TE IHUWAKA | Education Evaluation Centre

# Responding to Diverse Cultures:

## Good Practice in Home-based Early Childhood Services


EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

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# Introduction

Aotearoa is more ethnically and culturally diverse than ever before, and good education isn't one-size-fits-all. Culturally responsive teaching affirms and builds on children's cultures and languages to promote the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* through rich, relevant learning experiences. But what does "being culturally responsive" look like in practice?

That's what we asked a sample of home-based educators, visiting teachers, and leaders. This report is a collection of examples that show how children's cultures and languages can be reflected in everyday practice.

## Home-based education and care services

Around 15,000 children are enrolled at over 400 home-based services across Aotearoa[1]. This is about 8 percent of the enrolments in early childhood education (ECE), and most of the enrolments are children aged under two years. Home-based care and education is unique – unlike centre-based services, children learn within their own homes, or in the homes of their educators. Learning is promoted through experiences that would usually occur in a home setting, and the local community is used to extend and compliment the curriculum. Group sizes are between one and four children. Home-based staff are in direct, regular contact with a smaller number of families, compared to teachers in centre-based settings who have larger parent communities.

Home-based educators have various levels of qualifications, though they will be required to hold a Level 4 ECE qualification from 2025. They are supported in their practice by qualified early childhood teachers, who visit homes regularly. Many home-based networks arrange playgroups, events, and professional learning opportunities for educators, and support them in qualification programmes. Like all licensed ECE services in Aotearoa, home-based education and care services use *Te Whāriki*[2] as the basis for their curriculum.

## Aotearoa's diverse cultural context

Our first and primary responsibility is to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Tamariki and mokopuna Māori should be strongly supported to learn and thrive in their culture, language, and identity. For some key resources around responding to tamariki and whānau Māori, see page 20.

1 Education Counts. (2020). Enrolments in ECE (2000-2020). www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/participation
2 Ministry of Education. (2017). Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum. tewhariki.tki.org.nz/en/key-documents/te-whariki-2017/

The cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Aotearoa is growing.[3] Around 200 languages are now spoken in New Zealand homes and, in 2018, one in three children had a parent born overseas. This report sets out to share good practices that respond to the diversity of cultures and languages in Aotearoa communities.

> "Today New Zealand children are growing up in a diverse society that comprises people from a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities. *Te Whāriki* supports children from all backgrounds to grow up strong in identity, language and culture."
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 7**

## Culturally responsive practices matter

Alongside the growth in our diverse population, there has been a growing recognition in education research that one-size-fits-all education disadvantages most children.[4,5] Each child has a unique learning context, as they are located within the unique culture (defined as "the beliefs, customs, arts...of a particular society, group, place, or time"[6]) of their family and community. *Te Whāriki* sets out expectations for an inclusive and responsive curriculum. Culturally responsive practice is part of quality teaching, not an add-on to it.

Good culturally responsive practice involves making deliberate, thoughtful actions like:

- talking to families about the learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours they value most
- deliberately weaving this information into teaching and learning practices, and documentation
- using words from children's home languages in everyday conversations
- using assessment and planning processes in ways that are culturally relevant – this might involve focusing on particular experiences, values, or aspirations
- engaging in playgroups and other community outings that build on educators' own, as well as the children's, understandings of diverse cultures
- engaging in professional learning and development that builds cultural capability
- challenging ourselves and others to continually improve.

Where the difference in cultural background of educators and families is significant, educators may need support in providing culturally responsive education.

3 Stats NZ. (2018). 2018 Census. www.stats.govt.nz/2018-census
4 Farquhar, S. (2003). Quality teaching early foundations: Best evidence synthesis iteration. Ministry of Education. www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515
5 Alton-Lee, A. (2008). Making a bigger difference for diverse learners: The iterative best evidence synthesis programme in New Zealand. In *The education of diverse student populations* (pp. 253-271). Springer, Dordrecht.
6 Merriam-Webster. (2021). Culture. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture

# About this report

## Choosing examples of good practice

To gather the stories and strategies captured in this report, ERO contacted a small sample of home-based services and invited them to take part in informal video interviews. Discussions focused on the strategies they have used to support the learning and wellbeing of children from diverse cultures.

We gathered the experiences and insights of 10 home-based educators, 14 visiting teachers and service leaders (some in shared roles), and one translator. We also analysed documents, such as narrative assessments, newsletters, and induction guides. This report is a collection of the stories and strategies that illustrate ERO's indicators of quality culturally responsive practice in action (found in *Te Ara Poutama*).[7]

## Using this report

This is not a "how-to" guide. This report is intended to help share ideas, inspire reflection, and motivate improvement among educators, visiting teachers, and leaders (including service providers) in the home-based sector. It also has relevance for the wider early learning sector.

This report has a broad focus on responding to the many diverse ethnicities, cultures, and languages of Aotearoa families. For some specific resources on responding to whānau Māori and Pacific families, see page 20.

The report has four main parts, which draw from the indicators and examples of effective practice in *Te Ara Poutama*.

Part one sets out ways that educators and visiting teachers work with families to tailor culturally responsive practices.

Part two looks at supporting multiple language learning.

Part three looks at ways that culture and language can impact assessment practice.

Part four sets out how leaders and visiting teachers can provide professional learning, resources, and mentoring to support educators.

Each part contains narratives, quotes, strategies, commentary, and reflective questions. Explicit links are made to both *Te Whāriki* and *Te Ara Poutama*. The term 'kaiako' is used at times to refer to both visiting teachers and educators, mirroring its use in *Te Whāriki*.

7 Education Review Office. (2020). Te Ara poutama: Indicators of quality for early childhood education: What matters most. ero.govt.nz/how-ero-reviews/early-childhood-services/akarangi-quality-evaluation/te-ara-poutama-indicators-of-quality-for-early-childhood-education-what-matters

# **Part 1:** Working with families to tailor a culturally responsive curriculum

The experts in a child's culture are their family. Making curriculum decisions alongside families, and being responsive to cultures, languages, and identities, are central parts of our early childhood curriculum. When working with children and families that are of a different cultural context to their own, kaiako need to take deliberate action to grow their ability to respond to that child's unique ways of being, knowing, and doing. This is about reflecting the principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki*, in responsive and inclusive ways.

The leaders and kaiako that we spoke to affirmed that culturally responsive teaching is grounded in warm and respectful relationships. They described the value of regular opportunities for informal and unhurried conversation. These helped to build trusting relationships with family members that led to meaningful conversations about culture and language. They found that building on common interests and common values was the key to learning what is important to each family. They then made good use of that information in their everyday practice.

> "Children, parents and whānau contribute to a curriculum that recognises their identities, languages and cultures."
>
> ***TE ARA POUTAMA*, P. 19**

> "Kaiako take time to listen seriously to the views of parents and whānau about their children's learning, and they share decision making with them."
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 35**

## Good practice example: Tailoring mealtimes

### Key actions

Building relationships

Asking targeted questions

Noting cultural elements in the home

Sharing cultural information among the team

Using cultural information to inform practice

### A home visit supports culturally responsive mealtimes for a young girl.

On an enrolment visit, a family had prepared a meal for the visiting teacher. “It was a feast … Grandma was cooking in the kitchen and kept bringing more and more food out.” The visiting teacher put aside her paperwork and engaged in friendly conversation over the meal, focusing on making personal connections and finding out about the family’s interests.

She observed that during this meal, the child’s grandmother would feed the child with her hands. “That really stood out … [as well as] how very particular they were about cleaning up the child afterwards.” After the visit, the visiting teacher made notes and shared what she had discussed and observed with the educator who would be working with her. Although these kaiako usually encourage independent eating, they agreed that aligning with the child’s culture was most important for her learning and wellbeing, and independent eating skills could come later, in discussion with the family.

When the child started her education and care, the educator adjusted mealtimes to align with the child’s familiar customs: hand-feeding, an unhurried clean-up ritual at the end of the meal, and adjusting planned activities to allow for the preparation of hot lunches, which was this family’s preference. “[The home visit] gave the educator more understanding about the child’s culture and the child’s routine. If we had not known about this the child may have not eaten at all.” These small changes in the mealtime routine also created conversation with the other children in the care of this educator, supporting their understanding of diverse cultures.

## Other useful strategies that we heard about were:

- Finding out what form of communication works best for each family. Leaders and kaiako found success when they had a wide range of tools available – private social media pages, chat apps, email, phone calls, visits, and online portfolio platforms.
- Visiting families' homes to work through forms while building connections.
- Asking about families' favourite activities.
- Kaiako using resources (for example, clothing, dolls) from their own culture to prompt conversation.
- Borrowing artefacts from the family to support transitions into the educator's home, (for example, bangles, artwork, photos).
- Asking about the values that underpin a family's religion.
- Using photos, video, written communication, and translation strategies, when face-to-face communication was difficult.
- Consistently feeding back how information from parents was used in the learning programme.
- Using common interests to build and strengthen relationships (for example, gardening with the children, baking for the family).
- Using similar artefacts, furnishings etc. as in the child's home.
- Focusing on resilience and social competence skills when supporting 'only children' and children with leadership roles within their family to transition into learning with a group.
- When working with children with health challenges, ensuring that conversations about culture and language were not forgotten.

> "Differences between western culture and a lot of parenting styles can be a challenge."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

> "There's a form that's available [for gathering cultural information], but it's certainly not one that we rely on to really learn about the child. That takes time, by really being present. Being present with the children and with the families."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

> "Become acutely aware of the environment, for example who lives with their grandparents, does the child have their own bedroom, photos on the wall... get a good insight of what is important to the family."
>
> **VISITING TEACHER**

> "I understand that not everyone is the same and we don't have to believe in the same thing, what you believe I may not, what I believe you may not believe but please have some respect and teach our kids what we want them to learn."
>
> KAIAKO

> "How do kaiako learn about the languages and cultures of all families and in what ways are these affirmed in the setting?"
>
> *TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 35

## Reflective questions for leaders and kaiako

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

- Do we ask families questions about their culture and language? How do we use this information in our everyday interactions with children?
- Do we encourage further sharing of information, by valuing and using what we have learnt in practice? Do we communicate this to families?
- Do we seek the views of children and families about strategies for responding to their culture and language? Knowing the value of culturally responsive practices for children, how do we respond when families say they "don't want anything different"?
- Are we prepared for potentially difficult conversations when we have different views from the families we work with? Where might tensions come up?
- What could we commit to, to improve how we work with families to tailor a culturally responsive curriculum?

Kaiako may encounter different cultural values and be unsure about how to respond. It is important that they know where to go with questions or concerns.

# **Part 2:** Supporting multiple language learning

Around 200 languages are spoken in homes around Aotearoa. It's well-established in research that speaking more than one language has many learning advantages for young children, as well as ongoing life benefits.[8,9]

*Te Whāriki* acknowledges that home or heritage language knowledge is a taonga. References to language can be found woven throughout its principles and strands. In ERO's indicators of quality, it is made explicit that kaiako take action in fostering languages. Supporting home or heritage languages and supporting English language learning, alongside building children's understanding of te reo me ngā tikanga Māori, is one of the key challenges and opportunities for Aotearoa kaiako.

> "Leaders and kaiako seek ways to maintain children's connections to, and fluency in their home language/s."
>
> ***TE ARA POUTAMA*, P. 19**

In home-based settings, fewer adults are working with individual children than in a centre-based service. This means that taking personal responsibility for supporting multiple languages is really important.

Leaders and kaiako that we spoke to shared that they have had to work through challenges to make sure dual or multiple languages are supported. Most commonly, these included a lack of confidence from kaiako, and communicating with families that speaking home languages along with English helps with learning English[10] – it doesn't slow it down.

> "Children more readily become bi- or multi-lingual or bi- or multi-literate when language learning in the education setting builds on their home languages"
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 12**

8 May, St., Hill, R., Tiakiwai, S. (2004). Bilingual/immersion education: Indicators of good practice: Final report to the Ministry of Education. www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika/5079

9 UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific. (2020). Mother tongue and early childhood care and education: synergies and challenges. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374419

10 Castro, D. C., Páez, M. M., Dickinson, D. K., & Frede, E. (2011). Promoting language and literacy in young dual language learners: Research, practice, and policy. Child development perspectives, 5(1), 15-21. srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2010.00142.x

## Good practice example: Valuing children's heritage language

### Key actions

Valuing children's cultural knowledge

Meaningful context for dramatic play and literacy

Conversations about language

Sharing successes with whānau

Ongoing affirmation of home language value, in writing and in conversation

### An educator working with Somalian children uses dramatic play to affirm and support multiple language learning.

Four Somalian children, with varying levels of Somali language knowledge, enjoy having conversations with their educator about what life is like for their extended family in Somalia. They like to talk about how their cousins play outside for most of the day, and families live close by each other on the same street. Play and conversations explore the differences and similarities of words in different languages and families in different places.

One day, the educator invited the children to take an imaginary trip to Somalia. They made passports, writing their names and drawing pictures of themselves. Bags were packed with clothing that would be best for the Somalian heat. They used furniture to create a plane and took the trip, playing different roles along the way.

When the group were 'with' their Somalian relatives, the discussion between the educator and children turned to how people in Somalia usually speak Somali, and only some will also speak English – whereas in Aotearoa it's the other way around. The children and educator agreed that it would be important to keep speaking Somali a lot of the time, so that they would be able to talk to their cousins when they went to visit in real life.

The educator took photos and documented their trip and conversation about Somali language in a special book, celebrating the children's strong interest and connection to their families' home country and language. Learning stories for these children and their families were written in a combination of Somali and English. When looking through portfolios, the educator often talks to the children about how the stories in Somali will be particularly special for them to read and look back on as they get older.

## Other useful strategies that we heard about were:

- Getting started straight away by gathering key words about children's needs and care rituals from parents.
- Regularly asking children and families for new words to learn.
- Writing words out phonetically (how they sound), to help learn the correct pronunciation.
- Weaving words from home languages through all play and conversations – not only in documents or for instructions.
- Finding and singing songs in home languages – including songs children don't know.
- Having conversations with children and their families about words and how they link between languages.

- Making the most of having children with different languages in one place (for example, at playgroups) by having conversations about words and languages, or facilitating children to teach words to one another.
- Using some basic sign language in the first weeks of transitioning into care, to support communication.
- Learning lullabies in home languages to support sleep routines – or having parents record themselves singing.
- Sharing up-to-date, useful articles on parent communication platforms about the value of multiple languages for children's development. Leaders report this has been useful when parents have asked for only English to be spoken in care.

> "The language that [the educator] uses … she uses it very naturally and very organically in the conversations with the children. They are interwoven [with diverse languages]."
>
> **VISITING TEACHER**

> "[Parents] hold a lot of funds of knowledge about their child that we are desperately wanting to share and to celebrate. But there are barriers as well we need to break down- the language barrier, the trust."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

## Reflective questions for leaders and kaiako

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

- Do we actively seek ways to maintain children's connections to, and fluency in, their home languages?
- Are our educators ready for conversations about multiple languages with families? How could we grow educator confidence?
- Do we seek the views of children, parents, and whānau about supporting their language?
- When we think about 'multiple language learning', do we focus too much on supporting children to learn English? How can we adjust this focus?
- Do we understand and actively promote the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism? Do we need to explore some up-to-date research? (See page 20 for resources.)
- What could we commit to, to improve how we support children's multiple language learning?

> "How are children who are learning in more than one language supported to learn languages in daily practices?"
>
> ***TE WHARIKI*, P. 45**

# **Part 3:** Assessment and planning

Good quality planning and assessment comes from knowing a child well. When teachers and educators have strong understandings of the 'whole child' (for example, their interests, whānau, community, values, capabilities, cues, and rhythms), they are better prepared to provide appropriate challenge and extend their learning. The cultures and languages of children are central to who they are and to how they experience the world, so quality planning and assessment can't put culture to one side.

The experts on a child's culture are their family members. As discussed in previous sections, home-based education and care offers ongoing opportunities to gain rich cultural information. These examples show how kaiako can draw on their knowledge of children's cultures to inform how they assess and plan for children's learning.

> "Assessment practice ... reflects the cultural contexts in which [children] live and includes culturally valued knowledges, skills, attitudes and behaviours."
>
> ***TE ARA POUTAMA*, P. 22**

> "Learner identity is enhanced when ... kaiako are responsive to their cultural ways of knowing and being."
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 12**

> "When observing, assessing and seeing what's happening for the child and not being able to understand the background of why the child is doing something – this can be a challenge."
>
> **VISITING TEACHER**

> "We have these conversations with our team all the time – if a family shares something, no matter how little, what do you do with that piece of information? Once a family sees that happen even just once, the communication is on a whole other level."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

## Good practice example: Planning with the family

### Key actions

Using information from the family to impact practice

Noticing cues and recognising progress

Sharing successes with whānau

Planning new learning with the family

Using interests, culture, and language to extend learning

### Knowledge of Arabic language and music are valued by the family of an infant. This impacts how her new educator plans experiences and makes assessments of her progress.

During an enrolment visit, parents of an infant shared the importance of the Arabic language to their family. They gave some basic Arabic words that could be used in daily care routines, such as sleep and nappy.

Arabic was unfamiliar to this educator, who worked to familiarise herself with the new words. It took several weeks to build up confidence, but soon the educator was practised enough to start using the words most familiar to the infant. She immediately observed that Arabic words got positive responses from the child, such as stronger eye contact and smiles. This was "the starting point … to building a bond between the child and the nanny." Documentation captured the progress in the infant's sense of belonging within the new setting and within their relationship.

Soon, this educator recognised that the child had an interest in music, observing that "she would often sway when she heard music and 'sing' to herself." The educator worked with the family to extend this, by learning and discussing the meaning of songs in Arabic that were familiar from their home, including a number of action songs, supporting the child's oral language and coordination, as well as affirming her language and cultural context. Over time, documentation showed the child's progress in confidently singing and doing the actions. These songs now form a part of the daily routine in this home.

## Other useful strategies that we heard about were:

- Finding out about parents' aspirations and valued learning outcomes through rich conversations, using questions like, "What was it like for you as a child?" and "What's special about your family?"
- Highlighting progress of culturally valued knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours in portfolios. For example, a child using the particular "manners" that are important in her home and religion; a child expertly nurturing a vegetable garden; or a child's caring relationship with an infant.
- Considering how cultural factors, such as gender roles, independence, views on messy play, feeding, bed times and co-sleeping, being carried, etc., inform what teachers and educators know about children's growing capabilities and behaviour. Visiting teachers and educators described times when knowing the child's cultural context meant they could tailor assessment and planning around sensory exploration, fine- and large-motor skills, and social competence in ways that responded to families' culture and values.

- Making it a habit to consider how a child's culture, language, and family can enrich planned and spontaneous experiences. One educator extended on an interest in literacy by supporting children to write their cousin's names and using this as a prompt to talk about what their cousin's home is like and what sorts of activities happen at that home.
- Supporting family members with limited English to engage with written assessments and planning processes for their child. Strategies included: using translation dictionaries and apps, finding translators through friendships or networks, using a series of photos to show progress over time, and recording speech over video.

> "Visiting teachers sort of float in the background a bit more, because the main relationship that we want to foster is between the educators and the whānau … [they] have become the expert, hand-in-hand with this whānau."

## Reflective questions for leaders and kaiako

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

- Have we been celebrating festivals, special events, and language weeks – but forgetting about culture and language at other times?
- Do we know what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour are valued in the cultures of our families? Are we active and persistent about finding out what learning outcomes are most important?
- Do our written assessments and planning show that we know our children's cultures and languages well – and that we use this purposefully to extend their learning?
- What could we commit to, to make our assessment and planning more culturally responsive for all of our children?

> "How might kaiako make thoughtful decisions about which of children's spontaneous play, interests and working theories might be used to create curriculum experiences?"
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 50**

# **Part 4:** Supporting practice with guidance, networking, and knowledge-building

Leaders and visiting teachers set the scene for culturally responsive practice. This can happen through their professional support structures, policies and processes, resourcing decisions, and the attitudes and priorities that they model themselves.

In home-based education and care, educators have varying levels of qualifications (though all will hold a Level 4 ECE qualification by 2025). As qualified early childhood teachers, visiting teachers are the first point of contact for educators' professional growth. They have a key role in modelling good practice and challenging educators to continually reflect and improve on their practice. When we spoke with leaders, visiting teachers, and educators, they affirmed the value of mutual respect. It was important that all levels of the service had good professional trust and a shared view that culturally responsive practice should be prioritised.

This section gives some examples of guidance, professional learning opportunities, support, challenge, resources, funding and networking opportunities provided by leaders and visiting teachers.

> "Leaders ensure access to professional learning and development that builds capability."
>
> ***TE ARA POUTAMA*, P. 32**

> "How do kaiako recognise and value the identities, languages and cultures of all children?"
>
> ***TE WHĀRIKI*, P. 40**

## Good practice example: Prioritising culture

| Key actions | A multi-network service prioritises culturally responsive practice, at all levels. |
|---|---|
| Recognising and responding to the needs of the community | Leaders at this service, which has networks that serve a number of diverse communities, recognise that culture and language are key to the learning of children and staff alike.<br><br>Senior leaders share a view that cultural diversity enriches their service, and purposefully recruit diverse educators and visiting teachers that reflect their parent communities. In-house translators are employed to translate documents and work alongside immigrant and refugee communities that have little English. |
| Regular opportunities to share and grow cultural understandings | For educators, 'monthly focus' newsletters and accompanying resources often have a culture or language focus. 'Discovery days' and 'cultural days' for educators and families are popular events. Children and educators practice songs and dances to perform. "Everyone in the region from different cultures would come. Amazing displays, dance, singing, different food. Chinese educators would teach Samoan educators how to make mooncakes." |
| Targeted professional learning | Internal and external professional learning has supported the cultural competence of both visiting teachers and educators. Regional 'Who am I?' workshops encouraged diverse educators to share early memories, photos and recipes. Leaders shared that these workshops had particular value for the Pākehā educators: "As NZ Europeans, quite often you take for granted what we do and why we do it. It's 'just what we do' .... It meant they could take a step back." Leaders also observed that these workshops had an impact on the confidence of kaiako to talk about cultures and to use their own languages in front of others. |
| Networking opportunities | A wide range of communication and networking strategies were introduced, including private chats and pages on social media platforms, and regular get-togethers. "If we can communicate with them in a way that makes sense to them, we're going to end up in a situation where we can work collaboratively together." The has led to widespread sharing of ideas and practices across all levels of the service. |

## Other useful strategies that we heard about were:

- Defining expectations around culturally responsive practice, in guiding documents and induction packs.
- Linking policies and procedures to useful resources, videos, website links, etc.
- Developing in-house videos to clarify expectations and model practices.
- Resourcing translation services.
- Modelling being unsure and learning from mistakes.

- Matching educators and families that share culture and language, where possible.
- Persistently challenging educators to improve their culturally responsive understandings and practices.
- Networking with other services to share ideas.
- Organising activities and events that give staff opportunities to share and connect.
- Giving out resources and summary pamphlets after in-house professional learning, or developing their own after external professional learning. These would include clear guidance to support educators to weave new learning into their practice.
- Encouraging educators to use new professional learning immediately, for example, the next day, to ensure that it impacts their practice and won't be forgotten.

> "Be flexible and adaptable, and don't think that we have all the answers, because we don't."
>
> SERVICE LEADER

> "We only get to that point, where educators and families feel comfortable to share with us, if we've taken that time to get to know them, and they trust us – that we appreciate that their language, culture and identity are important, and that we don't just come in with our ... view about 'this is how we do things'."
>
> SERVICE LEADER

> "We have generally found that the educators who are responding well to cultural practices are the educators who have studied or gone through some kind of study. It is then viewed as valued practice. Culture is celebrated more. They go above the regular days of celebration and use it in the everyday. We get better in practice after attending PLD."
>
> VISITING TEACHER

## Reflective questions for leaders

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

- Do we have clear, high expectations for culturally responsive practice? Do we have strategies for moving staff beyond focusing on occasions (festivals, language weeks), to rich daily practices?
- Do our professional learning opportunities, support and guidance, resourcing, funding, and networking opportunities support culturally responsive practices?
- What do we have in place to support all staff to continually improve their cultural understandings and practices?
- What could we commit to, as home-based leaders, to improve how we support culturally responsive practices within our service?

# Conclusion

These summary points have relevance for all early learning services – not just home-based ones.

It is well established, in early learning research and our key early learning guiding documents, that culturally responsive practices have real value for children. The examples of good practice in this report show that practices are manageable, rewarding, and can emerge naturally from the foundations of trusting, learning-focused relationships. When there are differences in cultural background of kaiako and families there needs to be deliberate thinking by kaiako about how best to tailor their practice.

The educators, visiting teachers, and leaders that we spoke with were clear that relationships are the key. Features of relationships that support culturally responsive practice included:

- using a wide range of ways to stay in regular contact
- having heaps of opportunities to get together
- building on common values and interests
- sharing ideas and being flexible
- deepening relationships over time, to be able to focus on children's learning even within friendly chats.

> "I think if you are truly there for the children … you will reflect and make it work, and look at ways to reach and achieve that."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

When positive, trusting relationships were in place, educators and visiting teachers were well placed to take deliberate actions that supported children's learning in culturally responsive ways. Key features of their culturally responsive practice were:

- ongoing conversations about culture and language, including finding out about family contexts and culturally valued knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours
- using a range of communication tools to share how these conversations were remembered, valued, and how they impacted on teaching and learning
- taking personal responsibility for supporting children to retain (or learn) their heritage languages, along with developing their English and te reo Māori
- embedding multiple languages, and conversations about languages, in everyday interactions
- focusing assessment and planning on learning that has cultural importance for children and families
- engaging in professional learning and development to support their understandings
- challenging themselves, and others, to put new professional learning into practice.

In home-based settings, there is a special focus on learning through the home and community. Culture and language are what homes and communities are made of. Leaders, visiting teachers, and educators found that when they decided to put culture and language at the centre of what they do, it would inform, enrich, and add value to all of their roles. They agreed that this started with their mindset: seeing culturally responsive practices as opportunities to make a real difference for children. This was their key learning.

> "When you take a step back as a service and you see the difference that you've been part of making, that's what's rewarding."
>
> **SERVICE LEADER**

## Further reading and useful resources

Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mo ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum. It may be useful to revisit the passage on 'Identity, language and culture', on page 12, and the 'Assessment, planning and evaluation' section on pages 63-65.

Te Ara Poutama: Indicators of quality for early childhood education: What matters most, ERO's quality framework, sets out indicators for quality practice as well as examples of effective practice.

Te Whāriki online (tki.org.nz) has numerous useful resources around putting *Te Whāriki* into practice, including a useful section on identity, language and culture.

Talking together links to a suite of resources focused on supporting oral language, including focused sections on supporting bilingual and multilingual children.

ERO's research Extending their language, expanding their world has a useful chapter on responding to linguistically diverse learners.

Responding to linguistic diversity in Auckland evaluates culturally responsive strategies used in Auckland early learning services and schools.

He mapuna te tamaiti: Supporting social and emotional competence in early learning includes specific guidance on culturally responsive support for social and emotional competence, as well as a useful discussion on respectful dialogue with whānau when values differ (see pages 12-15).

Parents and whānau | Te Whāriki examines learning partnerships with families.

Much more than words: Communication development in young children looks at how oral language can be supported in everyday conversation, and explains the value of home languages in simple terms.

## Whānau Māori and Pacific families

This report has a broad focus on responding to the many diverse ethnicities, cultures and languages of Aotearoa families. Kaiako looking for more focused guidance around responding to tamariki and whānau Māori may find these useful:

- Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners
- Ka hikitia – Ka hāpaitia | The Māori education strategy
- Te whatu pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning
- Partnership with whānau Māori in early childhood services

Kaiako looking for more focused guidance around responding to Pacific children and families may find these useful:

- Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners
- Action Plan for Pacific Education
- Te Whāriki and Tapasā

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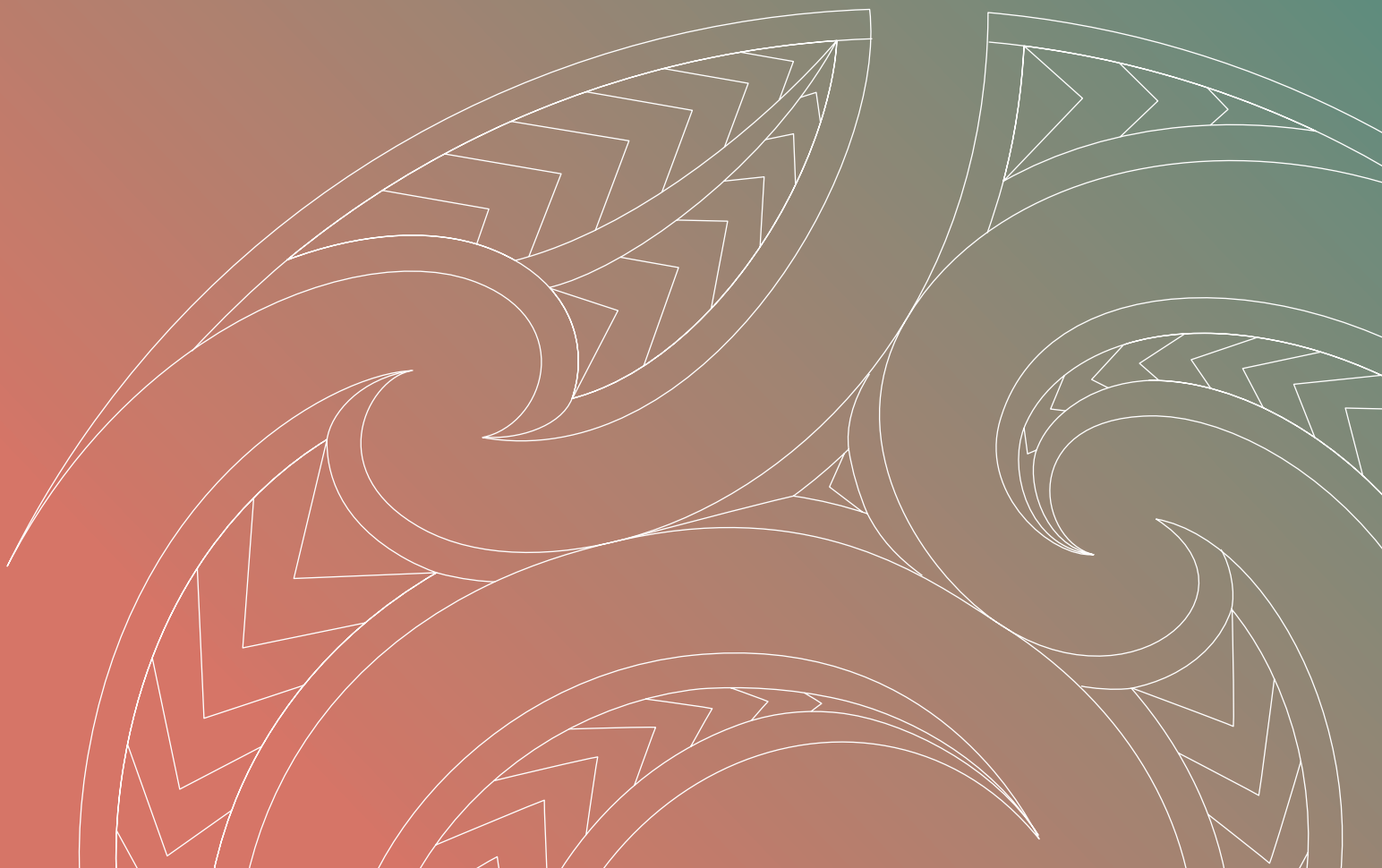

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