

EARLY LEARNING CURRICULUM

WHAT'S IMPORTANT AND WHAT WORKS



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Early learning curriculum

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Introduction

The Education Review Office (ERO) gathers system-wide information on a variety of educational issues, reporting on overall sector performance and highlighting good practice.

This retrospective study synthesises findings from 17 national evaluation reports¹ about curriculum implementation in early learning services published over the last ten years.

While the national evaluations over this time have not covered every aspect of early childhood curriculum, they provide an insight and consistent messages about how effectively services are designing, implementing and evaluating their curriculum based on *Te Whāriki*.² The evaluations highlight the dimensions of pedagogical leadership, teacher knowledge, and capacity to develop powerful learning partnerships as key factors impacting on quality.

Across these 17 evaluations we have collected examples of effective practices by early learning services as they design, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of their curriculum. We share some of these examples again in this report.

What ERO knows about curriculum in early learning services

ERO's national evaluation reports on curriculum in early childhood have a recurring and common theme: 'variability of quality across the sector'. This variability is a feature of understanding and implementation of *Te Whāriki*, regardless of the focus (age or ethnicity or specific learning needs of children; subject area; or curriculum principles and strands) of ERO's evaluation findings over this time.

Issues of quality and equity impact on children's learning and development in early childhood settings. All children should experience an early learning curriculum that is responsive to their language, culture, identity, strengths, interests, needs and abilities. Variability in curriculum understanding and practice impacts on the extent to which children are provided with equitable opportunities to learn in meaningful contexts and through rich and challenging experiences.

In the best examples of practice, children have opportunities to learn and experience a curriculum that extends and promotes their learning across the breadth and depth of *Te Whāriki*. A mix of deliberate and spontaneous teaching, balanced with child-initiated learning enables teachers to extend children's developing understandings. Where this is happening children are developing sound foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes along with a repertoire of working theories and dispositions, critical for their success as lifelong learners. Pedagogical leadership has featured as a key contributing factor in services with well-aligned curriculum processes and practices.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of ERO reports included in this report.

² Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

Where ERO has found variability

Across ERO's national evaluation reports on curriculum in early childhood we have found that variability of practice extends across the ages of children attending early learning services. For instance we have found that infants and toddlers are usually well cared for and many services support them to confidently and competently explore and communicate. However some services provide limited opportunities for infants and toddlers to develop physical confidence and make sense of the world.

We have similarly found variability in the curriculum associated with children's transitions to school. In services that successfully support transitions, children have a wide variety of opportunities to extend their interests and strengths in authentic contexts that promote foundational learning in literacy, mathematics and science.

We have repeatedly highlighted variability in assessment quality. Good assessment is fundamental to ensuring children experience a responsive curriculum, and to support successful transitions at each stage of their learning pathway.

Internal evaluation (self review) underpins high quality practice. Leaders in services who value and champion internal evaluation coupled with clear expectations about how to inquire into and evaluate practice are essential to services' effectiveness in improving outcomes for children. Leaders need to engage teachers in discussion about their practice and children's learning, and can use ERO evaluation indicators³ as a basis for evaluating their effectiveness. This is a key area that requires improved understanding and practice across the sector.

Poor pedagogical leadership and a narrow curriculum reduces children's opportunities to fully engage in learning experiences that respond to their emerging interests and strengths. Lack of teacher knowledge limits opportunities to extend and scaffold children's learning. Similarly, a lack of understanding about assessment impacts on the quality, breadth and depth of information documented about children's progress, learning and development.

Our national reports have emphasised the value of leaders and teachers working in partnership with parents and whānau to promote children's learning. Such collaboration needs to move beyond one-way communication and notions of informing parents and whānau about what is happening in the service, to authentic learning partnerships that have the child and their progress as the focus. Partnerships require practices (already evident in some services) where leaders and teachers listen, respect and respond to what parents and whānau expect of the service and what their aspirations are for their child.

New Zealand has many settings where *Te Whāriki* is well used to develop and implement a curriculum that engages children in rich activities to develop their foundation knowledge and skills.

3 Education Review Office. (2013). *He Pou Tātaki: How ERO reviews early childhood services*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/ero-reviews-of-early-childhood-services-and-kohanga-reo/

In this report we share examples of effective practice from across New Zealand's early learning services, focusing on the following areas:

- > anchors for practice – *Te Whāriki* and priorities for children's learning
- > designing and implementing a responsive curriculum that responds to children with diverse backgrounds and needs
- > positive foundations for children's learning: social and emotional competency; literacy and mathematics; and transition to school
- > pedagogical leadership
- > effective teaching practice
- > assessment for learning
- > internal evaluation for improvement
- > learning partnerships for a responsive curriculum.

Sharing and developing these effective practices across all early learning services will help to ensure all children participate in a well-designed, implemented and evaluated curriculum that ensures equity and excellence in early learning.

New Zealand's national early learning curriculum, *Te Whāriki*

New Zealand is regarded internationally as having a world-leading curriculum. Children's learning and development in early learning services has been influenced and supported by *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*,⁴ the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy statement since 1996. The nature of this curriculum document is well summarised in the 2011 report of the Early Childhood Taskforce *An Agenda for Amazing Children*:⁵

New Zealand's national early childhood education curriculum, Te Whāriki, is based on the principles of empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships. It is not prescriptive, and does not tell teachers 'what to teach'; rather, it focuses on supporting learning dispositions and broad competencies that can be readily transferred to new situations (such as entry to school). It is bicultural, inclusive of all ages from birth to six, and 'anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings.'

The findings of this retrospective study of what ERO knows about the effective design, implementation and evaluation of curriculum in early learning services will be used to inform the Ministry of Education's 2016 update of *Te Whāriki*.

4 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

5 ECE Taskforce. (2011). *An Agenda for Amazing Children: Final Report of the ECE Taskforce*. Wellington. Ministry of Education. p114.

Designing, implementing and evaluating curriculum in early learning services: what is important and what works

ERO's national evaluation reports provide evidence about how services are implementing *Te Whāriki* through a range of different foci. In this report we look back at what we have found in early learning services through 10 years of national evaluations and share what we know about what matters most and what effective practice looks like.

Anchors for practice – *Te Whāriki* and priorities for children's learning

Te Whāriki, the bicultural curriculum and priorities for children's learning are the anchors that all early learning services need to consider when designing, implementing and evaluating their curriculum.

Te Whāriki – early childhood curriculum

Te Whāriki is the Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum policy statement. It is a framework for supporting children's early learning within a sociocultural context. *Te Whāriki* emphasises the learning partnership between teachers, children, parents and whānau. Services are expected to design their own curriculum drawing on the broad definition in *Te Whāriki*, where curriculum is described as:

*“the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development.”*⁶

Early learning services are required to meet the *Curriculum Standard*⁷ as part of their licensing requirements and this is assessed using a set of criteria developed as part of the 2008 regulatory framework.⁸ The *Curriculum Standard* requires all licensed services to implement a curriculum consistent with this framework. However, services have considerable flexibility in how they do this, including reflecting the things of importance to children, parents, whānau and teachers; and their philosophy and context.⁹

Services are required to implement the prescribed curriculum framework of principles and strands from *Te Whāriki*. Our report, *Working with Te Whāriki*, (2013) highlights the different ways services were working with the early childhood curriculum. The open non-prescriptive framework of principles, interwoven strands and associated goals and outcomes enabled services to work with *Te Whāriki* in ways that suited their contexts.

6 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p10. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

7 Ministry of Education. (2008). *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008, and the Early Education Curriculum Framework*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at: www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/DLM1412501.html?search=ts_regulation_early+childhood_resel&sr=1

8 See www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-an-ece-service/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/

9 Education Review Office. (2016). *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/publications/early-mathematics-a-guide-for-improving-teaching-and-learning/

Although *Te Whāriki* suggests that each service develops its own emphases and priorities,¹⁰ it also expects that services weave their whāriki from the principles, strands and goals;¹¹ thus providing a rich and responsive curriculum for all children.

We found that some services used the broad nature of the *Te Whāriki* framework to accommodate a wide range of practice from good to poor quality.

Most of the services reviewed were making some use of the prescribed framework, principles and strands, especially in their philosophy statements and planning and assessment processes. A small proportion (10 percent) were fully exploring the underpinning theories and explicitly linking their curriculum to the four principles, four strands and their associated goals. Another 10 percent of services were not using *Te Whāriki* effectively and leaders and teachers had only a limited understanding of its principles and strands. Children who are not provided opportunities to develop their capabilities with the principles and strands are disadvantaged when compared to children engaging in the full breadth and depth of *Te Whāriki*.

To work more effectively with Te Whāriki, leaders need to support teachers to broaden their understanding of the principles and strands, and engage more deeply with the goals, working theories, dispositions and learning outcomes that are part of the curriculum. The broad nature of Te Whāriki requires teachers who have the professional knowledge to implement it effectively.



10 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p44. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

11 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p11. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

Implementing a bicultural curriculum

The principles and practice of biculturalism are foregrounded in Aotearoa/ New Zealand's founding document, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*.¹² *Te Whāriki* "is the first bicultural curriculum statement developed in New Zealand."¹³

*In early childhood education settings all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The curriculum reflects the partnerships in text and structure.*¹⁴

Guidance from the Ministry of Education about implementing the *Curriculum Standard* states that early learning services are a vital link to ensuring all New Zealand children, regardless of ethnicity, are given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both parties to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*.¹⁵ *Quality in Action: Te Mahi Whai Hua* also outlines how services can ensure their curriculum is bicultural by describing understandings, values, beliefs, and practices that are significant to Māori and that can enrich the philosophies and practices of service.¹⁶

Bicultural practice in early childhood education is mandated through regulations, curriculum, and *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners*.¹⁷ *Tātaiako* states bicultural practice in early learning services is inclusive of a number of aspects. These include leaders and teachers:

- > capitalising on the rich cultural capital Māori children and whānau bring to services
- > providing culturally responsive and engaging contexts for learning
- > building partnerships with whānau and drawing on their knowledge of local tikanga, history and language to enhance the learning programme
- > actively using Māori language and culture to enhance learning for all children
- > setting clear expectations for staff about bicultural practice and providing ongoing support them in their learning.

12 See www.treaty2u.govt.nz/the-treaty-up-close/treaty-of-waitangi/

13 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p7. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

14 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p9. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

15 See www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-an-ece-service/the-regulatory-framework-for-ece/licensing-criteria/

16 Ministry of Education. (1998). *Quality in Action: Te Mahi Whai Hua*. Retrieved from www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/Learning-tools-and-resources/QualityInActionTeMahiWhaiHua.pdf

17 Ministry of Education. (2011). *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners*. Retrieved from: <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/required/Tataiako.pdf>

Our report *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services* (2010) identified that although many services implemented what they considered a bicultural curriculum, the quality and relevance of this was variable. The implementation of a strong bicultural curriculum relied on leaders and teachers understanding and valuing te reo Māori and tikanga in the context of quality early childhood education.

Three years later, in *Working with Te Whāriki* (2013), we again identified that many services made reference to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, to New Zealand's dual cultural heritage, and bicultural practice in their philosophy statements. However, only a few services were fully realising the intent in practice by working in partnership with whānau Māori and through the provision of a curriculum that was responsive to the language, culture and identity of Māori children. Often bicultural practice meant the use of:

- > basic te reo
- > some waiata in the programme
- > resources such as puzzles that depicted aspects of te ao Māori
- > posters and photographs that reflected aspects of Māori culture
- > celebrating events such as Matariki.

In *Working with Te Whāriki* (2013), the principle of relationships underpinned bicultural practice in some services, particularly in terms of how they worked collaboratively with parents and whānau. In a few services, partnerships were strengthened through a focus on seeking and responding to the aspirations parents and whānau had for their children.

In some services, practice included:

- > focusing on bicultural practice as part of their internal evaluation
- > increasing teacher capability to implement a bicultural curriculum through involvement in professional learning programmes
- > increasing their awareness and use of *Ka Hikitia*¹⁸ and *Tātaiako*.

Te Whāriki needs to be well understood to be implemented as a bicultural curriculum. While the intent of Te Whāriki is recognised in some services, greater expectations and more guidance will encourage services to implement a bicultural curriculum for all children.

18 Ministry of Education. (2013). *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2013-2017*. Retrieved from: www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Strategies-and-policies/Ka-Hikitia/KaHikitiaAcceleratingSuccessEnglish.pdf

Example of effective practice: implementing a bicultural curriculum

An association developed a bicultural plan as part of its strategic direction. This plan expressed a commitment to Te Ao Māori. Strategies were developed relating to kindergarten programmes, consultation, assessment practice, professional learning and development for teachers, building partnerships with whānau, and internal evaluation. Planning also included a focus on improving transition to school for Māori children by supporting whānau and their children during this time. The bicultural plan had explicit links to *Ka Hikitia*, and the association was also looking at how to use the recently published *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Assessment for Learning Early Childhood Exemplars*.¹⁹

Bicultural development was seen as a collective venture involving the association board, kindergarten teachers, parents, whānau and community. Professional learning and development, along with leadership and a commitment from the association board, was crucial to development.

Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice (ERO, 2010)

Priorities for children's learning

Te Whāriki states that each service will develop its own emphases and priorities for children's learning. These priorities will vary in each service, however the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* provide the framework for curriculum design.

The particular priorities for children's learning established by the service influence their curriculum. In designing this curriculum, services should respond to parents' aspirations; children's language culture and identity; their strengths and interests; current research and practice; and the aspects of learning that sit within the strands of *Te Whāriki*.

Children's interests are a key source for curriculum design. Teachers observe children's emerging interests and use these as a platform to support and extend children's ongoing learning.

In *Priorities for Children's Learning* (2013), we found that many services identified their priorities for children's learning and some then developed their curriculum based on these priorities. To be responsive to all children, leaders and teachers need to be clear about their priorities for children's learning, and then ensure these are reflected in the design of their curriculum and associated teaching and assessment practice.

¹⁹ See www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/assessment-for-learning/te-whatu-pokeka-english/

Example of effective practice: priorities for children's learning

At one service, priorities for learning were very visible in teaching and assessment practice, so parents were very aware of their child's learning in relation to these. One child's portfolio included a pepeha at the beginning, reflecting her culture as well as the service's emphasis on bicultural practices. The emphasis on whanaungatanga was also strongly evident in this portfolio, with numerous examples of whānau contributing their response to her learning at kindergarten, and linking to events at home. The child's portfolio also included a page establishing whānau aspirations for her to learn numbers and letters through meaningful experiences. Later in the portfolio, assessment information showed progress towards this goal, which was aligned with the kindergarten's priority for numeracy and literacy learning.

Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice (ERO, 2013)

Our report *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011) highlighted that some services had developed guidelines to reflect their stated priorities for literacy within their curriculum.

Later, in *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning* (2016) we found that children had access to high quality mathematics learning in services that made this a priority. In such services leaders valued, and had thought carefully about how to promote early learning of mathematics. Teachers were skilled at using interesting and challenging resources to scaffold children's learning and extend mathematical concepts with a balance of deliberate teaching and spontaneous learning. In developing their programmes in response to this priority teachers considered:

- > children's interests
- > parent aspirations
- > service's priorities for children's learning
- > current research about mathematics
- > next steps identified in assessment information.

Our report *Continuity of Learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools* (2015) showed that when children's interests, strengths, prior knowledge and dispositions for learning were known and used to develop relevant and responsive learning pathways, their transition to school was also more likely to be successful. Not only did teachers know children well, they were able to articulate and share this knowledge with parents and receptive schools. In effective services, priority was also given to children's dispositional learning, independence and social competence as they neared school age.

Example of effective practice: priorities for children's learning

At one service, teachers build children's confidence in their identity and culture and a sense of belonging before they leave the service. The service is very responsive to the needs and interests of individual children. All children have individual development goals set with input from parents and whānau and all teachers at the service through observations during play. Goals are worked on through the child's interests. Learning stories are linked to children's progress with the goals, and they note their new and emerging interests. The managers check portfolios monthly for evidence that learning stories tell a relevant, useful story about children's learning and progress. The service's curriculum is regularly reviewed for relevance for children and their families.

They have joined a readiness for school community forum of early childhood and school teachers to share what they do, what has worked, and what is still needed to be done to support children and families. Both schools and early childhood services have shared their expectations for children with each other, so they have a better understanding of each other's perspective.

Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools (ERO, 2015)

Leaders and teachers need to revisit the intent of Te Whāriki – that each service will develop its own emphases and priorities for children's learning. Being explicit about the valued outcomes for children's learning and how these align to their priorities for children's learning anchors practice and means there is an explicit basis for evaluation and improvement.

Designing and implementing a curriculum that responds to children with diverse backgrounds and needs

A curriculum can only be described as responsive if it responds to the identity, language and culture of all learners in their setting. The curriculum must also include and respond to children with diverse strengths and needs, and those of different ages.

Culturally diverse learners

ERO is committed to improving equity and excellence for all learners. Early childhood education lays a foundation for future learning and educational success, and research shows that culturally responsive teaching and assessment are strong themes for that future success.²⁰

Te Whāriki identifies the importance of affirming and celebrating children’s cultural identity. The curriculum also highlights the importance of children experiencing a responsive curriculum inclusive of their culture and heritage.²¹

Māori learners

Understanding the significance of culture, language and identity for Māori children and their whānau is critical to developing practices that support their successful participation in education.²²

The *2013-2017 Māori Education Strategy, Ka Hikitia*, affirms this, stating “Māori students are likely to achieve when they see themselves, and their experiences and knowledge reflected in teaching and learning”.²³

In *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services* (2010) we evaluated the extent to which early learning services responded to the aspirations and expectations of parents and whānau of Māori children. In services where responsive practice was evident:

- > the principles inherent within *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* were recognised and valued
- > Māori whānau were acknowledged as tangata whenua
- > the philosophy statements reflected *Te Whāriki* and concepts and values such as manaakitanga and ako
- > there were responsive and reciprocal relationships with parents and whānau
- > the curriculum was inclusive of Māori values and beliefs
- > teachers used te reo and tikanga Māori throughout the curriculum
- > children’s ancestral connections were affirmed and their identity as Māori acknowledged
- > children’s prior learning experiences were valued
- > teachers had high expectations of Māori learners.

20 Peters, S. (2010). *Literature Review: Transition from early childhood education to school*. Retrieved from: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/98894/Executive_Summary

21 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p18. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

22 Ritchie, J. and Rau, C. (2010). Poipoiā te tamaiti kia tā tangata: Identity, belonging and transition. *The first years: Ngā tau tuatahi. New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education* 12(1): 16-22. p16.

23 Ministry of Education. (2013). *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2013-2017*. p3. Retrieved from: www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Strategies-and-policies/Ka-Hikitia/KaHikitiaAcceleratingSuccessEnglish.pdf

Example of effective practice: Māori learners

Crucial to one centre's success was the whānau support worker, employed as part of the centre's involvement in a Parent Support and Development programme funded through the Ministry of Education. Parenting programmes, guest speakers and coffee mornings were regular events organised by the whānau support worker that enabled parents to network and develop strengths and skills relating to everyday life situations.

"Some parents are shy at first. They come out slowly. There is no pressure on them. Relationships in this centre connect the teachers, parents and children in a way that gives a strong foundation for learning for all. Teachers provide opportunities that encourage and foster positive relationships. Children are respected, cared for and supported in their learning."

Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice (ERO, 2010)

Two years later in *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services* (2012) ERO again found that when the service understood biculturalism as expressed in *Te Whāriki* and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, practice was more likely to promote partnership with whānau Māori. These services acknowledged the skills and expertise whānau brought to the service, demonstrated a desire to work in partnership based on the Māori concepts of whanaungatanga and whakapapa, and showed a willingness to be guided by Māori in developing teaching and learning programmes about and for Māori children and their whānau.



Example of effective practice: Māori learners

At one service, partnership with whānau was meaningfully enhanced by educators who:

- > were visible members of the local community and had a strong understanding of the historical and current context
- > actively understood and valued the diverse aspirations of whānau for their children
- > had high levels of cultural confidence and competence in te reo me ngā tikanga Māori
- > sought whānau advice and guidance about how to appropriately practise tikanga in the context of the early childhood programme
- > engaged in regular formal and informal discussions with whānau about what they wanted for their children and collaboratively developed individual learning plans with whānau
- > ensured educators from the service visited and encouraged whānau to participate in the programme
- > included all members of a child's extended whānau in the programme, utilising the skills and knowledge of all generations
- > helped whānau who may have difficulty engaging with school personnel and supported them to adjust when children are transitioning to school.

Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services (ERO, 2012)



Pacific learners

Children and young people with Pacific cultural heritage make up an increasing proportion of young New Zealanders. The *Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017* focuses on improving Pacific education outcomes.²⁴ Success is characterised by Pacific learners being secure and confident in their identities, language and culture.

Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services (2013) also investigated how responsive each service's curriculum was in supporting Pacific children. When services used responsive practices, important features included:

- > warm, trusting and affirming relationships
- > a culturally responsive environment that reflected Pacific ethnicities achieved through the employment of Pacific teachers
- > implementing an appropriate curriculum
- > supporting children's language development
- > developing partnerships with parents
- > celebrating cultural events
- > appropriate teaching and learning resources
- > drawing on external research in Pacific education and health and their knowledge of the Pasifika Education Plan
- > robust internal evaluation that was improvement focused.

Example of effective practice: Pacific learners

In one aoga, relationships and communication were central to children's learning and there was a strong sense of belonging and community. Conversations between and among adults and children were rich in Samoan language, helping children to become confident and capable in the language. Formal and informal conversations with parents enabled teachers to find out about parents' aspirations for their child and make links with learning at home.

Teachers worked together to ensure clear links are made between planning, assessment and evaluation processes for individuals and groups of children. Planning was mostly done in Samoan to reflect the emphasis on Samoan language, culture and values.

Assessment records, mostly written in Samoan language, included learning stories and anecdotal observations that highlighted children's sense of identity as Samoan learners. Assessment portfolios were a record of children's learning and development, and had a strong focus on next steps to improve outcomes for children.

Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice (ERO, 2013)

²⁴ Ministry of Education. (2012). *Pasifika Education Plan*. Retrieved from: www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Strategies-and-policies/PasifikaEdPlan2013To2017V2.pdf

In *Continuity for Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (2015) we found that the curriculum and associated practices did not always support Māori and Pacific children by nurturing and maintaining their connections to their language, culture and identity.

ERO's findings about how well services respond to Māori and Pacific children highlight the need for services to implement a curriculum that gives all children equitable opportunities to learn and experience success. Such a curriculum has to be responsive to, and promote, children's cultural identity and strengthen partnerships with parents and whānau.

Children with additional learning needs and abilities

Te Whāriki “assumes the care and education of children with special needs and abilities will be encompassed within the principles, strands and goals set out for all children in early childhood settings.”²⁵ Inclusive practice allows teachers to support children’s individual needs within the early childhood setting.²⁶

We evaluated the inclusiveness of early learning services for children with additional learning needs in 2012. Our report, *Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Education Services* (2012) shows that leaders and teachers in a high proportion of services were fully including children with additional learning needs. These leaders and teachers:

- > believed children with additional learning needs could be capable and confident learners
- > used inclusive processes and practices, and accessed and provided, additional support as appropriate
- > worked collaboratively with parents and key professionals from other agencies
- > designed individual programmes linked to *Te Whāriki*, with assessment focused on the desired outcomes identified in the Individual Programme
- > participated in appropriate professional learning and development.

Although many early learning services were identified as being inclusive, several challenges were identified by leaders and teachers that impacted on their ability to improve outcomes for these learners. These included:

- > working collaboratively with parents who were previously unaware, or did not want to acknowledge, their child had an additional learning need
- > working with Special Education about referrals, funding, and the provision of education support workers (ESW)
- > fully meeting the child’s needs without the support of an ESW because of adult-to-child ratios or lack of pedagogical knowledge
- > children with additional learning needs being unable to attend the service more than 15 hours, or during the school holidays when these two scenarios were not funded for ESW hours.

²⁵ Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p11. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

²⁶ Corbet, J. (2001). *Supporting inclusive education: a connective pedagogy*. London: RoutledgeFalmer. Cited in Stark, R., Gordon-Burns, D., Purdue, K., Rarere-Briggs, B., and Turnock, K. (2011). Other parents’ perceptions of disability and inclusion in early childhood education: implications for the teachers’ role in creating inclusive communities. *He Kupu: The Word* 2(4): 4-18. p5.

In *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011) we investigated how services promoted literacy for children with additional learning needs or abilities. Leaders at many services sought specialist help such as speech language therapists and early intervention teachers and teachers provided one-to-one support and adapted the programme to make it appropriate.

Where children had identified special abilities in literacy many teachers supported, and extended their learning by providing appropriate resources, encouraging investigations to promote higher order thinking and problem solving, and by extending their questioning and conversations. However, we found variability in the response to children with special abilities, and that some teachers did not appear to have the pedagogical knowledge to extend children's learning through any planned or spontaneous teacher interaction.

Inclusion of children with additional needs and special abilities relies on teachers with appropriate knowledge and strategies to work with these children and whānau, and support the child's learning and development. Outcomes for children could often be enhanced further through teachers:

- > developing a shared understanding of inclusive practice*
- > increasing their knowledge of appropriate strategies for including children with special needs*
- > developing a shared understanding of pedagogy so that any adaptation made to the programme is appropriate*
- > learning how to scaffold and encourage the learning of all children including those with special needs and abilities.*

Pedagogical leaders have a role to play in leading this shared approach and facilitating teachers' access to appropriate professional learning and development opportunities.

Infants and toddlers

Good quality early childhood education and care for infants and toddlers has lasting benefits for children and their parents and whānau.²⁷ This time is a critical and fundamental period of development for children as it lays the foundations for lifelong learning.

In the report, *Infants and Toddlers: Competent and Confident Communicators and Explorers* (2015) we evaluated the extent services' curriculum promoted positive learning outcomes for infants and toddlers, particularly in relation to the *communication* and *exploration* strands of *Te Whāriki*.

²⁷ Dalli, C., White, E.J., Rockel, J. and Duhn, I., with Buchanan, E., Davidson, S., Ganly, S. and Wang, B. (2011). *Quality early childhood education for under-two-year-olds. What should it look like?* Retrieved from: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/Quality_ECE_for_under-two-year-olds/965_QualityECE_Web-22032011.pdf

Both these strands are vital for infants and toddlers, to support the development of working theories and dispositions for learning, and increase their understanding of the world around them. These strands of *Te Whāriki* set the foundation for children’s future learning as outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.²⁸

We found that services with a ‘highly responsive’ curriculum had some common characteristics that went beyond structural elements. These characteristics included:

- > strong pedagogical leadership with high expectations of teachers
- > a highly reflective culture where teachers inquired into, and regularly reflected on, their teaching practices
- > whole-staff professional learning and development about infants and toddlers
- > teachers having a deep knowledge of *Te Whāriki* and how it informed the service’s curriculum
- > teachers who knew children well and promoted continuity of care.

In these services, leaders and teachers had a shared understanding of ways to support infants and toddlers that led to a responsive curriculum and positive outcomes for these children.

Example of effective practice: infants and toddlers

Assessment information for toddlers shows their progress over time in terms of communication and exploration. One toddler’s e-portfolio shows her beginning to show initiative at story-time by requesting stories she wants to hear. The portfolio shows her becoming more involved with interactive stories, fully participating in group stories and being actively involved. Later learning stories show her asking and answering questions about stories.

Infants and Toddlers: Competent and Confident Communicators and Explorers (ERO, 2015)

Broadening the focus of their curriculum to better include the communication and exploration strands of Te Whāriki, and reviewing their processes to ensure toddlers are well supported during transitions within the service, would enable some early learning services to better support infants and toddlers as competent and confident learners.

²⁸ Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13*. Retrieved from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>

Positive foundations for children's learning

The aspiration statement from *Te Whāriki* identifies what the curriculum is founded on:

*[for children] to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.*²⁹

Over recent years we have evaluated a range of aspects of curriculum pertinent to children developing as confident and competent learners. These aspects include children's social and emotional development, literacy, mathematics, and transition to school.

Social and emotional competence

Te Whāriki provides a framework for early learning services to implement a curriculum that supports children's competence and confidence as learners. Developing social competence enables children to relate to others in ways that enrich and extend their learning. Young children who are socially and emotionally competent are more likely to behave with empathy and show less aggression.³⁰ The development of social and emotional competence contributes to a young child's success in an early learning service and has a major influence on the establishment of positive peer relationships.³¹ This development begins in infancy and continues through to adolescence.



29 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p9. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

30 Kim, M., Pizzo, P. and Garcia, Y. (2011). *The Path towards social and emotional competence*. Retrieved from: www.ChildCareExchange.com

31 Deans, J., Frydenberg, E. and Tsurutani, H. (2010). Operationalising Social and Emotional Coping Competencies in Kindergarten Children. *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education* 13: 113124.

Developing strong social and emotional competence is essential for children's everyday wellbeing as well as for their engagement and learning in school and beyond. Teachers have a key role in nurturing children's emotional wellbeing and helping children to develop an understanding of appropriate behaviour. Of significance, is the key role pedagogical leaders have in supporting teachers to achieve good quality and consistent practice.

In *Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services* (2011), we investigated how effectively the curriculum in services supported children to develop their social and emotional competence and understanding of appropriate behaviour. In the many services where effective practice was evident, some overarching themes emerged. These include:

- > a strong alignment between the service's policy and practice
- > documented expectations about social and emotional competence that were well understood by teachers
- > a clear process for induction and advice and guidance programmes associated with teacher registration that identified agreed strategies for developing children's confidence and competence
- > teachers using respectful practice and valuing different cultural perspectives, learning and behaviour.

We found that leaders also played an important role in providing guidance, particularly where services were part of an organisation. Modelling of good practice by professional leaders or other teachers was a constructive way to support all staff. This included sharing specific strategies and collaborating on problem solving. Timely and targeted professional learning and development for teachers also contributed to supporting children's social competence and emotional wellbeing.

We found that where teachers had a strong understanding of *Te Whāriki* and the experiences and indicative outcomes described in the curriculum for infants, toddlers and young children, teacher practices were highly effective. Our recommendations were that services:

- > work in partnership with parents and whānau to support children's developing social competence, emotional wellbeing and understanding of appropriate behaviour
- > ensure alignment between policy and practice
- > have processes to identify children's challenging behaviours and strategies to respond to them
- > implement a curriculum that helps children to develop as socially and emotionally competent and confident learners.

Example of effective practice: social and emotional competence

At one Playcentre, the Association's positive guidance policy is well implemented. Parents provide good support for children in managing their frustrations and strongly encourage them to be considerate and caring of others. Older children have opportunities to nurture and care for younger children and younger children learn by observing and imitating older peers. Children are capable and independent learners. They move confidently between areas of play, pursuing activities that interest them and often maintaining high levels of engagement for long periods. Children confidently initiate and maintain conversations with adults and seek their assistance. Toddlers have good opportunities for sensory play and exploring the environment.

Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services (ERO, 2011)

Literacy and mathematics

Te Whāriki's socio-cultural perspective informs literacy and mathematics practices in early learning services. Literacy and mathematical learning are woven through the strands and principles of *Te Whāriki*, although the curriculum document does not specifically advise teachers how to promote or teach these aspects of learning. Overall, the curriculum encourages a holistic view of these aspects of learning where infants, toddlers and young children engage with literacy and mathematics in ways that reflect their growing expertise and incorporates their home literacy and mathematics experiences.

Aspects of learning such as literacy (oral, visual and written) and mathematics are highly valued in society. A literate and numerate society is important for educational and economic reasons. There are also social, cultural and personal benefits for children developing good literacy and mathematical knowledge and practices. In early childhood education, parents can expect children to develop early literacy and mathematical knowledge through their early childhood experiences.

Early literacy and mathematics experiences developed as part of a holistic curriculum are critical to children's ongoing educational success. Children's mathematical knowledge and early literacy experiences provide strong foundations for ongoing learning.³²

³² Education Review Office. (2015). *Continuity of learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/publications/continuity-of-learning-transitions-from-early-childhood-services-to-schools/ and Mitchell, L., Wylie, C. and Carr, M. (2008). *Outcomes of Early Childhood Education: Literacy Review*. Retrieved from: http://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/885_Outcomes.pdf

Our evaluation *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011) showed that in services where literacy was well integrated into the curriculum, leaders and teachers:

- > promoted an holistic approach to literacy where children’s literacy experiences are part of purposeful play and attuned to their interests
- > were aware of current theories and research about early literacy
- > sought and valued the contribution of children, parents and whānau, and others in the community
- > reviewed their curriculum with a focus on literacy outcomes for children, and this resulted in changes to teaching and learning
- > valued and provided literacy learning opportunities that recognise and foster children’s language, culture and identity
- > encouraged an holistic view of literacy where infants, toddlers, and young children engage with literacy in ways that reflect their growing expertise, and that incorporates their home literacy practices.

Example of effective practice: literacy

A variety of play experiences that allowed for imagination and creativity were provided by one centre. Teachers actively encouraged children to engage in conversation and at times recorded this in print so that children saw that print conveyed a message. Access to a range of writing equipment promoted children’s view that they saw themselves as writers. Extensive use of recited prayer, nursery rhymes, and waiata supported children’s literacy development. Teachers used skilled questioning to promote engagement, enjoyment and responses to text.

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning (ERO, 2011)

However, this evaluation highlighted a need for further consideration of the theory, philosophy and practice of literacy teaching and learning in our early learning settings. Despite evidence that good quality literacy teaching practices in early childhood can contribute to later literacy success, we have found that early childhood pedagogy is often based on common practice rather than a deeper understanding of children’s learning progressions in literacy. This finding is supported by the work of McLachlan who states:

“Research also indicates that many teachers have an inadequate understanding of how literacy develops and consequently miss many opportunities to encourage children’s development within naturalistic settings.”³³

³³ McLachlan, C., Nicholson, T., Fielding-Barnsley, R., Mercer, L. and Ohi, S. (2013). *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education. Issues, challenges and solutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p112.

In *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning* we found that the curriculum in most early learning services provides children with a wide variety of opportunities to explore mathematical concepts. However, two factors were again found to be critical for effective mathematics teaching and learning; pedagogical leadership and teacher knowledge. In services where children experienced a balance of spontaneous and deliberate mathematics that was well integrated into the curriculum, leaders and teachers:

- > were more likely to be up to date with current research and good practice about early mathematics and were able to use this knowledge to be innovative and intentional in their planning and teaching
- > confidently recognised and extended children's understanding of mathematical concepts in a variety of contexts
- > balanced child-initiated learning experiences and deliberately planned activities to provide a platform for teachers to extend children's developing mathematical understanding
- > provided learning opportunities that reflected the six strands of *Te Kāhano*³⁴: patterning, measuring, sorting, locating, counting and grouping, and shape
- > used assessment information to make children's mathematical learning in their play and in conversations visible, and to show the development of children's working theories about mathematical concepts
- > identified next steps to build children's mathematical learning, and used these to inform planning and to highlight children's learning and progress to parents, whānau and the child.



34 Ministry of Education. (2010). *Te Aho Tukutuku – Early Mathematics (CD Rom)*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Example of effective practice: mathematics

The children at an early learning service experimented with multiple ways of measuring things, such as how much water their gumboots could hold, how long they could hang off a beam, and how far play dough could bounce. Teachers extended this interest by showing them different ways the measurement information could be presented.

They used the tape measure to measure each other's height and recorded these on a height chart. They counted how many segments were in their mandarins each day and recorded this data in a pictograph.

One child took the tape measure and began stretching it alongside pieces of wood. He told the teacher that he wanted to make two pieces of wood that were the same length. The teacher helped him by explaining that he would need to make sure the number on the tape measure was the same for each piece. There were not any pieces already the same length, so he realised he would have to cut one to match the length of another. The teacher prompted him to find the same number on his measuring tape as before, and mark the wood with a pencil to show where he needed to cut it. The boy was able to do this, and learnt a practical application for his new measuring skills.

Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning (ERO, 2016)

However, in this evaluation we expressed concern about teachers' misinterpretation of the notion of a 'child centred' curriculum that fails to appreciate the critical role of the teacher in deliberately extending and scaffolding children's learning. Adopting a philosophy of 'hands off', where teachers rely solely on children to take the lead in their own learning, can result in teaching and learning opportunities being missed.

Te Whāriki has been critiqued for its lack of attention to subject content knowledge,³⁵ as it could potentially "limit learning and teaching opportunities and children's inquiry based learning."³⁶ We have consistently found that when teachers have good subject and pedagogical knowledge they can show greater intentionality in the approach they take to teaching and learning; and through doing so, respond meaningfully to children's learning experiences.

35 Smith, A. (2011). Relationships with people, places and things – *Te Whāriki*. In L. Miller and L. Pound (eds) *Theories and Approaches to Learning in the Early Years*. pp 149-162. Sage: London.

36 Hedges, H. and Cullen, J. (2005). Subject knowledge in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy: belief and practices. *Contemporary issues in early childhood* 6(1): 66-79. p75.

When considering how this increased focus on subject content knowledge might fit with *Te Whāriki*, Hedges and Cullen state:

*An increased focus on content learning is not incompatible with early childhood pedagogy and philosophy, particularly if the content relates to children's interests. Weaving content into interests-based learning is consistent with the pedagogical focus of Te Whāriki.*³⁷

To effectively incorporate literacy and mathematics into their curriculum teachers need the subject and pedagogical knowledge to do this well within the framework of principles and strands in Te Whāriki.

This is emerging as a critical challenge for those providing initial teacher education and ongoing in-service professional development and learning for our teachers. It is also the role of pedagogical leaders to establish clear expectations and support teachers to meet these.

Transition to school

Te Whāriki principles – *holistic development, empowerment, relationships, and families and community*, underpin practices that support children as they approach transition to school. *Te Whāriki* provides goals for each strand, and learning outcomes that services can use to plan and evaluate their curriculum for children approaching transition to school. *Te Whāriki* includes guidance for services about 'continuity between early childhood education and school' for each of the five strands of the curriculum.³⁸

The Ministry of Education also provides guidance,³⁹ suggesting that services use the principles of *Te Whāriki* to guide their decisions about supporting children and their families through transitions. The information focuses on collaborative relationships and sharing of responsibility, and suggests that early childhood and primary school teachers share common goals for children's learning, and work together to reduce discontinuities that children experience.

37 Hedges, H. and Cullen, J. (2005). Subject knowledge in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy: belief and practices. *Contemporary issues in early childhood* 6(1): 66-79. p77.

38 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. pp 47, 55, 65, 73. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

39 See www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/transitions-in-ece/

In *The Continuity of Early Learning Project*, Mitchell *et al* report that the relationship between the early learning service and the school is important in establishing shared understandings.⁴⁰ Peters proposes cross-sector professional development to support children's transition to school as a useful approach to building a deeper understanding of each sector's curriculum.⁴¹ Teachers developing this shared understanding of curriculum, expectations and teaching philosophy can help children's smooth transition to school.

Investigating children's transition to school was the focus of ERO's *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood to Schools* (2015) evaluation. This report acknowledges that going to school can be an exciting but challenging time for young children and their families. When moving from early childhood education to school is a positive and rewarding experience, it sets children on a successful pathway.

Curriculum practices identified as supporting children's transition to school focused strongly on children's dispositional learning, independence and social competence. Where successful transition to school practices were evident, ERO found:

- > children experienced a responsive and holistic curriculum
- > clear links between a service's curriculum and the principles of *Te Whāriki*
- > collaborative relationships with parents, whānau, schools and external agencies
- > collaborative relationships between teachers in services and schools resulting in shared expectations and philosophies and curricula that were shared, valued and understood
- > services responded well to the interests, strengths and capabilities of children at risk of poor educational outcomes
- > the language and culture of Māori and Pacific children were integrated into, and reflected throughout, the curriculum.

In services with effective practices, older children often had the opportunity to participate in specific experiences that focused on extending their particular strengths in authentic contexts.

Supporting transitions can be difficult for services and schools when children do not have a clear pathway between them, such as when the service contributes to a large number of schools or vice versa. Under such circumstances effective curriculum and assessment practices are critical to ensure children have portable information about their learning to share with their new school.

40 Mitchell, L., Cowie, J., Clarkin-Phillips, K., Davis, A., Glasgow, A., Hatherly, L., Rameka, L., Taylor, L. and Taylor, M. (2015). *Case studies of assessment practice: Examples from Continuity of Early Learning Progress and Outcomes in the Early Years*. Retrieved from: www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/continuity-of-early-learning-case-studies

41 Peters, S. (2010). *Literature Review: Transition from early childhood education to school*. Retrieved from: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/98894/Executive_Summary

Example of effective practice: transition to school

This aoga forms part of a collaborative community, along with bilingual units at the local primary and intermediate schools, promoting Samoan language, culture and identity. Teachers at the aoga meet with teachers at the school regularly as part of the transition process. The new entrant teacher visits the aoga to observe the children, to get to know the teachers and see the curriculum in action. The teacher is part of the interview process for children transitioning to primary school. Portfolios are used for this interview and information (children's language, culture and identity, and aiga backgrounds) is noted by the primary teachers who know the children due to regular visits.

Partnerships with parents are well established, with many opportunities to interact on a formal and informal basis. Understandings and beliefs about children's learning are shared between parents and teachers, and parents have many opportunities to comment on, and provide input into, the curriculum, philosophy and governance. Fa'aloalo (respect) is a key 'poutu' at the aoga. This is a shared concept for all.

Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools (ERO, 2015)

In *Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Services* (2012) we found transitions at almost all services ensured the continuing wellbeing, learning and development of children with additional learning needs. Where good practice was identified there was a strong focus on respectful relationships; partnership with parents, the school and external agencies; ongoing communication; responsive teachers; and the child dictating the pace. Our *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (2015) report also noted that ensuring resources and support are in place for children with additional learning needs is a critical part of a smooth transition.

Example of effective practice: transition to school for children with additional learning needs

The leaders and teachers were very supportive of a child with autism who recently transitioned to school. Leaders and teachers collaboratively developed strategies to support the child with the parent, special education specialists, and the education support worker. Teachers tailored activities to motivate the child to participate and be involved. With the teachers' help, the parent developed a 'passport' that gave school staff very clear information about the child's needs, and what works and what does not work in engaging the child. Assessment information, which included the Ministry's Special Education observations and learning stories, and learning stories from the early childhood service, supported this process. The parent talked with school staff, the children in the new entrant classroom and the parents at the school to inform them of her child's needs and strengths and answer any questions they had prior to the child starting school. The parent told ERO the best thing that happened for her child at the service was everyone sitting down and making a plan together. The parent commented, "the perfect transition is strong communication, listening to families, letting parents lead with support, recognising that the parent is the expert on the child. The parent has to feel comfortable to ask questions. I was empowered to do all of this through, in part, the emotional support I got from the preschool."

Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools (ERO, 2015)

Te Whāriki provides "a foundation for children to become confident and competent and, during the school years, to be able to build on their previous learning."⁴² To maximise this opportunity, teachers in both early learning services and schools need to build their understanding of their respective curriculum so the transition process can be enhanced for children and their families.

⁴² Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. p93. Retrieved from: <http://minedu.cwp.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/ece-curriculum/te-whariki/>

Pedagogical leadership

Pedagogical leadership has emerged as a key dimension in early childhood education as it directly impacts on what happens for children.⁴³ Our reports since 2007 have shown a shift from ‘professional leadership’ to leadership being about learning and supporting curriculum: ‘pedagogical leadership’. Leaders who promote, support and participate in ongoing professional learning and development, and encourage teacher inquiry and collaboration, are better placed to provide leadership for curriculum, so all children can experience success.⁴⁴

ERO’s framework for early childhood reviews, *He Pou Tātaki* highlights the importance of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. Pou Ārahi refers to the people who provide guidance and direction to others. Pedagogical leadership is essential to:

- > the enactment of a service’s philosophy
- > realising the service’s vision and strategic direction
- > establishing a culture that supports ongoing improvement
- > building and supporting professional practice.

Effective leadership and teamwork has a major impact on the quality of the service.⁴⁵ Knowing the strengths of the individual teachers in their teams is the role of the pedagogical leader, as is leading learning.⁴⁶ In leading learning, the leader focuses on building a cohesive team with a shared understanding and a shared direction for the service. Leaders who use their pedagogical and subject expertise to guide curriculum implementation and practice can promote improvements in the quality of education and care children experience.⁴⁷

In *Quality in Early Childhood Services* (2010) leadership was identified as one of nine key aspects of practice that contribute to good learning opportunities for infants, toddlers and young children. Effective leadership plays a vital role in leading learning – it is described as “crucial to improving quality.”⁴⁸

43 Clarkin-Phillips, J. (2009). Distributed leadership: utilizing everyone’s strengths. *Early Childhood Folio* 13: 22-26.

44 Thornton, K. (2010). School leadership and student outcomes. The best evidence synthesis iteration: Relevance for early childhood education and implications for leadership practice. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice* 25(1): 31-41.

45 Rodd, J. (2006). *Leadership in early childhood*. (3rd ed.) New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

46 Ord, K., Mane, J., Smorti, S., Carroll-Lind, J., Robinson, L., Armstrong-Read, A., Brown-Cooper, P., Meredith, E., Rickard, D. and Jalal, J. (2013). *Te Whakapakari Kaiārahi Āhuatanga Ako Kōhungahunga: Developing Pedagogical Leadership in Early Childhood Education*. Wellington: Te Tari Puna Ora O Aotearoa.

47 Education Review Office. *Quality in early childhood services* (2010). *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011). *Priorities for Children’s Learning in Early Childhood Services* (2013). *Infants and Toddlers: Competent and confident communicators and explorers* (2015).

48 Education Review Office. (2010). *Quality in early childhood services*. p10. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Quality-in-Early-Childhood-Services-August-2010

The importance of leadership has been repeated in subsequent ERO reports with an increased focus over recent times.⁴⁹ The findings repeatedly show that outcomes for children are more likely to improve where leaders:

- > have established a shared understanding and sense of direction for the service with clear expectations for staff
- > are knowledgeable of current research and best practice
- > provide support and guidance to build teacher capacity
- > build relationships and learning partnerships with parents and whānau
- > lead internal evaluation and review of service quality and outcomes.

We have found that pedagogical leadership is lacking in some early learning services. This lack of pedagogical leadership contributes to variability of practice across all dimensions of the curriculum. This finding is consistent with a recommendation in 2015 made by the Advisory Group Early Learning calling for a programme of professional development focused on leadership for learning.⁵⁰



49 Education Review Office. *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011). *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services* (2012). *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (2015). *Infants and Toddlers: Competent and confident communicators and explorers* (2015). *How do Leaders Support Improvement in Pacific Early Childhood Services* (2015). *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning* (2016).

50 Ministry of Education. (2015). *Report of the Advisory Group on Early Learning*. p6. Retrieved from: <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/consultations/Report-of-the-Advisory-Group-on-Early-Learning.pdf>

Example of effective practice: pedagogical leadership

In the following example, ERO observed how a leader and teachers used their pedagogical and subject knowledge to deliberately plan for and extend children's mathematical learning. In this service, teachers empowered children to make choices about their learning. They also fostered children's exploration and experimentation by respecting and encouraging the children's thinking and ideas. With this support, children in this service developed elaborate, imaginative and deep interests that extended well beyond their initial ideas.

A four-year-old had seen a video about constructing with plastic cups and he had shared his excitement about making some similar constructions with his teachers. A series of learning stories show the development of his ideas and the deliberate extension of his mathematical exploration by his teachers, which culminates in a long-term project not just for him but for many of the children in his group.

The learning stories in his portfolio showed him making complex and accurate 2D drawings of the 3D structures he wanted to create. Teachers placed these drawings on display for him to refer to as he began to construct in 3D.

In the middle of his project, the teachers and children attended a light show at a local art gallery. The use of light fascinated him, and he then wanted to add light to his structures. Teachers provided torches and helped to make the room dark, and he added another dimension to his structures.

By this stage, other children in the group had caught his enthusiasm for designing and creating 3D structures from the plastic cups and had started building their own – with and without light. The teachers' planning shows a clear focus on supporting this mathematical learning. They made sure that resources were available to prompt children's interests through construction sets, blocks of a variety of shapes, and a variety of games with a mathematical focus; and they intentionally used mathematical language with children. Children were urged to draw their ideas and then to transfer their 2D drawings into a 3D reality.

Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning (ERO, 2016)

Pedagogical leadership is a key determinant of effective practice across all dimensions investigated in ERO's national reports. Where leaders have a deep understanding of early childhood research and how young children learn they are able to set direction, support and guide others, and build effective learning partnerships that lead to improved learning outcomes for children.

Effective teaching practice

When teachers are intentional in their practice, they draw on their up-to-date knowledge of how children learn, consider the service’s philosophy, and reflect this philosophical approach through practice and curriculum processes. Epstein states that intentional teaching requires the teacher to be knowledgeable about how children learn and develop. Intentional teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies to provide for, and accommodate, the range of ways that children learn.

*Intentional teaching means teachers act with specific outcomes or goals in mind for children’s development and learning. “Academic” domains (literacy, mathematics, and science) as well as “traditional” early learning domains (social, and emotional, cognitive, physical, and creative development) all have important knowledge and skills that young children want and need to master. Intentional teachers therefore integrate and promote meaningful learning in all domains.*⁵¹

Teachers who are intentional understand that children learn in different ways and there is a place for child-guided and adult-guided experiences in early childhood.⁵² This includes both planned and spontaneous learning experiences. “Teachers need to act with purpose, with intention and with awareness.”⁵³ However, not all teachers are intentional in their practice. Allington and McLachlan both argue “that many teachers are unaware of what effective teaching [for] young children looks like and [lack a] sufficient knowledge of how to promote [foundational learning] to young children.”⁵⁴

An intentional teaching approach is highlighted through the examples in *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice* (2011) and *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning* (2016). These examples show that the most effective early childhood curriculum has a balance between child-led and teacher-initiated group work.⁵⁵ Teachers understand how cultural concepts can be integrated into their teaching practice. Children are engaged in rich learning activities across the breadth of mathematics and literacy experiences. Children’s progress in learning is shared with parents and whānau in wall displays and assessment portfolios.

51 Epstein, A. (2007). *The international teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children’s learning*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children. p1.

52 Epstein, A. (2007). *The international teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children’s learning*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

53 Watson, B and Williams B. (September 2015). Bridging the disconnection between teaching & outcomes for children’s learning. *Swings and Roundabouts*: 18-19. p18.

54 Allington, R. (2010). Recent federal education policy in the United States. In D. Wyse, R. Andrews and J. Hoffman (eds). *International Handbook of Educational Policy and Practice*. New York: Routledge. pp 496-507. Cited in McLachlan, C., Nicholson, T., Fielding-Barnsley, R., Mercer, L. and Ohi, S. (2013). *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education. Issues, challenges and solutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p113.

55 Anthony, G. and Walshaw, M. (2007). *Effective Pedagogy in Mathematics/Pāngarau Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]*. Retrieved from: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5951>

Our *Priorities for Children’s Learning in Early Childhood Services* (2013) found that when teaching practices were effective:

- > internal evaluation was effective and ongoing
- > identified priorities for children’s learning were aligned with teaching
- > children’s interests, strengths and dispositions were identified through assessment and used to design a responsive curriculum
- > parents’ perspectives and aspirations for their children informed curriculum decisions.

ERO’s reports highlight the need for leaders and teachers to discuss and explore what effective teaching practice looks like and examine their understandings of the role of the teacher in implementing their service’s curriculum. As Watson and Williams note in a recent article:

In order to teach in ways that will support the valued outcomes for children’s learning, teachers first need to be clear and to what they are trying to achieve and then deliberately and reflectively practice in ways that promote these outcomes.⁵⁶

Assessment for learning

Early learning services licensed by the Ministry of Education are required to carry out assessment using an approach that reflects the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. Services should carry out assessment “reflective of current research, theory and practices in early childhood education.”⁵⁷

A narrative approach to assessment has been widely adopted as being reflective of current sociocultural practice in early childhood education.⁵⁸ Such an approach considers both the context and the people involved in the narrative – as both contribute to the learning. The early childhood regulations, however, do not specify the use of particular assessment approaches.⁵⁹ ERO’s evaluation indicators from *He Pou Tātaki* highlight the features of high-quality assessment practice. McLachlan states:

“assessment should take many different forms; and should shed light on what children are able to do as well as the areas where they need further work.”⁶⁰

56 Watson, B. and Williams B. (September 2015). *Bridging the disconnection between teaching & outcomes for children’s learning*. Swings and Roundabouts: 18-19. p18.

57 Ministry of Education. (2008). *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008, and the Early Education Curriculum Framework*. p8. Retrieved from: www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/DLM1412501.html?search=ts_regulation_early+childhood_rese&sr=1

58 See www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/kei-tua-o-te-pae-2/

59 Ministry of Education. (2008). *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008, and the Early Education Curriculum Framework*. Retrieved from: www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/DLM1412501.html?search=ts_regulation_early+childhood_rese&sr=1

60 McLachlan, C., Nicholson, T., Fielding-Barnsley, R., Mercer, L. and Ohi, S. (2013). *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education. Issues, challenges and solutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp145-146.

Assessment continues to be an area for improvement in many early learning services. Our 2007 report *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education (2007)* showed that where practices are working well they include:

- > access to resources dedicated to assessment and time to engage in the assessment process
- > written guidelines outlining expectations of assessment and practices that reflect the stated philosophy
- > a shared understanding of the purpose and intent of assessment
- > strong professional leadership
- > regular access to professional learning and development
- > multiple perspectives evident in assessment documentation – teacher, child, parent and whānau
- > celebration of children’s cultural backgrounds and recognition of whānau aspirations
- > assessment documentation that reflects children’s holistic development and their social context.

We found that improvements were needed to ensure children’s learning and development was reflected in assessment information; that information was being used to inform learning; and that internal evaluation included the perspectives of children and their families.



Findings from subsequent ERO reports over the past eight years⁶¹ have continued to highlight where improvements could be made with assessment practice. These include:

- > making learning visible in assessment and analysis of learning that makes next steps for learning clear for teachers, children and parents
- > identifying children's progress and showing the increasing complexity of their learning and development.

Example of effective practice: assessment

The philosophy stated that children would learn through play; that their interests would be extended and that children would be treated as competent and confident learners. The assessment practices reflected the philosophy, with observations and anecdotal notes of children at play documented and shared by all members of the teaching team each day, in order to challenge and provide ongoing opportunities and experiences for learning. The philosophy of a partnership approach to learning with parents was also evident. Portfolios were sent home as a learning story was completed. Information about children's interests, strengths, likes and dislikes at the service were shared by the educators and in return parents shared anecdotal information from home, which together created a holistic view of the child's knowledge, skills and understanding.

The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education (ERO, 2007)

Improving assessment practice is essential for early learning in New Zealand. This requires leaders and teachers to develop a shared understanding of its purpose in the context of their service's curriculum. Assessment practice needs to include the following purposes:⁶²

- > *to identify progress and achievement*
- > *to identify and diagnose children's capabilities and where additional support may be needed*
- > *to evaluate and adapt the service's curriculum to achieve its priorities and outcomes.*

61 Education Review Office. *Success for Māori Children in Early learning services* (2010); *Literacy in Early learning services: teaching and learning* (2011); *Infants and Toddlers: Competent and Confident Communicators and Explorers* (2015); *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood to Schools* (2015).

62 See ERO's evaluation indicators in *He Pou Tātaki: How ERO reviews early learning services*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/publications/he-pou-tataki-how-ero-reviews-early-childhood-services/

Internal evaluation for improvement

Internal evaluation (self review) is the use of robust processes to systematically inquire into, and evaluate, the effectiveness of policies, programmes and practices. Leaders use internal evaluation processes and findings to inform decision making, improve the quality of practice and promote positive outcomes for all children.⁶³ This purpose aligns closely with the definition in the Ministry of Education publication *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*, which states:

*“review is the deliberate and ongoing process of finding out about how well our practice enhances children’s learning and development. Reviews allow us to see which aspects of our practice are working well and what we could do better. As a result we can make decisions about what to improve.”*⁶⁴

The Ministry of Education also provides some guidance in the form of questions for services to consider developing and implementing their curriculum so that is consistent with the prescribed curriculum framework.⁶⁵ The importance of internal evaluation is highlighted as being helpful to services when considering why they do certain things with regard to their curriculum. Internal evaluation can be used to inform decision making, improve the quality of practice, and promote positive outcomes for all children. Services are able to use internal evaluation processes to identify contributing factors and priorities for enhancing children’s learning.⁶⁶

In *Implementing Self Review in Early Childhood Services* (2009), we identified factors common to early learning services where internal evaluation was well understood and implemented. These include strong leadership, relevant professional learning and development, a stable and collaborative staff, sound systems for review, and the use of relevant resources.

The conclusion of *Implementing Self Review in Early Childhood Services* (2009) refers to leadership as an essential component in services where internal evaluation was implemented well.

63 Education Review Office. (2013.) *He Pou Tātaki: How ERO reviews early learning services*. p11. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/publications/he-pou-tataki-how-ero-reviews-early-childhood-services/

64 Ministry of Education. (2006). *Nga arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education*. Wellington: Learning Media Limited. p8. Retrieved from: www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-an-ecce-service/administration/self-review-guidelines/

65 Ministry of Education. (2008). *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008, and the Early Education Curriculum Framework*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from: www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/DLM1412501.html?search=ts_regulation_early+childhood_rese&sr=1

66 Education Review Office. (2013). *Working with Te Whāriki*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Working-with-Te-Whariki-May-2013

Self review was an integral part of services' operations, and managers and teachers in leadership positions played a key role in championing review and making sure it happened. Sometimes leadership came from an umbrella organisation which set out expectations in policies and guidelines, and sometimes it came from external advisors or professional development facilitators. What was crucial was how leaders showed their commitment to review and worked with others in the service to encourage, motivate and support a collaborative approach.

The report also shows that where internal evaluation was well understood and implemented, there were some common features of practice and contributing factors. These included:

- > internal evaluation was integral to the operation of the service and focused on improvement
- > well-established procedures guided self review, and reviews were both planned and spontaneous
- > review included teaching practice, and led to ongoing improvement to the quality of the programme for children.

Spontaneous reviews were more informal and responded to what was happening on a day-to-day basis.



Example of effective practice: internal evaluation

Teachers, children and families all played a part in self review [internal evaluation] and all contributions were valued and considered. Reviews could be prompted by adults or children and were clear in focus. Teachers were able to articulate positive changes to teaching and learning that had been the result of review. Some reviews were formally planned while others occurred spontaneously. Value was placed on both of these processes.

Teachers used evidence-based processes for reviewing centre operations in order to improve outcomes for children. They gathered data informally through discussions, surveys, and observations. Analysis of information led to effective decision making and the identification of well-defined indicators of high quality practice. Opportunities to revisit changes to practice were documented.

Review findings informed decisions about changes to practice and were also used to develop long- and short-term plans. Such plans served as a useful basis for self review, enabling services to monitor progress towards goals and track improvement over time. A few services used their previous ERO report for ongoing self review. Managers and educators in these services were developing an understanding of the complementary relationship between external review and self review.

Implementing Self Review in Early Childhood Services (ERO, 2009)

In our national reports and through our external evaluation processes we encourage early childhood leaders and teachers to review aspects of their practice, and we provide tools to support internal evaluation practice.⁶⁷ We have consistently focused on the need for services to evaluate outcomes for children resulting from teachers' practice and to promote ongoing improvements in their curriculum. In *Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services* (2013) we found that when services undertake effective internal evaluation linked to *Te Whāriki* and their identified priorities for children's learning, they are better placed to know how well they are promoting positive outcomes for all children.

⁶⁷ Education Review Office. *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education* (2007). *Quality in early childhood services* (2010). *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice* (2010). *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning* (2011). *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice* (2011). *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services* (2012). *Continuity of learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (2015).

Leadership is an essential factor in ensuring successful internal evaluation is undertaken.⁶⁸ Leaders have a key role in building the capability and capacity of teachers to engage in inquiry and evaluation activities that have an improvement focus.

Example of effective practice: internal evaluation

The head teacher at one early learning service, supported by the professional services manager, business manager and centre manager, initiates and implements effective spontaneous and planned internal evaluation. Key outcomes include:

- > improved staff appraisal processes
- > focused professional development on identified areas for improvement
- > routines that promote children's independence and self-care skills
- > increased opportunities for cooperative play among toddlers and young children.

High quality internal evaluation ensures teachers are provided with effective support and guidance focused on improving social and emotional outcomes for children.

Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services (ERO, 2011)

68 Grey, A. (2002). *The role of the leader in self-review in early childhood education in New Zealand*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Palmerston North: Massey University.

Wansbrough, D. (2004). *Management matters: self review the hot topic*. Early Education 35 (Winter): 23-30.

White, E. (2003). *In search of quality: A journey for family day care*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.

Learning partnerships for a responsive curriculum

Partnerships between teachers, parents, whānau and children are emphasised within the curriculum. One of the four principles of *Te Whāriki – Family and Community*, emphasises the significant role that the family and community play in a child’s early education. It identifies parents and whānau as an important part of the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum. When parents and whānau are actively involved in and contributing to the programme, children are better able to develop a sense of belonging at their early learning service. *Te Whāriki* places emphasis on services working in partnership with parents and whānau to design a curriculum that is responsive to the development and changing capabilities of the children at the service.

The Early Childhood taskforce report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children* states:

*Parents are the biggest influence on children’s educational achievements, and educational achievement is inextricably linked with other life-course outcomes. Early childhood education programmes that have strong parental connections have been shown to be more effective than those that do not.*⁶⁹

Learning partnerships include involving parents sharing their aspirations for, and contributing to, their child’s learning. Engaging parents and whānau in assessment and curriculum design increases the responsiveness to the child’s language, culture and identity. It strengthens the connection between the learning occurring in the home setting and the early learning service.

Our national reports have noted a shift from ‘collaborative relationships’ with parents and whānau to ‘working in partnership’ to seeking and sharing information about the child’s learning. While acknowledging that partnerships with parents are multidimensional ERO has characterised *learning partnerships* as partnerships formed between whānau and the service to achieve improved learning outcomes for the child.⁷⁰

He Pou Tātaki identifies the multiple ways these learning partnerships can occur. For example, parents and whānau can be involved in:

- > developing the service’s philosophy and curriculum priorities and emphases
- > contributing to the service’s curriculum, including transition processes and practices
- > sharing their aspirations for their child and having these reflected in practice
- > working closely with teachers when their child has specific learning needs
- > actively contributing to their child’s assessment information
- > sharing their knowledge of culture and language
- > engaging in internal evaluation.

Partnership is especially important for Māori children because of the central role of whānau in building children’s sense of identity. Through whānau, children develop their understanding of the world and their place in te ao Māori.

69 ECE Taskforce. (2011). *An Agenda for Amazing Children: Final Report of the ECE Taskforce*. Wellington. Ministry of Education. p114.

70 Timperley, H. and Robinson, V. (2002). Partnerships accomplishing important work together. *Set 3*: 41-43.

Partnership with whānau Māori in early childhood services (2012) investigated how well services worked in partnership with whānau. The findings show that in services with strong partnerships with whānau, leaders and teachers:

- > put into practice well-articulated philosophies of working with whānau
- > knew the aspirations of whānau for their children, and worked with whānau to achieve these
- > drew on Māori expertise to improve teaching strategies for working with Māori children
- > included whānau in internal evaluation that examined the impact of the programme for Māori children and the quality of the service's policies and procedures for whānau Māori.

Many of our recent reports, including *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice* (2011), *Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Services* (2012), and *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning* (2016) highlight examples of learning partnerships working well and identify examples of what good practice looks like.

Example of effective practice: partnerships with whānau

Teachers at one kindergarten shared their approach to learning partnerships with a focus on literacy. Parents are able to discuss what is important to them with the teachers. They can do this verbally, or share written stories or comments in their child's portfolios. Parents understand and support the service's philosophy about literacy and the way that teachers embed this through the programme. They know the importance of sharing their ideas and building partnerships with the service in order to support their children's learning. They share literacy experiences that their children have at home, and successful experiences their children have when they start school.

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice (ERO, 2011)

Learning partnerships not only support the child in their learning at the service, but give parents and whānau the knowledge, skills and expectations to support their child. Parents are better placed to support their child as they move along their learning pathway when they:

- > *know about their child's learning*
- > *know how to support their child with their learning*
- > *have strong expectations that they can contribute to their child's learning.*

Conclusion

Through our national evaluation reports, ERO has built up a body of knowledge about what the implementation of *Te Whāriki* currently looks like in New Zealand early learning settings. This retrospective study provides a synthesis of the findings of these reports, highlighting what is important and what is working well, and giving examples of effective practice in each area.

The depth and richness of *Te Whāriki* is internationally recognised, however, the holistic and interpretive nature of this curriculum document is both its strength and a challenge. ERO's evaluations signal the need for increased support for the early childhood sector to work with the full intent of *Te Whāriki* as part of their curriculum design and implementation.

Our findings highlight the critical role of pedagogical leadership in effective curriculum implementation that promotes positive outcomes for children. Pedagogical leadership plays a significant role in promoting and enhancing the quality of curriculum implementation, teaching practice, assessment and internal evaluation in early learning services. This particular aspect of leadership is essential to implement the service's priorities and guide teachers to implement a curriculum that is responsive to children and their language, culture and identity.

Leaders' and teachers' depth of subject-content knowledge is another crucial factor. Teachers need to be well equipped to make effective curriculum decisions based on sound assessment of children's learning, including a focus on dispositions and working theories.

Subject-content knowledge is required to create seamless pathways for children's learning. Cross-sector professional learning and development has been proposed as useful to support children's transitions to school⁷¹ and would provide an opportunity for all leaders and teachers to further their knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy across sectors.

Developing educationally powerful partnerships with parents and whānau is another key dimension for quality in early learning. Such partnerships go far beyond the daily communication of children's immediate care needs and interests. They are structured to ensure that the rich learning children are engaged in at home and at the service is built upon and extended in either setting. For this to happen, leaders and teachers need to be responsive to children's language, culture and identity.

71 Education Review Office. (2015). *Continuity of learning: Transitions from Early learning services to Schools*. Retrieved from: www.ero.govt.nz/publications/continuity-of-learning-transitions-from-early-childhood-services-to-schools/ and Peters, S. (2010). *Literature Review: Transition from early childhood education to school*. Retrieved from: https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/98894/Executive_Summary

Leaders and teachers need to increasingly engage in ongoing professional learning, and develop a reflective culture that refers to current research in questioning and evaluating their practice. Ongoing professional learning is a vital tool for teachers to strengthen their own pedagogy and capability. Teachers who are more knowledgeable and confident are also better able to share their knowledge of children's learning with colleagues, parents, and schools.

Strong pedagogical leadership, curriculum knowledge and collaborative learning partnerships play a critical role in how well early learning services promote positive outcomes for all children.

If everyone in the education system works together, we can improve outcomes for our children and set them on pathways as confident and successful lifelong learners.

Appendix 1: ERO's national evaluation reports

2007 *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education*

2009 *Implementing Self Review in Early Childhood Services*

2010 *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services*

Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice

Quality in Early Childhood Services

2011 *Positive Foundations for Learning: Confident and Competent Children in Early Childhood Services*

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice

2012 *Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood Services*

Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services

2013 *Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services*

Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice

Working with Te Whāriki

2015 *How do Leaders Support Improvement in Pacific Early Childhood Services*

Infants and Toddlers: Competent and Confident Communicators and Explorers

Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools

2016 *Early Mathematics: a Guide for Improving Teaching and Learning*
