The parents of 56 percent of the Year 5 student cohort responded to a written survey (this included the parents of students who had not attended the summer programme). Ninety-six percent of surveyed respondents said they were very happy or happy with the summer reading programme. Parents of the 43 children who did not attend gave as reasons for their children's non-attendance that their children were: away for a holiday; busy doing other things; had to help at home; went to a different holiday programme or lost the notice about the summer reading programme. Six parents said that either they or their children were not interested in participating.

Also, a sample of parents whose students attended 10 or more sessions was interviewed by telephone. They were unanimous in saying their children had fun and enjoyed meeting their friends and making new friends, and they thought their children's reading had improved. The activities their children appeared to enjoy the most were: meeting friends; storytelling, reading books; and creative activities, which included doing "design" activities, such as posters and book covers; the storyboards, and the "doing" activities such as Lego construction. They reported that their children had wanted to go every day because they loved reading and going to the library, and certainly would go again if the opportunity arose.

When asked what they thought overall about the summer reading programme, parents responded with epithets such as "Awesome, wonderful, excellent" and, "best way to have peace and quiet at home".

## Teachers' perceptions of the summer reading programme

The focus group questions elicited teachers' perceptions of the effect of the summer reading programme on student attitudes and achievement in reading, and on their own practice.

### Impact on student achievement and attitudes to reading

Teachers reported that many of the high-attending students at the summer reading programme previously were the more "motivated and able readers", thus accounting for their interest in the programme. Nonetheless, Teacher 1 (T1) observed, "A lot of them came back really enthusiastic" and eager "to share their experiences" about the summer reading programme. The students expressed great interest and, "seem to be building on what they've already done" (T1). All teachers felt that the students' vocabulary knowledge and comprehension showed a greater depth of understanding of more difficult plots and characters (particularly of continuous prose). They attributed this to the new approaches implemented in the preparatory phase for the summer

reading programme. For example, Teacher 2 commented on the development of “Their comprehension of their ability to read a substantial piece of text and discuss it, and show through that discussion that they do understand, at minimum, the key ideas”, because students were being “exposed to higher order vocabulary as a result of all the innovations” (T2). Teacher 4, in reference to one student, commented that the student “has shown improvement in comprehension ... literally higher order thinking”. Similarly Teacher 3, talking about another student, said that summer reading programme had “Motivated him as well ... I have noticed he thinks a bit more critically”.

Students’ self-confidence as readers was noted. Teacher 4 talked about students’ enhanced “enthusiasm” and “willing[ness] to respond to comprehension questions”. There was a consensus the students who had attended the summer programme had a “More positive view of themselves as a reader as opposed to just liking reading” (T2). For example, Teacher 2 spoke about some students who, previously, “Didn’t have a lot of confidence ... and they didn’t have a positive view of themselves as a reader” who now, like others in their cohort “see themselves as readers”.

A strength of the summer reading programme, they concurred, was the emphasis being “On kids to enjoy reading, gain a love of reading, enhance their love of reading” (T1), and as Teacher 2 observed, “If it has changed their view of themselves as a reader actually there will be long term impact on achievement”.

### Impact on teachers’ knowledge and practice

For the four 2014 Year 5 teachers, the summer reading programme was the culmination of a process which started with the teachers asking themselves as a team “How can we raise the profile of reading with the children and parents?” (T1). Most notable of the changes initiated, according to all the teachers, was the cohort-wide read-aloud novel to establish a shared experience and create a community of readers. The success of the shared novel was, they believed, that “we were all having shared experiences as a whole year group not just as a whole class and kids could talk about it to each other in the playground ... there were conversations going on [about the book] between students” (T4). The collaborative approach led to other related activities such as creating posters, book covers and character studies with a common intention of “Getting reading just right up there in the children’s minds” (T2) throughout the year. For example, Teacher 3 commented, “I think these read-alouds have been one thing I am taking away from this project and the discussions as well.”

Practices initiated in preparation for the summer reading programme, such as the “community of readers”, were being maintained for Year 6 students in 2015 through “post read-aloud discussion circles” (T2), which “really motivate(d) children to look forward to the actual read-alouds or any type of reading because they are keeping up and they are actually understanding what we are reading about” (T4), and in which “even our ELLS [English language learners] get the opportunity to speak up and show they understand more” (T3).

The teachers also valued the opportunity to “reflect and as a team look more closely at our practice” (T2). One of the teachers (T4) concluded, “I’m just really glad that we’ve been part of the reading project and I think definitely over the [course of the project] I’ve been more aware of, and focused on, reading—joining the reading development team to extend my PD on, you know, trying to enhance children’s ... it’s been really beneficial for many of the children.” To which Teacher 3 added, “It was beneficial to us as a team, and to the kids, and probably now since as a reading development team we are doing reading aloud and other things for other teams as well (in) the school”.

## The reading support teachers’ perceptions of the programme

The project’s reading support teacher, a registered teacher, was interviewed shortly after the completion of the summer reading programme. She had been working in a support and preparation role on the research project at Papatoetoe Central School since the beginning of 2014, and knew the 2014 Year 5 cohort well.

The reading support teacher saw her role and responsibilities as working with students specifically with their reading in the preparatory phase, and as the school’s lead teacher for the implementation of the summer

reading programme. She believed it was important for her to know the students, the nature of the summer reading programme, and to have had time to build a relationship with the children prior to and during the programme.

She felt the programme was well planned, well-structured with clear expectations for the students, and soundly built on a preparatory phase. She said that students' growth in confidence in being in a library, talking to others, engagement in the activities, and sharing their views on what they had read was evident, and parents were very complimentary about the programme. When asked what would enhance similar collaborative programmes, her view was that clearer articulation of the respective roles and responsibilities of the school-based personnel and the library staff would have contributed to a more integrated programme.

## Papatoetoe Library's children's librarian's and its Acting Manager's perceptions of the programme

The children's librarian, who participated in the summer reading programmes, was not present at the beginning of the project but joined following her appointment during the year. She said she saw her role as one of providing information and support to facilitate the delivery of the summer reading programme in library space. She felt she had had no involvement in planning the day-to-day operation of the programme. Her involvement with the implementation of the programme was once or twice each week throughout the 4 weeks of the programme, as part of her oversight as children's librarian.

She said a strength of the programme was that it reflected the students' suggestions for a summer reading programme and was compatible with the Dare to Explore programme operating in the library. She was unable to comment on the summer reading programme's impact on the students but noted parents were happy with the programme.

Asked for advice to give schools and libraries when undertaking a similar collaboration, she emphasised the importance of (a) the school and library working together to enhance mutual ownership of the programme, and (b) clearly articulating the respective roles and responsibilities of school-based personnel and library staff so as to ensure an integrated programme.

Although the Acting Manager (replacing the Library Manager who was part of the early planning for the project) was not directly involved in the summer reading programme, she commented on several positive aspects including the library's developing relationship with the school, teachers, and children, and opportunities for their caregivers to get to know the library and staff. Professional discussions with Papatoetoe Central School staff about children's reading habits and the variety of books needed to encourage reluctant readers were particularly valuable. She also thought the programme worked well, but felt there was some confusion over roles, which better communication may have resolved. The summer reading programme, in her view, should be continued, and the relationship between the school and library strengthened through greater mutual involvement.

## Papatoetoe Central School's Principal's perception of the programme

The principal, as project co-leader, believed her role was to lead the school's involvement with the project; coordinate the teaching team, oversee the preparatory aspects of the summer programme, and liaise with the university researcher (the other project co-leader). She saw the strengths of programme as (a) the way it was based on the students' ideas and interests; (b) the access to the public library's facilities, resources and staff; and (c) the commitment of the implementation team. She noted the obvious eagerness and enjoyment of the students and said the length of the daily sessions, in her view, was appropriate.

The principal felt the programme would have benefited by (a) the library staff having a higher profile and contributing more of their knowledge, and (b) clearer communication between the partners during the planning stage and prior to start of the programme so as to establish mutual expectations.

Literacy, she believed, had achieved a high profile in the school in the year leading up to the summer reading programme, with a cross-school literacy focus led by a reading development team. Student attendance at the summer reading programme had been strongly encouraged, with frequent reminders, including a special year-group assembly to provide the students with details about the programme, and a comprehensive letter, including the daily programme, sent home to all families. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that a further reminder to parents prior to the start of the programme in January may have encouraged more students to attend. The principal commented on the benefits of a strong relationship between the school and the local public library, and believes it could have been further strengthened through the public library's children's librarian attending school library meetings and other related activities.

## A community representative's perception of the programme

A telephone interview was held with the representative of the Otara-Papatoetoe Community Board who was a member of the summer reading programme reference group. He was able to observe only part of one session so did not see much of the programme in action. He commented, however, on the commitment, dedication and passion of those involved both at the school and the library, noting this as a strength of the programme. The aims of the programme, he believed, were consistent with the values of the community, such as collaboration between community groups (e.g., the school and the local library) and of aspirations of raising the achievement of children in the area. He considered that greater communication with the community would ensure families were fully aware of opportunities to participate. He encouraged the school to apply for funding to offer a similar programme, suggesting the local board could provide advice and support.

## Implications

The outcomes from this project suggest that a summer reading programme alone may be insufficient to raise student reading achievement. The data suggest other variables in addition to the programme have contributed to the students' improved performance across the cohort. Students appeared to benefit from a "total package" that arose because the school had committed to the summer reading programme. These "total package" aspects included: the teachers' self-review of teaching approaches, and placing greater emphasis on comprehension; a cohort-wide "read-aloud" which fostered student engagement and discussion about books, and created a community of readers; a supplementary teacher who assisted in preparing students for the summer reading programme and led it during the summer break; a responsiveness to the students' and families' voices in planning for the summer programme; the enhancement of student and family awareness of the library as a community resource; and ongoing communication with whānau and parents that emphasised the importance of reading at home. In addition, two books, funded by the Lion Foundation, gifted at the end of the year to each student at the school (1,440 books) may have heightened the profile of reading for all students as they started their holidays.

There were, however, specific outcomes which suggest additional benefits from the intensive summer reading programme, such as increased comprehension of continuous prose passages and students' self-efficacy and identity as readers. These data imply that having a registered teacher who knew the students, as well as the librarian, leading the summer reading programme, may enhance library-based holiday programme outcomes. Activities that were influenced by students' views may also have contributed.

Collaboration with the public library was undoubtedly a potential, but not fully realised, strength of the summer reading programme. A true partnership did not develop because of some misunderstandings about each party's roles and responsibilities. A stronger partnership, however, may have developed if the library had had greater involvement in the planning and delivery. The study highlights the time and effort needed to establish a collaborative partnership to enhance commitment and to develop a sense of collective ownership of a programme.

# Limitations

A number of factors led to limitations for the outcomes of this project in addition to issues that inevitably arise when two complex organisations such as a school and a library collaborate on a project. Student attendance at the summer reading programme, staffing changes in the library, and the physical environment of the library may have all affected aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

Family demands, holiday arrangements and students' ability to get to the library appeared to constrain attendance at the programme (41 students, 36 percent of the cohort). More attention to communication at the beginning of the holidays, and prior to the January summer reading programme may encourage more students to attend, especially those students who are less motivated to engage with reading. The small number of students ( $n=13$ ) who attended regularly means that any claims that a summer reading programme can lead to less of a summer slide in reading achievement are limited. For example, the growth in self-efficacy and difference in paragraph comprehension for students who attended regularly cannot be assessed for significance because of the small sample size.

The children's librarian, who participated in the summer reading programme, was not part of the initial planning for the project, having replaced the librarian who was in the role earlier. Likewise, the Library Manager, a member of the project planning team, was replaced by an Acting Manager. Gaps in communication arose through lack of continuity which may have contributed to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in relation to planning and implementation. Staffing changes may also have constrained collaborative planning of the summer reading programme by the school and the library.

The spread of activities through the library restricted systematic data collection to evaluate student engagement during the summer reading programme.

# Conclusions

This project adds to the body of national and international research suggesting a summer slide in reading achievement is neither inevitable nor immutable (e.g., Kim & Quin, 2013; Meyer, Meissel, & McNaughton, 2015; Turner & Tse, 2015). STAR data demonstrated an improvement in stanine scores following the 2014/2015 summer break for the whole Year 5 cohort (not just for students attending the library-based summer reading programme) in comparison with data following 2013/2014 summer break. After the 2014/2015 break, the mean STAR data also showed an increase in comprehension scores.

The reduced slippage appeared, however, to be due as much, if not more, to approaches implemented in the preparation for the summer reading programme, that started in Term 1, 2015, as to the summer reading programme itself. Improvements in STAR data may be the outcome of changes in the school programme, and teacher development.

From the outset of the project, the Year 5 teaching team determined that the summer reading programme was not going to be an isolated 4 weeks of extra reading during the summer holidays, but a component, and culmination, of a larger, ongoing review of their reading programmes. Engaging in the review had led the teaching team to ask themselves questions such as: "What does really mean to be a reader? How can we ensure every student in the cohort succeeds in reading? How can we inspire a lifelong love of reading?"

The review led to the enrichment of daily reading programmes through cohort-wide initiatives, such as the cohort-wide "read-aloud", the use of student reading diaries, and the use of e-big books and audio books. Parents were involved to a greater extent through Year 5 reading-specific newsletters, and class visits to the local library were initiated. Teachers, it seemed, were developing a greater awareness of their pivotal role in enhancing student engagement and motivation and, as one teacher put it, they were "shining a spotlight on reading".

Nonetheless, for students who attended the summer reading programme, it appears there were additional benefits. Students who attended regularly demonstrated not only an increase in self-efficacy on a standardised assessment tool, but were strongly positive about their experiences in follow-up discussions as well. Three factors in this project appeared to increase student engagement and enjoyment of the summer reading programme in the public library: involvement of a trained teacher who knew the students well; a library environment and knowledgeable librarian; and a sense of ownership generated through students contributing to the content and format of the programme.

We argue that from this research, some lessons arise:

- Teacher knowledge and commitment is pivotal to minimising the effect of long holiday breaks on a student reading achievement programme.
- Development of the community of readers in which reading is a base for social interaction can have an effect on student achievement.
- Close collaboration with a local public library has the potential to help students use a library more effectively and to maintain reading engagement during the year and over long holiday periods.
- When establishing such collaborative projects, establishing (and regularly reviewing) relationships and having clear communication and mutual expectations between school, library, and whānau is critical during the planning, preparation, and implementation stages.

Some questions also arise:

- Are there more cost effective ways of keeping reading going?
- How can less motivated students be encouraged to attend?
- How can collaboration between groups, each with powerful knowledge, experience and commitment but with limited available time to ensure effective communication, be maximised?
- How can public libraries play a bigger role in ensuring student engagement in reading?
- How can community involvement be increased so that summer reading programmes can be sustainable?

Thus, this project suggests that summer reading programmes developed conjointly with a local school and a local library have the potential to enhance student reading engagement during the long holidays, and to reduce the summer slide in reading achievement. An “add-on” summer programme, however, may be insufficient in itself. Evidence from this project suggests that reducing the summer slide should be seen as the responsibility for the whole school community.

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