

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning

February 2011



# Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

## The Child – the Heart of the Matter

Thank you to the staff and children of Gracefield Early Childhood Centre for permission to use photographs of them at play and work. Also thank you to Mackenzie Chartrand, Mila and Clara van Stokkum and Lola Crocker for their examples of early literacy.

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We welcome your comments and suggestions on the issues raised in these reports.



## Foreword

The Education Review Office (ERO) is an independent government department that reviews the performance of early childhood services and schools, and reports publicly what it finds.

Our whakataukī demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

*Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa*  
*The Child – the Heart of the Matter*

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

This report, *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning*, highlights the variety of factors, activities and experiences that go into the development of children's early literacy skills.

Successful delivery in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people. We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their task.

Graham Stoop  
Chief Review Officer

February 2011

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## Overview

A Government priority for education is that every child achieves literacy and numeracy levels that enable success. A literate society is important for educational and economic reasons. There are also social, cultural and personal benefits for children developing good literacy knowledge and practices.

The Ministry of Education has highlighted literacy as a focus area of professional development in early childhood education stating that “Literacy and numeracy skills are the foundation for continuing learning and provide access to other parts of the curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 2009a: p.8).

Children’s development of strong early foundations in literacy begins in the home and is grown and enriched through participation in high quality early childhood settings. New Zealand and international research highlights the consistent and positive association between participation in early childhood education and gains in mathematics, literacy and school achievement (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008).

The Education Review Office’s 2010 review of early childhood teaching and learning literacy practices confirms that children attending New Zealand early childhood services are exposed to a multitude of resources and experiences that provide opportunities to develop early literacy. Early childhood environments are rich in resources and activities designed to engage and support children in becoming literate. The early childhood curriculum promotes literacy learning and provides some guidance about the skills and dispositions children are likely to have when moving to school. Early childhood educators engage in a range of practices and strategies intended to build children’s literacy learning and competence.

The question for policy makers is whether this is enough. This review found little evidence of explicit links between the literacy teaching and learning practices in early childhood settings and those undertaken in early literacy programmes in our schools. In many cases, literacy activities in early childhood are based on common practice rather than a deeper understanding of children’s learning progressions in literacy. Early childhood educators are generally not aware of how effectively, or to what extent, their programmes and practices support later learning or achievement. Similarly, there is limited evidence that schools seriously enquire into, or adjust, their literacy programmes to build on children’s prior literacy learning and experiences, despite acknowledging that early childhood education is beneficial to success at school.

ERO suggests that New Zealand’s current approach to literacy learning and teaching in the early years of education is an important topic for greater cross-sector discourse and debate. Early childhood services and schools have much to learn from each other. The findings of this evaluation raise questions about whether current early childhood and school practices should be better aligned and, if so, how. The Ministry of Education has a leadership role to play if the government’s vision for New Zealand’s future literacy achievement is to be fully realised.

### ERO'S EVALUATION

This report presents information from ERO's evaluation of literacy teaching and learning practices in early childhood services. ERO undertook this review in 353 services having an Education Review in Term 4, 2009 and Term 1, 2010. The review considered:

- how services valued and promoted literacy learning
- what literacy teaching and learning was occurring in early childhood services
- how services knew literacy teaching practices had improved outcomes for children.

ERO found the quality of practices associated with literacy teaching and learning varied considerably across early childhood services. Educators at most services had a shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning and used a range of planned and spontaneous opportunities that encompassed oral, written and visual literacy. In some services, educators lacked a shared understanding of appropriate literacy teaching and learning practices. This variable knowledge of early literacy meant opportunities for learning were sometimes missed. Literacy teaching and learning was inappropriate in a few services and did not reflect the socio-cultural framework provided by *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), or align with what is known about best practice in early childhood education.

In most of the services demonstrating high quality literacy practice, ERO found that leaders and educators could describe clearly how literacy learning was valued. The importance of literacy learning was evident in services' philosophy and strategic goals, and in the practices educators used to engage children with literacy. Literacy learning was more likely to occur in an authentic and meaningful context in the services where educators received appropriate guidance and professional learning and development (PLD) about socio-cultural processes involved in oral, visual and written literacies.

In less effective services, guidance on literacy teaching and learning was not clear or documented. Opportunities to extend children's literacy learning were often not recognised or not taken. In some services, formal and educator-directed literacy teaching and learning limited the opportunities for children to begin their own spontaneous literacy learning in ways that were meaningful to them. Many services did not adjust their programmes for different groups or abilities of children, which led to disengagement with literacy for some children.

Although some guidance is available about effective literacy teaching and learning in early childhood, this is not gathered into an easily interpreted framework accessible to educators. More could be done to provide guidance on specific practices that would align the principles, strands and goals in *Te Whāriki* with effective early literacy learning

expectations inherent in *The New Zealand Curriculum*. In some services, educators showed a lack of awareness of the pathways children take in developing literacy knowledge and skills before they start school. These educators sometimes responded to parental pressure to introduce formal “readiness for school” classes. The most unsuitable of these were uninteresting, non-inclusive and lacked meaningful purpose or context for children in early childhood. They did not align with school entry literacy practices and had little educational merit.

Services should use self review to investigate the impact of their practices on children’s learning. In many services, the potential to evaluate and improve literacy outcomes for children through self review was not well understood. In these services either no evaluation of literacy practices, processes or outcomes occurred; or self review was limited to considering resources and their placement in the service’s environment. In a small proportion of services, educators considered the impact of their teaching on literacy outcomes for children and used their findings to make improvements.

A recent New Zealand review of international research highlights the importance of positive links between participation in early childhood education and positive literacy outcomes and overall student achievement (Mitchell et al, 2008). This evaluation set out to investigate literacy teaching and learning in the early childhood sector, and is a starting point for further exploration in this important aspect of children’s learning and development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- review the information and expectations for literacy teaching and learning available to the early childhood sector
- provide services and schools with guidance on what constitutes high quality literacy teaching and learning in the early years (ages 0–5), and the factors that determine successful transitions
- resource targeted professional learning and development to improve early literacy teaching and learning.

ERO recommends that services:

- review their shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning
- undertake meaningful self review of literacy teaching and learning to evaluate outcomes for children resulting from their practices and to promote ongoing improvements in their programme.

# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of ERO's review of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood services. It includes information about how services value and promote literacy, what literacy teaching and learning is occurring in early childhood services, and how services know if literacy practices and outcomes for children have improved. The intent of the evaluation is to generate insights and understanding of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood education. This can then be used for improving and refining literacy programmes in early childhood services, and across the education sector as a whole (Chelimsky & Shadish, 1997; Patton, 1997).

### Good literacy practices support strong learning foundations

When children can understand, enjoy, engage with and use oral, visual and written language and symbols they are better able to express their individual identity and become active participants in a literate society (Hamer & Adams, 2003: p.13). Literacy learning supports children's language development and their later achievement in other learning areas such as mathematics, science and social sciences. A 2008 Ministry-funded literature review identified that good quality literacy teaching practices in early childhood services contributed to later literacy success (Mitchell et al, 2008). Other New Zealand longitudinal research has identified that differences at school entry in 'literate cultural capital' may predict future reading achievement (Tunmer, Chapman & Prochnow, 2006).

Recent New Zealand research suggests that some children may be disadvantaged when they go to school, when their early literacy experience is not closely matched to the pedagogy and practice of school (McLachlan, 2006: p.33). Emergent or early literacy is very much a social practice that develops in social contexts rather than through formal instruction. Early childhood educators therefore need to consider and incorporate home and community literacy practices into their teaching and learning programme. When home literacy practices greatly differ from primary school literacy practices, children can experience difficulties (Martello, 2007). Effective literacy practices in early childhood services can help build a bridge between early literacy practices in the home and literacy practices at school.





### Literacy in the early childhood curriculum

New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, promotes a socio-cultural perspective, which informs literacy practices in early childhood services.

While *Te Whāriki* does not specifically advise educators how to promote or teach early literacy, Strand 4, Communication-Mana Reo, does state that the languages and symbols of children's own and other cultures are promoted and protected in an environment where children:

- develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes
- develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes
- experience the stories and symbols (pictures, numbers and words) of their own and other cultures
- discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive (Ministry of Education, 1996: p. 16).

In a broader sense, *Te Whāriki* promotes literacy learning through its principles, which seek to empower children to become literate through activities that are meaningful and engaging. It encourages a 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.

*Te Whāriki* briefly outlines the skills, knowledge and experiences that children are likely to have when moving from an early childhood service to school. These include:

- language skills for a range of purposes
- experience with books
- development of vocabulary, syntax and grammar
- awareness of concepts of print
- enjoyment of writing
- playing with, and using, words
- opportunities to hear and use te reo Māori and other community languages (Ministry of Education, 2006: p. 73).

Part C: The Strands of *Te Whāriki* expands on how these are included in the teaching and learning programme, in particular, Goals 2 and 3 of the Communication-Mana Reo Strand.

The learning outcomes for Goal 2 of the Communication-Mana Reo Strand include children developing:

- language skills in real, play and problem-solving contexts
- language skills for increasingly complex purposes

- a playful interest in sounds and words, rhythm, rhyme and alliteration
- increasing knowledge and skills in syntax and meaning
- an appreciation of te reo Māori
- confidence that their first language is valued
- the expectation that verbal communication is a source of delight, comfort and amusement, and is used to communicate ideas and information, and solve problems
- the inclination and ability to listen and respond.

The learning outcomes for Goal 3 of the Communication-Mana Reo Strand include children developing:

- an understanding that symbols can be read, and thoughts, ideas and experiences represented visually
- familiarity with print and its uses
- familiarity with stories and literature valued by their community
- an expectation that words and books can delight, amuse, comfort, illuminate, inform and excite
- their experience with technology and resources used for reading and writing
- their ability in creating stories and symbols.

In addition to these learning outcomes, three other strands of *Te Whāriki* also contribute to literacy teaching and learning. The Exploration-Mana Aotūroa Strand includes pretend, symbolic and dramatic play, and using information; the Contribution-Mana Tangata Strand includes listening to and discussing others' points of view, and empathy; and the Belonging-Mana Whenua Strand acknowledges the importance of home and community in children's learning.

*Kei Tua o te Pae* (Books 16 and 17) (Ministry of Education, 2009b and 2009c) gives educators further guidance on developing and assessing literacy in the early childhood setting. Literacy is defined as a repertoire of oral, visual and written practices, including:

- observing and listening in – for example, listening to stories, or making a shopping list
- playing with symbol systems and technologies – for example, playing with letters and sounds, or making marks
- using the symbol systems and technologies for a purpose – for example, concepts of print and letter-sound relationships, or retelling poems
- critically questioning or transforming – for example, inventing oral, visual and written accounts, or questioning conventions (Ministry of Education, 2009b: p. 8; Ministry of Education, 2009c: pp. 5–6).

*Kei Tua o te Pae* places a strong emphasis on children establishing a sound oral foundation, arguing that this is essential to success in reading and writing (Ministry of Education, 2009b: p.2).

### Literacy as a socio-cultural practice

A socio-cultural approach embeds literacy learning in the meaningful activities children are involved in and acknowledges that children come to an early childhood service with knowledge about literacy learnt in the home and elsewhere.

One socio-cultural perspective promotes six elements of literacy:

1. Children learn about literacies and how to 'do' literacy through participating in a range of activities in their family and community.
2. Literacy practices are carried out in culturally specific ways and contribute to children's developing sense of identity.
3. Children have different understandings about what counts as literacy and how literacy is 'done'.
4. Literacy practices are carried out in specific ways for particular purposes.
5. The pattern of literacy learning differs between children, as they become relative experts in different literacy events.
6. Literacy practices are valued differently in different social and educational contexts (Barrat-Pugh, 2000).

Another socio-cultural perspective suggests that children encounter a variety of literacies and literacy practices from the different communities of which they are a part (Jones Diaz, 2007). This includes multi-literacies such as linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial forms.

A socio-cultural model of literacy acknowledges not only the context of the home and family, and the early childhood service, but also that of community and society. The curriculum, government policy and cultural expectations all influence literacy practices (Hamer & Adams, 2002; Hamer & Adams, 2003). Hamer & Adams, authors of *The New Zealand Early Childhood Literacy Handbook* (2003), place children and their literacy knowledge and experiences at the centre of literacy learning. This learning is influenced by:

- families
- the home literacy environment
- services and their early literacy knowledge and practices
- the transition to school and formal reading and writing
- other contexts such as libraries, the arts, social events, marae and church.

A socio-cultural approach to literacy sees literacy as including not only reading and writing, but also listening, talking, viewing, drawing and critiquing. The approach is also seen as a way in which people construct and communicate meaning by traditional means, through technology, critical thinking and popular culture (Jones Diaz, 2007).

*Te Whāriki*, promotes a socio-cultural and holistic view of literacy teaching and learning. It encourages educators to consider the place of literacy in the physical environment, routines and planning, the role of the educator capitalising on learning opportunities and the links between home, community and the early childhood service (Hamer & Adams, 2002).

### What literacy practices support strong learning foundations for children?

Children begin early childhood education with a wide range of literacy skills. Educators therefore need to be knowledgeable about socio-cultural processes involved in listening, reading, speaking, writing and viewing, as well as about the pathways children take in developing these literacy skills (Tayler, 2006).

New Zealand and Australian research evidence suggests that children's early phonological awareness and familiarity with books links to their later reading and writing skills (Hamer & Adams, 2003; Early Childhood Literacy Project, 1999; Nicholson, 1999). If these literacy and other practices are poorly developed or skills are missing prior to schooling, then this is an indicator of later reading difficulties (McLachlan, 2006; Tayler, 2006). ERO was therefore interested in the literacy practices that early childhood educators encouraged and promoted to support children's successful transition to primary school.

New Zealand and international research indicates that particular literacy practices may help children in early childhood services strengthen their literacy competency so they can make a successful transition to formal schooling. These practices can be found in the range of literacy activities children engage in throughout the day. Table 1 shows the literacy knowledge and abilities that are enhanced through appropriate and meaningful literacy teaching and learning.



Table 1: Literacy knowledge, abilities and activities

Literacy knowledge and abilities	Literacy activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alphabet knowledge</li> <li>• Letter-sound knowledge</li> <li>• Concepts about print</li> <li>• Concepts about books</li> <li>• Phonological awareness</li> <li>• Vocabulary knowledge               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unusual words</li> <li>– Narrative competence</li> <li>– Using decontextualised language</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discourse skills</li> <li>• Phonemic awareness</li> <li>• Emergent writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich oral language experiences such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Rhyming</li> <li>– Language play</li> <li>– Informal phonemic awareness activities</li> <li>– Storybook reading</li> <li>– Sings songs/waiata and nursery rhymes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Extended conversations including taking turns talking</li> <li>• Scribble making, letters, numbers, letter-like forms to represents things</li> </ul>

Sources: (Teale, 2003; Espinosa, 2008; McLachlan, 2007)

In particular, rich oral language experiences are important to early literacy development (Teale, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2009b: p.2). The quality of interaction between and among educators and children fosters language learning. Furthermore, encouraging children to express their views encourages independent thought and expression. (Mitchell et al, 2008: p.36).

Effective educators have a toolkit of knowledge and strategies that can help develop literacy skills in children. Research indicates that educators need strong and in-depth knowledge of children's literacy development (Hamer & Adams, 2003) and, in particular, an awareness of the importance of oral language as a pre-cursor to reading development. This requires them to know about language structures and how language learning develops (Cunningham, Zibulsky & Callahan, 2009). Educators also need to have a range of strategies for promoting literacy, and understand what this means for their practice. This knowledge helps educators to identify when children need help to gain the skills to learn and achieve in the formal environment of school.

## Methodology

### ERO'S FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

ERO analysed information gathered during services' regular education reviews in response to the following key questions:<sup>1</sup>

1. How does the service promote literacy teaching and learning?
2. How are educators prepared and supported to implement literacy programmes?
3. What opportunities are there for children to develop strong literacy learning foundations?
4. How do parents, whānau and community contribute to, and how are they involved in, literacy teaching and learning?
5. How does self review of literacy improve managers' and educators' practices?

### SAMPLE

ERO investigated literacy teaching and learning in 353 services that were reviewed in Term 4, 2009 and Term 1, 2010. Table 2 shows the types of services in the sample.

Table 2: Service types

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage <sup>2</sup>
Education and care	251	71	63
Kindergarten	71	20	16
Playcentre	28	8	12
Homebased Network	3	1	9
Total	353	100	100

Table 2 shows that the types of services in this sample are not representative of national figures. Education and care services are over-represented, and homebased networks are under-represented, compared to the national sample. These differences were statistically significant.<sup>3</sup>

1 See Appendix One "Self Review: Questions for your service" for the indicators of practice used by review officers.

2 The national percentage of each service type is based on the total population of services as at 1 May 2010. For this study, it includes education and care, kindergarten, playcentre, and homebased networks.

3 The differences between observed and expected values were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was  $p < 0.05$ .

## DATA COLLECTION

During each service's review, ERO collected information from a variety of sources including:

- discussions and interviews with the management and educators at the service
- informal discussions with parents
- observations of interaction between educators, children and their parents, and between children
- documentation related to the operation of the service and to the literacy learning and assessment of individuals and groups of children.

Review officers provided descriptive information for each key question.

Services were also asked to complete a Pre-review Questionnaire (PRQ). This self-reported information from the 297 completed PRQs is summarised in Appendix Two.

## Data analysis

The information provided by review officers was collated using qualitative data analysis computer software. A content analysis of this, and the information from the PRQs, was undertaken to identify emerging themes.



## Findings

The findings from ERO's review of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood education are presented in three sections:

- defining and valuing literacy teaching and learning
- practising literacy teaching and learning
- reviewing literacy practices and outcomes.

Examples of practice are in italics.

### DEFINING AND VALUING LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Children's learning and development is influenced by their interaction with adults and other children, the physical environment and the philosophy and resources in the service (Education Review Office, 2004: p.2). Specifically, the ways literacy teaching and learning occur in a service are influenced by these aspects and how educators are guided to teach literacy skills to children. *The New Zealand Early Childhood Literacy Handbook* (Hamer & Adams, 2003: pp.16–17) recommends that services have written guidelines or statements that clearly outline their understanding of literacy teaching and learning in relation to the children at the service for:

- providing an opportunity to discuss the core aspects of literacy
- encouraging the development of effective literacy practices
- providing a planned and coherent approach to literacy
- formalising existing literacy practices
- improving the quality of literacy decision-making.

### What ERO found

ERO considered the following key questions when investigating how services defined and valued literacy:<sup>4</sup>

- How does the service (through philosophy, strategic and annual planning, and shared understanding) promote literacy teaching and learning?
- How are educators prepared and supported to implement literacy programmes?

### Definition of literacy

ERO found that understanding and definitions of literacy were many and varied. Many services defined literacy as including oral, written and visual language, woven holistically throughout the curriculum in meaningful contexts with appropriate resources. However, this was not always evident in teaching and learning practices or in service documentation. The following example illustrates how the service's definition is reflected in documentation.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix One for the indicators of practice for each of these questions.



*The service's documentation and practice included:*

- *a literacy information folder for parents that defined literacy as languages and symbols for representing and communicating information, experiences and ideas*
- *texts of all kinds including oral, visual, written, imaginative, formal, informal, mathematical, scientific and technological language*
- *establishing a sound oral foundation through conversation and storytelling*
- *using aspects of the Te Whāriki communication, belonging, and exploration strands.*

The following example shows inconsistencies between intent and practice.

*The centre's website stated that teachers endeavour to create a sense of purpose in children's minds for literacy concepts through practical experience and activities. However, there was little or no mention of literacy in documents. Literacy was not referred to in meeting minutes or self review and did not usually feature in children's portfolio entries.*

### Philosophy and shared understanding

About half the services referred to literacy in their philosophy but, in some cases, this link was tenuous. Many services' philosophy statements mentioned the holistic development of competent and confident learners. Some statements also stated specifically how literacy would be developed as part of the programme.

*The centre philosophy had a focus on extending children's learning and interests through literacy opportunities that were connected to their interests, experiences and knowledge. Teachers were expected to observe children's personal strengths and interests, identify areas for learning and development, and implement individual plans to achieve these goals through a holistic approach to child development.*

In services where literacy teaching and learning was not overtly apparent in the philosophy, the statement often referred to helping children reach their potential, or transitioning to school in general terms. Conversely, some services where ERO saw a strong literacy focus in the programme had no mention of literacy in their philosophy statements.

Educators at most services had a shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning. This often resulted from ongoing professional development and included children's literacy learning occurring through play, social interactions and interactions with resources and materials in and beyond the service. Educators' knowledge and practices fed into the development of guidelines and policies, and informed planning and resourcing. However, in some services, literacy knowledge was not based on current theories and research.

In a small number of services, educators did not have a shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning, especially when there was a high staff turnover and educators were new to the service. The following exemplifies literacy teaching at one service without a common understanding.

*Senior management recognised that children need learning based on rich experiences where children learn about literacy in the context of play. However, educators, who had primary teaching backgrounds, were introducing activities commonly seen in new entrant programmes in schools that were not always meaningful for younger children.*

These findings highlight the need for services to consider including their values and beliefs about literacy in their philosophy statement, and promote appropriate practices.

### Guidelines, policies, planning and resourcing

Some services had documented guidelines or expectations for literacy practices, mentioned literacy in strategic or annual planning or had literacy policies or procedures. Most services budgeted for resources to support literacy teaching and learning. When literacy was included in strategic or annual planning, it often related to resourcing.

Where services had guidelines for literacy teaching they highlighted the importance of integrating literacy into children's developing learning. Sometimes guidelines outlined specific literacy aspects such as oral communication and first languages, involving parents and whānau in learning about home literacy practices, and making literacy learning more visible in assessment. In some cases, primary schools' expectations influenced services' guidelines.

Services' literacy policies or teaching and learning statements often referred to the:

- holistic nature of literacy
- context of play and learning in literacy development
- transition to school and the literacy skills children need for success
- formal literacy activities to be provided
- language development pathways
- questioning needed to help children engage more deeply in literacy
- assessment strategies or processes used to monitor and share a child's literacy development.

*Managers expected that literacy would be a natural part of all learning, and planned daily in different ways for individual children. Expectations for children's learning were individual depending on the developmental stage, previous knowledge, and experiences of the child and the expectations of their family. The services wanted literacy learning to be meaningful for the child and to relate to their family and culture.*

*Literacy was valued and celebrated in the service's community – children, teachers, parents, and whānau. The environment was literacy rich. Experiences for children and adults were authentic and involved active participation. Bicultural and multicultural literacy were integrated into the curriculum. Literacy learning aligned to current research and responded to the strengths and interests of the children in the service.*

Where services had literacy policies or statements these were often out of date and in need of review. As a result, managers often had no current process for evaluating how well their literacy practices were promoting positive outcomes for children.

Most services budgeted for literacy-related resources. However, in many of these services budgets were not linked in any way to strategic planning, expectations or other guiding documents that identified literacy practices or the resources to support them. Instead, there was evidence of ad hoc purchases of books, art and writing materials, and computer software with no specific learning purpose in mind.

Where services had no reference to literacy in any documentation – philosophy, guidelines, expectations, or strategic or annual planning, this lack of reference contributed to inconsistent teaching practice across the service.

### **Educators' preparation and support**

In many services, leaders provided good support for educators to include a focus on literacy in their teaching. Leaders modelled good literacy practice, placed an importance on literacy through expectations and resourcing, and promoted professional discussions among educators. Educators in these services tended to discuss literacy strategies, reflect on the programme and the learning occurring, and explore ways to be more deliberate in their teaching. These included:

- capitalising on incidental learning opportunities (for example: following interests through books and information communication and technologies (ICT))
- setting up the physical environment to encourage reading and writing
- extending conversations to develop thinking and vocabulary
- using literacy activities to revisit prior learning experiences (for example: photos, posters and children's portfolios)
- developing literacy skills through gross motor play and music
- providing a meaningful print environment.

In services where managers provided little or no literacy leadership support, educators were not encouraged to increase their knowledge of current theories and research about literacy in early childhood education, or to apply their learning. In some services, educators did not understand how to support literacy learning for specific groups of children (for example, infants, toddlers or young children), and were unable to recognise and respond to learning opportunities. The following example shows the impact of this on teaching practice.

*Educators lacked an awareness of the importance of literacy in their interactions with children and the need to maintain conversations with children to support their developing understanding of language. They did not articulate any theoretical understanding of literacy based on knowledge of current research. Little consideration was given to the developmental stages and appropriateness of their practice of formally teaching phonics to toddlers. There was no reflection or evaluation of their literacy programme.*

One of the main ways educators were supported in teaching literacy was through PLD. ERO found that educators in many services had undertaken PLD with a literacy focus. However, in some of these services, there was no planned approach to PLD, or only one or two educators attended. The main focus of the PLD undertaken included:

- general literacy workshops usually provided by umbrella organisations, for example: kindergarten, playcentre, or a private provider
- training to become a qualified teacher
- *Kei Tua o te Pae* (some literacy focus)
- teaching phonics courses
- ICT
- oral literacy
- motor coordination programmes
- storytelling
- transition to school
- te reo Māori
- action research about literacy practices
- multi-literacies such as ICT and visual arts
- baby sign language
- literacy for boys
- participation in local clusters with primary schools.



Participation in PLD increased awareness among educators of literacy opportunities in planning and linking with strands of *Te Whāriki*. In particular, ICT courses helped educators to become experts in, and promote the use of, multi-literacies.

In the remaining services, ERO found that little or no literacy-related PLD had been undertaken. The following example illustrates the lack of appropriate support for educators in improving their literacy teaching knowledge.

*Educators had some support in literacy and numeracy from a local primary teacher. One educator identified literacy as an area for further professional development as part of the staff appraisal process. However, she and the manager had trouble locating appropriate professional development courses. As a result, educators often felt pressured by schools and families to provide more formal programmes in literacy and numeracy. They had had some PLD in phonics but were not sure of the appropriateness of using phonics in early childhood education.*

When services placed importance on literacy and encouraged educators to develop their understanding, literacy teaching and learning was incorporated into the daily programme holistically and in meaningful contexts.

*Literacy was an integral part of the centre's programme in natural and meaningful ways. Educators had an appraisal goal related to the implementation of literacy programmes. Appropriate PLD supported educators to meet this goal. Management provided a separate budget for literacy. Educators participated in reflective meetings and discussed individual children's needs and how they could support their literacy development.*

### HOW IS LITERACY PRACTISED?

As a socio-cultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki* is not prescriptive about literacy teaching and learning. However, current theories and research about early literacy highlight aspects of socio-cultural practice that can guide educators.

Recent research on early literacy emphasises the importance of a print-rich and resource-rich environment, and meaningful and socially-constructed play and conversations in literacy learning and development (Morrow, 2008; Hamer & Adams, 2002). Play, games, make-believe storytelling and songs are important to literacy learning, enabling children to make choices about their learning (Tennant et al 1998 as cited in Education Review Office, 2004: p. 33). The educators' role is to provide the play area, introduce events and extend play (Hall & Robinson, 2000). Children are likely to develop better oral literacy when learning conversations are varied and used in a variety of contexts (Ashworth & Wakefield, 1994 as cited in Education Review Office, 2004: p. 35).

*Te Whāriki* promotes a broad and holistic approach where literacy teaching and learning is woven across a service (including all children) and throughout its planning. Programmes should be inclusive and cater for the diversity of abilities, ethnicities and gender. A socio-cultural approach to literacy includes multi-literacies such as linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial forms. An awareness of this helps educators to recognise that teaching and learning is happening in various literal modes (Hills, 2007; Martello, 2007).

A socio-cultural approach to early childhood education recognises that children encounter multiple literacy practices and activities in different places and with different people. These opportunities help children develop their ideas and values about literacy. It is important for educators to be aware of and incorporate literacy practices and activities that are not only meaningful and practical, but also reflect the child's family and community. The contribution and involvement of parents, whānau and community helps children experience varied, meaningful opportunities and interactions (Hamer & Adams, 2003; Lenhart & Roskos, 2003; Mitchell et al, 2009).

### What ERO found

ERO considered the following key questions when investigating literacy teaching and learning in services:<sup>5</sup>

- What opportunities are there for children to develop strong literacy learning foundations?
- How do literacy practices include alphabet and letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness, concepts about print, oral language development and writing for a variety of purposes?
- How does the service promote literacy for different groups of children?
- How are parents, whānau and community contributing to, and involved in, literacy experiences?

### Oral, written, visual literacies

#### *Promotion of literacy learning*

Programmes at most services promoted literacy learning in a variety of planned and spontaneous opportunities that encompassed oral, written and visual literacy. Routines and planned activities encouraged literacy learning. Children's literacy development was encouraged by having resources such as clipboards and marker pens in carpentry and block play areas; writing materials and keyboards in the family area; and photos and text of food and cooking equipment at the dough table. Educators also revisited past learning experiences with children using portfolios, profile books and recent events at home or the service to enhance learning.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix One for the indicators of practice for each of these questions.

*A variety of play experiences that allowed for imagination and creativity were provided by the 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.*

In a few services, literacy was not well promoted. Educators were too quick to intervene or too directive, and they missed opportunities to enhance children's literacy learning. Activities were often not based on children's interests and did not extend their learning and thinking. Books were not displayed in ways that promoted exploration or browsing, and there were few opportunities for writing except in scheduled sessions.

#### ***Service environment***

Most services had a print-rich environment with children's artwork and writing, photos, posters, books in different languages and labels displayed for children to view and read. Children had easy access to writing and drawing materials inside and outdoors. Fiction and non-fiction books were attractively displayed and these, as well as portfolios/profile books, were accessible to children. Children were able to use many creative and dramatic resources. In some services, children could also use visual and audio equipment, computers and software either independently or with an educator's support. However, in others, print was only displayed at adult height and was not accessible to children, and literacy resources were not displayed in ways that encouraged children to use them.

#### ***Interactions***

In many services, educators promoted age appropriate language learning and listening skills by modelling oral language patterns and developing children's vocabulary. Educators also modelled and guided children's conversations. Children's questioning and critical thinking skills were extended through conversations and open-ended questioning. Educators encouraged communication and took opportunities to develop children's oral language.

*Interactions between teachers and children constantly encouraged and empowered children in the use of oral language and thinking skills. Teachers displayed skill in critical questioning and reflecting on their role in encouraging children's use of vocabulary, phrase structuring and thinking about language.*

ERO found that in some services, educators were not aware of the importance of sustained conversations with children to support their developing understanding of language.



*Meaningful contexts*

In many services, children explored literacy in meaningful ways, often initiated by the children themselves. These included:

- using books for research interests
- writing invitations, letters, lists, cards
- writing and dictating stories
- using name badges for dramatic play
- sign writing and creating advertisements
- signing into the service
- using recipes
- writing and reading emails.

Some educators shared books and used skilful questioning to develop children's comprehension and prediction skills. Educators engaged children in learning conversations, responding to their interests or incorporating oral literacy into trips and events, either while on the trip or when revisiting it as a prior experience. Impromptu storytelling based on children's ideas and suggestions was also used to develop oral literacy.

At times, however, ERO observed children completing worksheets that had little meaning or interest to them. Such activities do not align with the principles of *Te Whāriki* or promote literacy learning in meaningful contexts.

*Noticing, recognising and responding*

In many services, educators recognised when literacy learning was occurring and took opportunities to extend a child's learning during play. Responses included: open-ended questioning, revisiting prior experiences during reading and dramatic play, extending oral language and integrating writing into play. In some services, educators recognised children's interests that had a literacy focus and responded to these in their planning and by showing the learning and next steps in assessment comments.

Some educators were rarely or not able to notice, recognise or make good use of opportunities for literacy teaching and learning, particularly in written and visual aspects of literacy.

Making literacy learning visible in assessment and including next steps for learning was variable or poor in some services. Educators were good at noticing significant learning, but seldom included aspects to support further learning, particularly for written and visual literacies. Few used assessment information to plan for individual children's needs in transition to school programmes.



*Educators were still developing their knowledge of assessment for learning. Aspects of literacy learning were evident in some children's profile books where educators recorded children's dialogue as it related to the photograph or artwork alongside it. However, this good practice was not evident for all children. While educators noticed and recognised the learning, the challenge remained as to how they responded as a team.*

### ***Transition-to-school programmes***

Many services, especially kindergartens, had transition-to-school programmes for older four-year-olds. Most often the children took part in a formal group with literacy-based activities. In some services, children's participation was voluntary, in others, it was not. Usually the boys did not join in. In some services, children's interests or developmental needs were not catered for. In others, activities from one day to the next were seldom linked and were educator-directed. Often participation in these transition groups was limited to certain children at any one time, resulting in inequitable access for some children who met the age criteria.

The focus of literacy activities in these programmes included:

- increasing alphabet knowledge
- developing letter formation
- writing their names
- drawing
- developing print concepts
- teaching phonics.

In a few services educators showed a lack of understanding of the pathways children took in developing literacy knowledge and skills, and made extensive use of worksheets. Mostly this was limited to writing worksheets during a formal transition-to-school group, but some services also used homework sheets. The use of worksheets was often teamed with little independent access to writing materials, and limited any literacy opportunities occurring in play. There was little incidental development of understanding the purpose of print, and activities were educator-directed with little independent literacy learning initiated by children.

### **Specific literacy skills**

ERO investigated how specific literacy skills were promoted in services' programmes. The acquisition of these skills has been shown to help children in their transition to formal schooling.

*Alphabet and letter-sound knowledge/phonological awareness*

ERO found that services used many ways to promote phonological awareness and alphabet and letter-sound knowledge in formal contexts and in play. These included:

- through stories, rhymes and songs, both formally and informally
- using worksheets and flashcards
- in conversations
- in the context of play, for example: puzzles, rhymes, magnetic letters, “I spy” with sounds and letters
- word play such as alliteration, descriptive language and onomatopoeia
- computer programmes
- displaying posters, books and friezes about the alphabet at child level
- providing board games, alphabet blocks and letter/object cards
- sounding out letters when writing names, and when labelling objects and artwork
- questioning children about letters and sounds as opportunities arise
- having special letter days
- providing formal phonics programmes.

In some services, educators were conscious of the need to link children’s knowledge of names of letters with sounds of individual or combinations of letters. A small number of services did not promote letter-sound knowledge or did not do this well for certain groups of children. For example, over-threes participated in a formal phonics programme, but phonological awareness for younger children was not promoted through informal activities.

About a fifth of services used a commercial phonics programme as part of their literacy teaching and learning mostly, but not always, for older children. Some services had integrated phonics into children’s play or included a focus on phonics during formal group times. However, in a few services, the use of phonics, including teaching phonics to under-twos, and basing the whole literacy programme on a commercial phonics package, was not appropriate. Large formal group mat times with a one-size-fits-all approach to literacy teaching did not cater for children with more advanced abilities, or those not ready to learn what was being taught. These practices have little alignment with the socio-cultural approach of *Te Whāriki*.

*Concepts about print*

The most common way services promoted concepts about print was during shared reading time. Educators and children discussed pictures and followed storylines through the pictures, learning about starting points, left to right sweep and parts of books, such as the title, author and illustrator.

Concepts about print were promoted in the context of children's self-directed play and with educators' support during child-initiated play and experimentation. Children also learnt by observing others reading and talking about parts of a book, and by observing educators recording dictated stories, emails, explanations and captions.

*Educators were skilled at using the teachable moment to capitalise on concepts as they talked with and worked alongside children. This ensured the learning was in context. Mat time also included opportunities to learn about protocols of reading and books such as reading from left to right and using the illustrations to assist with making sense of the story.*

### **Oral language**

Services promoted the development of children's oral language in many ways, both formally and during play times. Educators had conversations with children in the context of play and extended children's thinking through open-ended questions and prompting answers. These ongoing conversations and interactions with children were more effective when educators knew the children and their families well. Other ways oral language was promoted included:

- singing, poetry and rhymes
- role-playing and drama
- sharing news from home and encouraging questioning
- retelling stories
- formal and informal vocabulary development – words that match objects, emotions and experiences
- using te reo in daily conversation
- going on excursions to develop vocabulary relating to events and places
- listening post for audio books and sound games.

The following example highlights ways educators promoted oral language.

*When educators planned a group focus, they brainstormed what language they wanted to introduce as part of the topic. Educators worked alongside children and used rich oral language as part of a sustained learning interaction. For example, one educator worked with four children on mathematical concepts of sorting and grouping according to attributes. She explicitly used words such as different or similar, and comparatives such as big, bigger and biggest.*

In some services, however, ERO found a low level of conversation and extensive use of closed questions with children. In these services, interaction between adults and children lacked rich vocabulary, and children rarely initiated discussions or contributed their own ideas.

### Writing

Writing in almost all services was promoted either formally or in the context of play. Educators often modelled writing for a purpose. However, while children were encouraged to write, in some services their writing lacked a purpose. The focus was often solely on letter formation, with no purpose or relevance for children.

*A focused literacy programme was almost exclusively for children over 4½ years. Dedicated time for literacy was made one morning a week when children practised letter formation, drew a picture, and dictated a short narrative that they then copied several times. Almost all the children struggled with the writing activities. None was observed writing for their own purposes. No resources such as clipboards or notepads were located throughout the centre to foster writing anywhere other than within the room for those particular children.*

In other services however, children initiated the use of print independently in play: writing and posting letters, using train or bus tickets, writing invitations, making passports, making cards, writing signs and advertisements, drawing kōwhaiwhai patterns and making books. All children had opportunities to draw, paint, write and make marks. The following example shows the variety of meaningful writing experiences at one service.

*Purposeful writing opportunities were frequent. Children took turns to write minutes for their meeting times. Children drew plans and listed steps in their project developments, and used mind-maps to check their progress. A separate writing table had appropriate equipment and resources. As children entered drawings into their “About Me” booklets an educator annotated the child’s dictated text, or the child was supported to write their own annotation.*

### Groups of children

ERO evaluated how well literacy was promoted to four categories of children: by age, ability, gender and ethnicity. Research shows a disparity in achievement later in life between certain groups.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, many services indicated that they did not differentiate their programme in any way. While these services said they catered for children as individuals and provided equitable access for all, many did not plan for specific needs, or recognise that some activities did not appeal to particular children or groups of children, or were not appropriate for them.

6 The Ministry of Education’s summary of the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) 2005/06 showed that the average score for Māori and Pacific students was significantly lower than the international mean, while for NZ European and Asian students it was higher. In addition, the difference between New Zealand girls’ and boys’ average scores was one of the largest in the study, with girls achieving significantly higher scores than boys. ([http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2539/pirls\\_0506/34898/34900](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2539/pirls_0506/34898/34900) accessed August 2010.)



### *Age*

Most services promoted literacy appropriately and in different ways to different age groups such as infants, toddlers and young children. ERO did have concerns about appropriateness of programmes in some of these services. These included activities that needed too much help from the educator to complete, or meant that children could not experience their own success.

Services promoted literacy for infants (birth to 18 months) by:

- having books that were tactile, accessible and that infants could hold themselves
- reading books and storytelling
- singing rhymes and songs
- repeating words and phrases
- responding to verbalisation and non-verbal cues
- displaying resources at child-height and giving access to photos and portfolios
- creating opportunities for mark-making, messy play and playdough.

In addition to these, services promoted literacy for toddlers (1–3 years) by:

- supporting and extending emerging language
- matching words to actions and experiences
- encouraging gross and fine motor skills
- providing books to meet interests and developing needs
- making writing materials available
- providing practical activities such as baking, excursions and gardening to develop new vocabulary
- displaying photos with names and labels.

In addition to the activities mentioned above, literacy for young children (2½ years to school entry) was promoted through more formal literacy teaching and learning. These programmes focused on preparing for school, with many services having transition-to-school groups. Older children in some services were encouraged to lead group times, which helped them develop their oral literacy. Other literacy activities or encouragement included:

- access to writing and drawing resources
- use of a listening post for audio stories
- expressive and creative storytelling
- open-ended questioning by educators to encourage thinking and expression of ideas
- dramatic play
- encouraging reading and writing for real purposes.

*Catering for different needs and ability*

ERO investigated how services promoted literacy for children with special educational needs or abilities. Just over a third of services did not differentiate their programmes in any way or have a policy regarding these children if they were to enrol at the service. The remaining services promoted literacy for these children in a variety of ways. Generally, most services sought specialist support and parent involvement as needed, and had a range of resources either to support the children or extend them.

Where services had children with special needs, they sought specialist help such as speech language therapists and early intervention teachers from a specialist early intervention provider such as the Ministry of Education's Group Special Education (GSE).<sup>7</sup> Educators provided lots of one-to-one support and adapted the programme to make it appropriate. Sometimes children's transition to another part of the service was delayed. However, where children demonstrated delayed literacy understandings and did not have a disability recognised by GSE, educator support or programme differentiation was less obvious.

Educators in services that supported children with identified special abilities in literacy extended their interest by providing appropriate books, encouraged research on the internet and extended their questioning and conversations. Some provided more challenging resources to promote higher order thinking and problem solving, or extended children's imaginary play. Appropriate computer software challenged children and extended their reading and writing. However, some services did not extend children with special abilities in literacy through any educator interaction.

*Gender*

From an early age, boys and girls use different literacy practices (Alloway, 2007). ERO investigated how services promoted literacy learning for boys and girls. Almost half did not differentiate their provision in any way. In many of these services, boys in particular were not well catered for and were often bored with the literacy activities provided. Formal programmes were often of no interest to them. Most services with some differentiation provided books and resources, or planned different activities and environments, so both boys and girls had access to literacy learning that would engage them.

Educators at many of these services were aware that girls tended to be more engaged at mat times when literacy was specifically promoted and often persisted at writing or worksheets for longer than boys. Literacy learning was also more apparent during girls' role-playing and dramatic play.

7 The Ministry of Education's Special Education group is responsible for providing specialist education services, operational policy, enhancing professional practice, undertaking research, and developing the special education workforce.

High quality literacy provision for boys was often in the context of play and centred on topics of interest to them. Ways this happened included:

- providing writing materials such as chalk, paint and clipboards in all learning/play areas
- providing access to ICT to research subjects of interest
- telling or retelling stories that interested boys, including both fiction and non-fiction
- encouraging dramatic play and inventing stories based on popular culture characters
- developing fine motor skills in play
- encouraging oral language through questioning during water/sand play, blocks, carpentry and imaginary play.

The following examples highlight literacy provision for boys in two services.

*A spontaneous review at the service identified that boys were not involved with literacy materials. Opportunities subsequently provided included “construction pictures in the sandpit, art mediums near the sandpit” and books outside.*

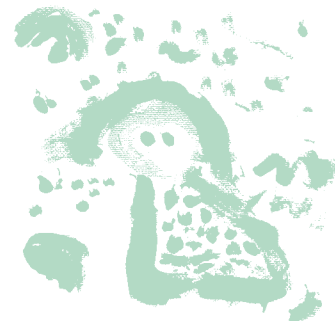
*Boys were encouraged in their interests and helped to extend these through the use of reference materials from the centre, the internet and local library. These activities were usually accompanied by hands-on activities, for example, drawing and writing the information they gained so they could share this with others. One recent interest was in sea animals (whales, sharks, and dolphins). Plastic replicas were purchased so the children could immerse them in the water trough and act out different situations.*

### ***Ethnicity***

While most services promoted literacy for children from different ethnicities, the quality of this was variable. Some services had a high percentage of Māori children but did not reflect this in the programme.

ERO has previously found that over half the services were not implementing practices that supported Māori children as learners (Education Review Office, 2010). Many services incorporated basic greetings and instructions in te reo Māori into daily routines, but did not extend further. Services that sought to promote literacy for Māori in more meaningful contexts and based on children’s interests did so through:

- waiata, karakia, mihi/pēpeha, whakapapa, pōwhiri, haka, poi, rākau
- designing pounamu, moko, kōwhaiwhai
- making piupiu
- celebrating Matariki
- noho marae
- learning about local history, legends and spiritual contexts.



Services with high numbers of Pacific children, such as Pacific language nests, had a strong focus on promoting oral language traditions through modelling by educators and other adults. Resources and activities such as books, songs, dances and storytelling in home languages promoted literacy for Pacific children. However, this type of promotion was rarely seen in services that did not have a high percentage of Pacific children.

For children whose first language was not English, services provided books, songs and storytelling in first languages where possible. Educators who spoke languages other than English included these in the programme and in conversations. This was particularly so in playcentres. Many services celebrated cultural festivals like Diwali, Chinese New Year, Rakhi and Moon Cake Day, promoted the sharing of food from children's cultures and used written and oral greetings from their first languages. Research shows that children who are fluent in their first language are more likely to be fluent in English (May, 2005). However, in some services, educators believed that because parents wanted their children to learn English, they should provide little opportunity for children to speak their first language.

#### Parents, whānau and community

ERO investigated how parents, whānau and the community contributed to literacy at services, and how services involved them.

#### *Parents' aspirations and home literacy practices*

Encouraging parents to share information about home literacy practices helps educators by affirming or refocusing literacy practices at the service. In services where this was poorly done, or not at all, parents' aspirations and home literacy practices played no part in the teaching or learning.

In many services, parents' aspirations for their children and home literacy practices were taken into account in literacy teaching and learning. Educators found out about parents' aspirations through parent-teacher interviews, informal conversations and parents' comments in portfolios/profile books or narratives about home experiences.





Educators responded to their aspirations by:

- linking learning stories to what parents had told them about children's interests
- encouraging children to bring books from home
- encouraging parents to share home literacy practices with the children at the service.

### *Informing parents about literacy*

Educators at many services took opportunities to inform parents about literacy in early childhood. Some of these were less formal such as conversations about their child's development, including next learning steps and goals in portfolios or profile books, giving information on noticeboards and in newsletters, displays, and celebrations of children's learning, homework and involving parents in trips and activities where educators could model best practice. Some services encouraged parents to stay and work with their child, if possible, and playcentres encouraged parents to undertake the association's education programme. More formalised ways to tell parents about appropriate literacy practices included providing information on enrolment, at parent-teacher interviews and running parent workshops about literacy. The following examples show some of the ways services sought to inform parents of the services' literacy practices.

*Educators made an attractive and informative display board for parents that outlined the centre's philosophy of learning. It gave clear information about approaches for developing children's early literacy skills and knowledge. It provided parents with useful information about how they could foster this learning at home.*

*A workshop was held for all parents and educators. It focused on ways literacy learning can be supported at the centre and at home. By sharing learning stories parents were informed of their child's interests (for example: playdough, peek-a-boo, sandpit, books, music, puzzles) and how these supported literacy development.*

ERO found that educators in some services could do more to work with parents to increase understanding of best early literacy practice. In some services, parents explicitly asked educators to provide formal literacy programmes not aligned with good teaching practice. Problems may arise when educators themselves are not knowledgeable about early literacy and are not able to justify their literacy practices to parents. The following example highlights the need to give parents information about literacy teaching and learning in early childhood.

*Recently, the four-year-old programme that focused on worksheets and colouring-in sheets was discontinued. Educators and the director fielded calls from parents who were not happy about this change. Educators were subsequently investigating ways to effectively communicate their ideas about appropriate early childhood-based literacy programmes and how they could share this knowledge with parents so the programme could be relevant and engaging for children.*

Overall, ERO found an imbalance between educators informing parents about best practice in early childhood literacy and drawing on parents' knowledge of their child's home literacy practices. Finding out about home literacy practices was less evident in many centres.

#### *Engaging parents and using their expertise*

In some services, parents were engaged in literacy learning at the service, and contributed their expertise. They contributed to portfolios and profile books modelled literacy activities such as reading, encouraged literacy learning in play and supported the use of first languages at home. In many services, educators had to find different ways to encourage parents to engage in their child's literacy learning, as parents' own literacy experiences were many and varied.

In some services, parents' expertise was used to help all children's literacy learning. Parents and whānau contributed their skills in poster making, photography, creating blogs and websites, and music, and their knowledge of different cultures and languages. The following example shows how involving whānau can develop links between the service and home, and strengthen literacy practices in both settings.

*Strong links between the service and homes were developed through the service's focus on gardening. Grandparents were involved in centre gardening and replicating gardens at home. Lots of rich language development and learning was reinforced between home and the centre. This has supported the centre's primary focus on developing and supporting the Tongan language and culture.*

#### *Networking with schools*

Many services had developed networks with local schools. For some services the large number of different schools children were to attend made this more difficult. In a few services, younger primary students visited the service and read to the children, or new entrant teachers or principals visited services to talk with the children about what to expect at school. At some services, parents were encouraged to show their child's portfolio or profile book to the new entrant teacher. Increasingly, services were participating in PLD with schools as part of a cluster, as shown in this example.

*The head teacher participated in a local professional learning community that brought new entrant and kindergarten teachers together to support children's transition to school and included a focus on literacy. This project improved kindergarten teachers' understanding and knowledge of the key competencies, The Literacy Learning Progressions (Ministry of Education, 2010), and expectations of the primary schools and their practice in terms of children's literacy.*

However, some schools and services had developed literacy learning expectations that were inappropriate in an early childhood setting. These expectations promoted the acquisition of skills in ways and contexts that were not meaningful for children in early childhood.<sup>8</sup> The following example highlights the negative outcome from services and schools setting and sharing inappropriate achievement expectations.

*Networking with the local primary schools and an over-emphasis on literacy expectations for students after one year at school has prompted the manager to move away from Te Whāriki and a socio-cultural perspective to a more formal and instruction focused literacy programme.*

Services and schools need greater opportunities to explore *The Literacy Learning Progressions* to discuss how educators in services and schools can use both *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) to cater for each individual child's needs and abilities.

#### **Using community resources**

Services that used local community resources to promote literacy did so through:

- visiting the library or receiving visits from the mobile library
- going to see puppeteers, musicians, storytellers, cultural performers, or inviting them along
- going on walks and excursions – reading maps, road signs and symbols, developing oral vocabulary, dictating/writing text for photos
- participating in community networks for non-English speakers
- consulting the local Māori community, marae visits, kaumatua visits.

#### **HOW DO SERVICES KNOW LITERACY PRACTICES AND OUTCOMES HAVE IMPROVED?**

In 2006, the Ministry of Education published *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-Review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2006). These guidelines outline the process of preparing, gathering and making sense of information, and of deciding to bring about improvements in learning and teaching practice through: the ability to notice, recognise and respond; curriculum planning and evaluation; and responsive and reciprocal relationships.

*Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua* guides educators to ask how well they foster children's learning, to explore what they do, what they believe, what they know and what the result is for children at their service. The guidelines provide advice on the review process and the elements of effective self review.



8 The Ministry of Education states that the development of National Standards in schooling has not changed *Te Whāriki*. Please see <http://www.educate.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/NationalStandardsandECE.aspx>

ERO has previously identified factors common to early childhood services where self review was well understood and implemented (Education Review Office, 2009). These included strong leadership for self review, relevant professional development, stable staffing and collaborative teamwork, sound systems for review and the use of relevant resources.

### What ERO found

ERO considered the following key question when investigating literacy teaching and learning in services:<sup>9</sup>

- How does self review of literacy improve managers' and educators' practices?

ERO found that 40 percent of services had some self-review focus on outcomes for children regarding literacy teaching and learning. In these services, the quality of self review was variable. Generally, literacy review was not well embedded in services' practice. It was mostly informal, lacked timeframes and did not focus on how services knew literacy teaching and learning had improved.

Where self review was undertaken, it focused mostly on reviews of amounts and quality of resources such as books, puzzles, art materials and sometimes ICT. Occasionally, educators' use of these resources was reviewed.

When self review was limited, the results often focused on the positioning of resources in the environment. Educators lacked depth and understanding of the intent of self review to improve literacy teaching and learning.

More specific aspects of self review of literacy identified across services included:

- reviewing literacy strategies – play versus formal programmes
- how educators assessed children's progress
- how well educators sustained children's interest
- the extent to which educators' noticed, recognised and responded to children's learning
- identifying parents' expectations and aspirations

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix One for the indicators of practice for this question.



- identifying opportunities for particular aspects of literacy, for example: oral storytelling, ICT
- integrating and strengthening te reo Māori
- ensuring literacy programmes prepared children for school.

Two examples of self review in services are described below.

*A review of literacy was initiated from a finding that many parents did not recognise what was good literacy teaching and learning in early childhood education and some parents had unreasonable expectations. Educators developed a large wall display with examples of children's work in literacy to show parents. They also changed the first three pages of children's profiles linking the early childhood education curriculum to the school curriculum and set up a literacy table. The educators now take the time to explain to parents about the literacy development of their child. At the time of ERO's visit, the service was at the stage where another parent survey was to take place to find out how effective this focus had been.*

*Through self review, educators had investigated the impact of their teaching and planning on outcomes for children. They reviewed how well the resources and displays supported children's interest in, and awareness of, literacy. They were now giving greater consideration to how their practice and programme were more closely aligned to outcomes for children. The self-review process shifted educators' reflective practice to a deeper level of thinking.*

ERO found that in services with some self review of literacy, this mainly reflected the perspectives of educators: through formal and informal assessment of children, performance appraisal, as part of in-service training or PLD, or practice. Very few services took into account the perspectives of parents, whānau and children.

Services varied in the ways they gathered information for self review to help them make judgments. Some approaches were limited to descriptive reviews of what literacy practices had taken place in the week and how the children had responded. Others gathered a range of data from parents, observations, professional knowledge, shared PLD, assessment information and reflections on effective strategies. This information was then used to answer evaluative questions and reach judgments about improvements in teaching and learning, and budgeting for resources.

*Management and educators initiated spontaneous and planned reviews of the programme. They documented children's interests, dispositions, and participation. During regular meetings and their non-contact time, educators reflected on the effectiveness of the curriculum and the environment to provide successful learning opportunities for children. Improvement-focused review developed teaching and promoted positive outcomes for children.*

In many services, the findings from self review were not well documented and often did not focus on outcomes for children. At times, self review undertaken by one or two people in the service resulted in little shared understanding of how literacy teaching and learning could be improved.

Where ERO found evidence of self review to improve literacy outcomes for children, outcomes resulted in:

- ongoing improvement and modification of practice, programmes, interactions and assessment
- modifying planning to meet children's changing interests and build on their strengths
- increasing parents' understanding of literacy in early childhood education
- developing a shared understanding of literacy amongst educators.

The following example shows how one service used self review to identify the need to improve practice.

*Self review of literacy provision in a parent-led service helped educators develop an understanding of appropriate ways to promote children's literacy learning. The trigger for the review was the risk of losing four-year-olds to different service types, the desire for children to be well prepared for school, and the knowledge that the literacy area could improve. The resulting action plan for implementing and sustaining improvements focused on an extensive range of teaching strategies to incorporate literacy in meaningful and holistic ways.*



## Conclusions

ERO's review of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood services highlights the wide variety of understanding of early literacy and accompanying practice across the early childhood sector. In services where educators had strong and in-depth knowledge of how children's literacy learning develops, high quality literacy practices were evident. However, in services where ERO observed few or poor quality literacy practices, children were not well engaged with literacy learning.

The variability in quality may stem from a lack of additional guidance about implementing practices that align with the principles and the communication strand of *Te Whāriki*. Current theories and research about literacy in early childhood are not gathered into an easily interpreted framework that can be readily accessed in each service. This lack of specific literacy guidelines has led to variable advice and support for educators from leaders in services.

Good leadership was crucial to educators developing a shared understanding of early literacy, and to implementing best practice consistently across the service. Effective leaders had a professional approach to reflecting on and drawing on current research about curriculum and assessment as part of the service's self review and development. Shared understanding in the service was developed through PLD, and resulted in an expectation of including literacy throughout the curriculum on a daily basis, and the encouragement of ongoing reflective practice.

While services reported that they placed a high value on literacy teaching and learning, literacy was often not mentioned in philosophies, policies, or other written documents or expectations, despite educators' beliefs that this should be promoted as part of a holistic learning framework. This resulted in a lack of appropriate understanding about literacy in some services.

In most services, literacy teaching and learning was child-initiated through play, with children using resources in meaningful ways. However, the literacy teaching and learning in some services was inappropriate and did not reflect the socio-cultural framework provided by *Te Whāriki*, or did not align with what is known about good teaching and learning in early childhood education. In particular, practices in formal transition-to-school groups were variable, with some activities so un motivating and inappropriate that they had the potential to create negative attitudes to literacy learning.

# CONCLUSIONS



Most services attempted to engage parents and whānau in literacy activities. Many told parents about literacy in early childhood, and some sought information about home literacy practices from them. In some services, pressure from parents to introduce 'readiness for school' literacy programmes, or inappropriate literacy expectations developed through networking with schools, had created tensions about literacy activities. In a few services, this tension led to some groups of children becoming disengaged from literacy. Educators from both services and schools need to work together using both *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* to provide suitable early literacy programmes for children.

Some services actively planned to differentiate their literacy programmes for different groups of children. Services were most likely to differentiate for age and ability, rather than by gender and ethnicity.

In some services, the potential for improving literacy outcomes for children through self review was understood. However, where review of literacy teaching learning was undertaken it was often limited to resourcing and setting-up of the environment for literacy learning. Only some services had extended their literacy self review to focus on outcomes for children, reflect on teaching practices, incorporate children's and parents' perspectives, and create a shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning with the service and its community. With this knowledge of outcomes for children, these services were able to see the need to change their teaching practice.

The wide range of quality and practice found in this evaluation highlights a need for deeper consideration of the theory, philosophy and practice of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Current guidance and expectations are not well articulated. Despite evidence that good quality literacy teaching practices in early childhood can contribute to later literacy success, ERO found that early childhood pedagogy is often based on common practice rather than a deeper understanding of children's learning progressions in literacy.



## Recommendations

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- review the information and expectations for literacy teaching and learning available to the early childhood sector
- provide services and schools with guidance on what constitutes high quality literacy teaching and learning in the early years (ages 0–5), and the factors that determine successful transitions
- resource targeted professional learning and development to improve early literacy teaching and learning.

ERO recommends that services:

- review their shared understanding of literacy teaching and learning
- undertake meaningful self review of literacy teaching and learning to evaluate outcomes for children resulting from their practices and to promote ongoing improvements in their programme.

TO  
GRANNY  
LOVE  
FROM  
MAGGIE  
TOT

Handwritten text in green ink on a white background. The text is arranged in several lines: 'TO', 'GRANNY', 'LOVE', 'FROM', 'MAGGIE', and 'TOT'. To the right of the word 'TOT' is a simple green heart symbol.

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## Appendix 1: Self Review: Questions for your service

*Question 1: How does our service (through philosophy, strategic or annual planning, shared understanding) promote literacy teaching and learning?*

- Our philosophy incorporates literacy teaching and learning and is based on current theories and research.
- There is a shared understanding amongst our staff about literacy teaching and learning.
- Our guidelines and expectations for teaching and learning literacy have been developed.
- Our policies and/or literacy statements include literacy teaching, learning and assessment.
- Literacy teaching and learning is included in our annual and/or strategic planning.
- There is provision for literacy teaching and learning in our budgets and resourcing.

*Question 2: How are our educators prepared and supported in implementing literacy programmes?*

- There is/has been a literacy focus in induction, professional development, training and appraisal at our service.
- Our service's leadership supports and promotes literacy.
- Our educators are:
  - reflective and inquiry-focused in their literacy teaching.
  - aware of, and understand, bilingualism/biliteracy.
  - aware of, and understand, multi-literacies, for example ICT, visual, oral.
  - motivated to include literacy in their teaching in ways meaningful to children.
- Our educators acknowledge and include children's cultural contexts in literacy teaching and learning.
- Our educators' theoretical understandings and expectations regarding literacy are based on knowledge of current research.
- Our educators' teaching strategies and pedagogical knowledge regarding literacy are based on current research.

*Question 3: What opportunities are there for children in our service to develop strong literacy learning foundations?*

- Our programme promotes literacy learning.
- Our physical and emotional environment promotes literacy learning.
- Interactions at our service promote literacy learning.

- Literacy learning occurs in contexts meaningful to the children at our service.
- Children's prior literacy experiences are valued at our service.
- The principles of *Te Whāriki* are incorporated into literacy learning:
  - Whakamana–Empowerment
  - Kotahitanga–Holistic Development
  - Whānau Tangata–Family and Community
  - Ngā Hononga–Relationships
- Our educators notice, recognise and respond to a range of literacy learning.
- Our assessment information about literacy learning is collected and used in planning for literacy programmes.

*Question 3.1: How do our literacy practices include alphabet and lettersound knowledge, phonological awareness, concepts about print, oral language development and writing for a variety of purposes?*

*Question 3.2: How does our service promote literacy for different groups of children?*

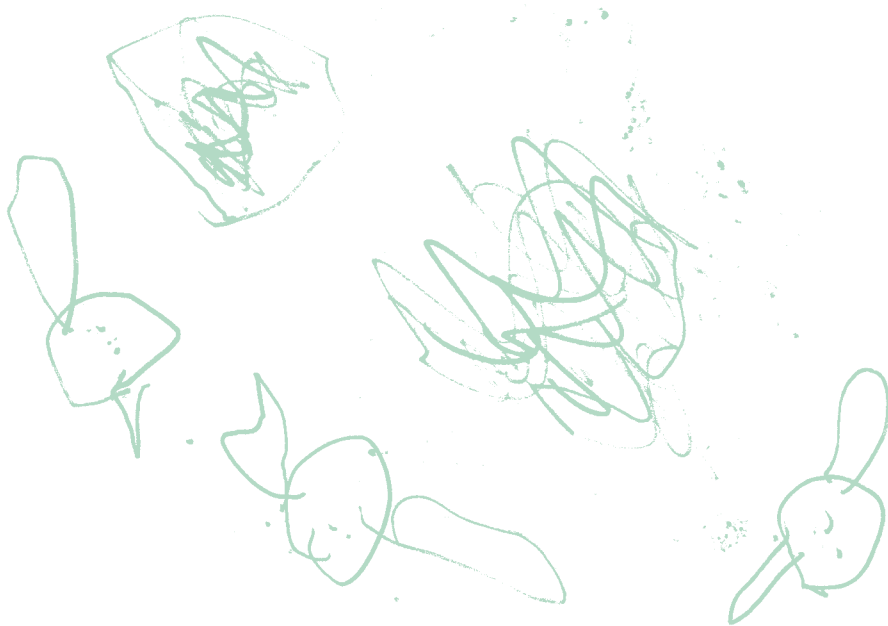
- Age – infants (birth-18 months), toddlers (1–3 years) and young children (2½ years – school entry age)
- Ability – special needs and gifted
- Gender – boys and girls
- Ethnicity – for example: Māori, Pacific, ESL

*Question 4: How are parents, whānau and community contributing to literacy experiences at our service, and how do we involve them?*

- Parents' aspirations for their children are included in our literacy programmes, for example in planning.
- Our educators seek information about home literacy practices from parents.
- Our service is aware of, and acknowledges, parents' expertise, e.g. multi-literacies (ICT, visual, oral).
- Our educators report children's literacy learning to parents.
- Our service educates parents about literacy – seeking input, sharing philosophy, celebrating.
- Parents are engaged in the literacy teaching and learning in our service, especially where parents are heavily involved.
- Our service uses local resources to support literacy teaching and learning, for example, library, visitors and regular excursions.
- Our service networks with the local schools (for example, transitions, shared professional development).

*Question 5: As part of its self review, does our service focus on outcomes for children regarding literacy teaching and learning? If so: How does our self review of literacy improve managers' and educators' practice?*

- Our reviews have a clear focus on literacy.
- Our self review includes gathering useful information from a range of sources and multiple perspectives.
- Analysed information has been used to support judgements about literacy practice at our service.
- Self-review findings have been used to inform decisions about changes and improvement to literacy practices at our service.
- The focus of our review is inclusive of a wide range of practice over time such as learning and teaching practice, collaborative practice and governance and management practice at our service.
- Outcomes of self review continue to enhance and extend the quality of literacy practice at our service.
- Reviews are embedded in our service's practice.
- There is evidence that shows self review leads to improved literacy outcomes for children at our service.



## Appendix 2: Pre-review Questionnaire – what services told ERO

ERO asked services to complete a Pre-review Questionnaire which included questions about how the service promoted and defined literacy, what expectations they held and PLD they provided for educators, what literacy skills educators had and how they included literacy in the programme, how they catered for different groups of children and included parents, whānau and the community in literacy.

### Defining and valuing literacy teaching and learning

#### Promoting literacy teaching and learning

Almost all services reported that they valued literacy teaching and learning. However, many did not have a formal commitment to literacy through their philosophy, strategic and annual planning, policies, or PLD.

About a third of services thought their philosophy promoted and supported literacy teaching and learning. Most commonly, services reported that their philosophy supported a holistic framework in which literacy was interwoven, and encouraged children to be competent and confident learners. However many of these services had no specific mention of literacy in their philosophy.

A few services' identified that their philosophies included specific mention of:

- providing a literacy-rich environment
- valuing first languages and cultures
- promoting skills to live in a technological world
- emphasising literacy and numeracy
- providing meaningful contexts
- providing dramatic play and art for creativity and expression
- talking and listening
- preparing children for school.

Just under a third of services reported having recent PLD that was related to literacy. In some cases, this PLD was undertaken by the whole service. However, more often PLD was limited to one or two educators who subsequently shared their learning with other educators in their service.

About a fifth of services reported referring to literacy-related goals in strategic or annual planning. They mostly suggested this was linked to resourcing, and occasionally to goals for learners such as expressing ideas and feelings through oral and written languages,



visual arts, drama and music; and using and understanding te reo Māori through commands, praise, stories, waiata and conversation.

Very few services reported promoting literacy through a literacy policy, self review, performance appraisal, or assessment practice. Services where this was apparent identified a focus on promoting and enhancing children's emergent literacy skills and experiences through written policies and appraisal.

### Defining literacy

Nearly two-thirds of services defined literacy as “oral, visual and written” aligning with the broad definition provided in *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2009b: 2).

Some services expanded on this to define literacy as:

- holistically developed throughout the curriculum
- language, symbols, texts and communication
- multi-literacies and multi-modal.

### Expectations for literacy teaching and learning

Services self-reported a wide variety of expectations and outcomes for literacy teaching and learning. The most common included:

- educators provide a literacy-rich environment
- educators understand and support literacy learning
- children experience literacy across the curriculum in meaningful contexts
- children are supported to move through the different stages of literacy learning at their own pace
- children learn the formal skills they need for the transition to school
- children have foundation skills such as phonological awareness, concepts about print and letter-sound knowledge
- children actively communicate or develop communication skills.

In some services, defined expectations were unclear, or focused solely on reading and writing. A few mentioned the need to meet the “starting school” indicators in *The Literacy Learning Progressions* (Ministry of Education, 2010). Others said they included parental expectations such as alphabet knowledge, name recognition, identifying some numbers and letters, letter formation (particularly the child's name) and correct pencil grip.

Very few services mentioned involving parents and whānau in partnerships to promote literacy learning, teachers having up-to-date knowledge through PLD, providing positive literacy role models, or encouraging first language development.

*Educators' literacy skills*

Most educators indicated they had a literacy component included in their preservice or field-based training, some more extensive than others. Some educators had undertaken postgraduate study specialising in literacy.

While many educators identified they used and understood basic te reo Māori, few said they were proficient. A far greater number were proficient in a language other than English or te reo Māori. This often reflected the first languages or other home languages of children at the service, especially, but not only, in playcentres.<sup>10</sup>

Services identified different types of preservice training for some of their educators. Some educators were trained ESOL<sup>11</sup> teachers. Some were trained primary school teachers, and a few were trained secondary teachers. These educators were most often in playcentres, as were educators with previous work experience in communications, journalism, research, ICT, or with university qualifications majoring in English or linguistics. A few educators had also worked with, or for, therapists and GSE.

**What services told ERO about how literacy is practised?**

Services reported a large variety of ways to provide literacy experiences in their programmes. Usually literacy learning was in the context of play or daily routines. Common activities reported included:

- songs, poems and stories
- word play and language games
- development of fine and gross motor skills
- questioning games
- creative activities – drama, art, music, dance
- writing in the context of play and with a variety of writing materials
- activities using ICT
- walks and outings
- conversations in te reo Māori and children's first languages
- extended conversations and questioning
- physical games such as 'duck duck goose' and 'I wrote a letter'.

Many services highlighted the importance of providing a print and literacy rich environment, developing sensory skills for infants and toddlers, developing oral language, fostering imagination and creativity, and teachers role modelling and coconstructing thinking and ideas with children. The following example highlights the variety of ways services incorporated literacy.

<sup>10</sup> Educators reported proficiency in almost 60 languages other than English and te reo Māori.

<sup>11</sup> English as a Second or Other Language.

*Literacy is woven throughout the programme. Teachers place a strong emphasis on recording the different means our tamariki have of communicating. We view our programme as being socio-cultural and believe that literacy experiences can be found in most areas of the kindergarten in a variety of different ways.*

Many services with children aged three years and over reported providing more formal literacy activities, particularly for transition groups and at mat time. Activities included:

- learning pencil grip and letter formation
- phonetic awareness
- letter and name recognition, sometimes using flashcards
- mihi
- reading books and worksheets
- reading and printing homework.

#### **Groups of children**

Over half of services who completed the questionnaire felt they differentiated their programme for different groups of children. The remaining services said they provided gender-friendly, age and stage-based activities, and focused on individual children. However, comments showed little recognition that different groups of children respond in different ways to different literacy activities.

#### **Age**

Many services believed they differentiated their literacy experiences for children of different ages. For infants, the emphasis was on sensory experiences, verbal and nonverbal communication, easy access to resources and displays, and using routines as opportunities for communication. For toddlers, the emphasis was on introducing more books and resources, developing fine and gross motor skills, and nurturing oral development and vocabulary. For young children, educators introduced more structured mat times, developed oral language such as mathematical and scientific language, encouraged more complex sentences and introduced specific literacy skills such as letter recognition and formation, and concepts about print/books. A focus on learning through play was acknowledged though more formal activities were introduced during transition times. Some services reported using early readers, worksheets and homework books.

*Ability*

Many services stated they did not have any children enrolled who had special needs or abilities relating to literacy. Those who did outlined how they sought to support these children. For special needs children support reported across services included:

- special one-to-one time with, or support from, an educator or aide
- IDPs or IEPs<sup>12</sup>
- visual aids
- sign language
- language games/sessions
- support from GSE or therapists.

Very few services acknowledged having special needs children with delayed literacy development, or who showed no interest in literacy. They mainly referred to children who had a formally recognised intellectual or physical disability.

Where children with special abilities in literacy were identified, services sought to provide appropriate resources and challenges to extend these children. This was sometimes spontaneous and sometimes planned. Particular approaches services stated they used were:

- using ICT to develop personal inquiry
- recognising multiple intelligences<sup>13</sup>
- providing more challenging books
- extending questioning
- expanding vocabulary
- providing PLD for educators and information for parents.

*Gender*

Some services expressed an awareness of a need to offer equitable literacy opportunities, stating that boys and girls engaged with literacy in different ways. In general, services stated they:

- provided books appealing to a range of interests
- encouraged children to bring items from home to talk about
- promoted drama indoors and out
- made opportunities for pretend play and associated writing in a variety of scenarios from pirates and bus trips to shopping and restaurants
- acknowledged popular culture such as superheroes, fairy tales, movies and songs.

12 Individual Development Plan /Individual Education Plan

13 For example: Interpersonal, Verbal/linguistic, and Visual/spatial intelligences. These are three aspects of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. Visit [http://www.tki.org.nz/r/gifted/reading/theory/gardner\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/gifted/reading/theory/gardner_e.php) for more information.

They recognised that girls were more engaged in “tidy art” activities, fiction books and the family corner. Educators told how they added literacy focused resources to the play areas that attracted girls. Activities they identified that focused more on boys included providing clipboards and markers at the sandpit and/or carpentry table, providing an outside writing table and encouraging “messy art”.

### *Ethnicity*

Services reported incorporating basic te reo Māori in daily routines, greetings and conversations; sang waiata; and celebrated events such as Matariki. Some said they encouraged oral traditions such as karanga, mihi and whaikōrero, and taught children kapa haka and pōwhiri. A few services described encouraging Māori whānau to share their culture with the children at the service, and referred to desired outcomes for Māori children in *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2009d).<sup>14</sup>

In some services with Pacific children enrolled, especially Pacific language nests, educators referred to promoting oral storytelling, counting and greetings in the children’s language, singing Pacific songs and playing music. Communication with families about the names of objects and phrases were also mentioned as important.

Services with children from other cultures identified that music, songs, home language lists, the celebration of special occasions and the inclusion of religious and ethnic practices were important literacy practices. Differentiation in literacy experiences was more likely for children whose first language was not English.

### *Parents, whānau and community*

Services reported involving parents, whānau and the community in literacy experiences in a variety of ways. Some encouraged parents and whānau to participate in literacy activities with their children at the service. Practices included sharing their home language, literacy practices and celebrations; taking time to read or retell a story or sing a song when arriving to drop off or collect their child; and accompanying children on excursions. Some services described how parent helpers/educators took opportunities to model different literacy practices and/or draw on the parents’ knowledge and expertise.

Services described how they involved parents and whānau by sharing literacy learning in assessment records such as children’s portfolios or profiles. Educators shared how they encouraged parents to contribute to these assessments and to comment (written or verbally) on home literacy practices. Parent interviews, surveys and informal chats also provided opportunities for educators to share information about children’s literacy progress and ask about home practices. Educators also talked with parents about their aspirations for their child, including the development of their first language if appropriate.

<sup>14</sup> *Ka Hikitia* outlines a framework of priorities, goals, and actions with a focus on improving the quality of early childhood experiences for Māori children and the education services they attend.

Services also described providing information about literacy to parents through:

- literacy information evenings
- motor skills workshops
- transition to school information
- newsletters, daily whiteboards and blogs with information about literacy activities
- lending resources such as books, DVDs and CDs
- written information about their philosophy and how it relates to literacy
- Ministry of Education publications
- links from the service website.

Many services also said they encouraged and valued home literacy practices such as the use of a first language, shared reading and help with homework (readers and letter formation). Some provided resources in first languages for parents to take home.

*We encourage parents to buy Samoan resources. We give them pese and tauloto<sup>15</sup> for them to sing at home. We encourage them to speak Samoan to their children at home.*

Services described how they used community resources, and engaged with community members to help with literacy teaching and learning. Many services told how they networked with schools to develop literacy expectations, discuss children's abilities and interests, liaise with new entrant teachers and share PLD. Services also described visits to and from other services, especially language nests, to share songs and dances. Other visitors included authors and illustrators, puppeteers and storytellers (both professional and volunteer groups like Story Grans). Children at some services regularly visited local libraries or celebrated special occasions at marae, while others, particularly in rural areas and/or at playcentres, were invited to and attended community events such as concerts and school agricultural days. These visits and interactions gave children opportunities to develop their questioning and extend their vocabulary.

15 Pese – song or hymn.  
Tauloto – bible verses.

### Questions from Pre-review Questionnaire for Services

1. In what ways does your service promote and support literacy teaching and learning? For example, included in philosophy, annual or strategic planning, recent professional development.
2. How does your service define literacy?
3. What expectations does your service have for literacy teaching and learning?
4. What professional development focusing on literacy has been undertaken at your service in the past three years?
5. What literacy skills do particular educators bring to your service? For example, from pre-service training or professional development, knowledge of biliteracy, ICT, English as a Second or Other Language, literacy networking.
6. How do educators include literacy experiences in the programme?
7. How does your service cater for different groups of children in your literacy programme? For example, age – infants, toddlers, young children; ability – special needs, gifted; gender – boys, girls; ethnicity – Māori, Pacific, English as Second or Other Language.
8. How does your service involve parents, whānau and community in the teaching and learning of literacy? For example, parent education, networking with local schools, surveys.
9. What is the ethnicity of the children enrolled at your service?
10. What are the age groups of the children enrolled at your service?
11. ERO is interested in any “success stories” you may have about literacy teaching and learning in your service. These can be documented for and/or discussed with the ERO review team.



### Appendix 3: Glossary

<b>Action research</b>	A reflective and cyclic process to improve strategies, practices and knowledge based on problem solving. The process involves identifying the problem, creating a solution, implementing the solution, evaluating and modifying ideas and practice.
<b>Alphabet knowledge</b>	Refers to the names of the letters of the alphabet that the child knows, and their recognition of the symbols used.
<b>Concepts about print/books</b>	These are concepts that show how much a child knows about how books, text and pictures work. For example, reading from left to right and top to bottom, and making connections between the text and illustrations.
<b>Letter-sound knowledge</b>	Refers to what the child knows about the names of the alphabet letters and some of the sounds they make.
<b>Multi-literacies</b>	A socio-cultural approach to literacy takes into account multi-literacies such as linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural and spatial forms. In an early childhood setting these may include: writing, painting, speech, dance, music, images, film, television, computers and telecommunications.
<b>Multi-modal literacies</b>	Young children's understandings of literacy develop within their socio-cultural and linguistic communities. As children move across these communities, they encounter a variety of literacies and literacy practices. Many of these literacies are multi-modal and technologically based, requiring simultaneous and combined uses of visual, audio and critical meaning systems (Jones Diaz, 2007: p.31)



<b>Phonemes and phonological awareness</b>	Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that make a difference to the meaning of spoken words (Hamer & Adams, 2003: p. 46). Phonological awareness refers to an individual's awareness of the sound structure, or phonological structure, of a spoken word including syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes. The ability to segment and blend phonemes is critical for the development of decoding skills, reading fluency and spelling.
<b>Socio-cultural</b>	A socio-cultural curriculum acknowledges the individual child and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that child brings to their learning and development. It acknowledges that learning begins at home, and the early childhood services and the wider community provide further opportunities for learning.
<b>Umbrella organisation</b>	Overarching organisations such as kindergarten or playcentre associations, home based care networks, or private companies with multiple services. In some, there is an overarching philosophy guiding practice.





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