



Responding to Diverse Cultures: Good Practice in Home-based Early Childhood Services

SUMMARY



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 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. We heard about practices which will be useful to inform practice across all early childhood education settings.

This is a summary of ERO's report, *Responding to Diverse Cultures: Good Practice in Home-based Early Childhood Services*. The report is a collection of examples that show how children's cultures and languages can be reflected in everyday practice, supporting their learning and wellbeing.

The cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Aotearoa is growing. There is also a growing understanding that one-size-fits-all education doesn't work for most children. *Te Whāriki's* learning outcomes need to be promoted through culturally relevant learning

experiences. ERO wanted to find out what good practices were happening in home-based settings, so that these could be shared with other kaiako and leaders in the early learning sector. These examples could inspire reflection and motivate improvement.

“Differences between western culture and a lot of parenting styles can be a challenge.”

SERVICE LEADER

What is culturally responsive practice, and why does it matter?

Making learning decisions alongside families, and being responsive to diverse cultures, languages, and identities are central parts of our early childhood curriculum. Diverse cultures include different beliefs, customs, languages, and traditions. 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.

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

In our report, we drew on *Te Whāriki* and ERO's quality indicators in *Te Ara Poutama* to look at four key aspects of quality culturally responsive practice. These are:

- working with families to tailor a culturally responsive curriculum
- supporting multiple language learning
- assessment and planning
- supporting practice with guidance, networking, and knowledge-building.

Who did ERO talk to?

Based on our work with services across the country, ERO contacted a small sample of home-based services and invited them to take part in informal video interviews.

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 learning stories, newsletters, and induction guides. We then collated a selection of stories and strategies that show ERO's indicators of quality culturally responsive practice in action.

What did ERO find out?

The leaders and kaiako that we spoke with shared that developing culturally responsive practices is manageable, rewarding, and can emerge naturally from the foundations of trusting, learning-focused relationships. When these relationships were in place, kaiako and leaders found that they were well placed to deliberately support 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.

“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

Leaders and kaiako 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 the challenges were worth the efforts, because they could see the difference it made for children.

How can kaiako build their culturally responsive practices?

Our report sets out many ideas, strategies, and reflective questions for improving culturally responsive understandings and practices. There are also links for further reading listed at the end of the report. Leaders and kaiako may find it particularly useful to:

- revisit *Te Whāriki* and *Te Ara Poutama*, focusing on what these key documents say about culturally responsive teaching
- reflect on everyday practices, and how these could be enriched by diverse cultures and languages

- consider children’s diverse languages, and how these could be fostered in everyday play and conversation
- focus assessment and planning documentation on building culturally valued knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours
- engage in professional learning and development opportunities that build cultural understanding – and ensure that new learning is embedded in practice.

It’s also important that educators know who to go to (for example their visiting teachers, leadership, or governing organisation) with their questions or concerns about responding to families’ cultures in ways that are consistent with *Te Whāriki*.

Looking forward, as New Zealand becomes more diverse, being able to respond to the diverse cultures of children in early childhood education will be increasingly important.

“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’.”

VISITING TEACHER

If you’re interested in the culturally responsive stories and strategies that we collected from home-based educators, visiting teachers and leaders, check out our report: *Responding to Diverse Cultures: Good Practice in Home-based Early Childhood*.



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