

Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Good Practice

November 2011



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter

Thank you to the staff, parents and children of all the services mentioned in this report for permission to use their photographs. Thanks also to Gracefield Early Childhood Centre for the cover photograph.

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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.

Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve literacy levels that enable success. This report highlights good practice in literacy teaching and learning in early childhood services. It is the companion report to *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning February 2011*, which looked at various literacy practices in services and their effectiveness. The examples in this good practice report will help to inform and contribute to the overall improvement of early childhood literacy teaching and learning.

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

November 2011

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Introduction

Children's development of strong early foundations in literacy begins in the home. They are grown and enriched through participation in high quality early childhood education. It is a key priority for Government that every child achieves literacy and numeracy levels that enable their success. In New Zealand, children in early childhood services are exposed to a multitude of resources and experiences that engage and support their literacy learning.

ERO evaluated literacy teaching and learning in early childhood services in Term 4, 2009 and Term 1, 2010. The evaluation 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's evaluation of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood services highlighted the wide variety of understanding of early literacy and accompanying practice across the sector. High quality literacy practices were evident in services where educators had in-depth knowledge of how children's literacy learning developed. However, in services where ERO observed few or poor quality literacy practices, children were not well engaged with literacy learning.

The intent of the evaluation was to gain an insight and understanding of literacy teaching and learning in early childhood education. This report complements the ERO national evaluation report, *Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning February 2011*.¹ It presents examples of good practice from 13 early childhood services, identified during their ERO reviews, which had high quality literacy teaching and learning. ERO revisited these services in Term 4, 2010. These services were at different stages in their understanding and associated literacy teaching and learning practices.

The information is divided into two parts. The first six examples describe all three aspects of the evaluation: promotion, practice, and self review of literacy teaching and learning. The second presents examples from the remaining services that exemplified good practice in some aspects of literacy teaching and learning. The examples also include ideas that could be used by other services.

1 This report can be accessed on ERO's website: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Literacy-in-Early-Childhood-Services-Teaching-and-Learning-February-2011>

LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*,² 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 ways that seek to empower children to become literate through activities that are meaningful and engaging. It encourages an holistic view of literacy where infants, toddlers and young children engage with literacy in ways that reflect their growing expertise, and that incorporates their home literacy practices.



2 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Methodology

ERO identified early childhood services for this report from education reviews in 353 services undertaken in Term 4, 2009 and Term 1, 2010. Thirteen were selected for a further visit in Term 4, 2010 to gather in-depth information about specific practices that underpinned their literacy teaching and learning.³

This report draws on findings from these early childhood services:

- Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne
- Bear Park Infant and Toddler Centre
- Botany Downs Kindergarten
- E Tipu e Rea Early Learning Centre
- Massey University Child Care Centre – Hoiho Section
- Massey University Child Care Centre – Tui Section
- Nelson South Kindergarten
- Peachgrove Playcentre
- Reporoa Kindergarten
- Richmond Kindergarten
- Strathmore Kindergarten
- Taikura Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten – Hastings
- Totara Hill Montessori.



³ Two of these services were under one management umbrella and were treated as a single example of good practice in this report.

Examples of good literacy practice

The following are six examples of good practice in literacy teaching and learning. In all of these literacy is embedded through leadership, relationships, the environment, assessment, and children’s engagement in learning through play.

Bear Park Infant and Toddler Centre

Background

Bear Park Infant and Toddler Centre is one of 10 Bear Park centres operating under the same management structure in Auckland. This centre is located in Parnell and caters for 29 children aged from three months to three years. At the time of ERO’s visit, 25 children were enrolled (52 percent boys and 48 percent girls) with 84 percent of the children identifying as New Zealand European/Pākehā. The remaining four children were Māori, Indian, German and Brazilian.

The children are cared for in two separate areas; infants in the Fantails group and toddlers in the Moreporks group. Teachers are qualified early childhood teachers and most staff members have worked at the service for many years.

Management has well-developed systems and practices to support the service and ensure professional learning and development (PLD) is planned, relevant and results in improvements to learning and teaching for children. The service’s philosophy is based around the Te Whāriki principles of empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships.⁴ Aspects of Reggio Emilia⁵ are also evident in the presentation of the learning environment and the ways that teachers interact with children.

Learning is visible and valued by managers, teachers, parents, and children. The teaching team works in collaborative ways that are inclusive of parents and each other. Teachers critique each others’ assessments of children’s learning. They share reflections of their own practice, and children’s learning and progress with each other and the parent community.

Defining literacy

Teachers have defined literacy in the following ways:

- “*Literacy is learning to communicate, whether it is reading or writing or using sounds and gestures – it is all about communication.*”
- “*Literacy must be authentic and interesting. Babbling is a natural way to gain language. Scribbling is a natural way to develop muscle control and coordination in ways that integrate a wide range of media for example, pencils, crayons, or paper.*”
- “*Young children’s literacy skills need to be developed through exposure to a hands-on involvement with print-related activities. As listening and speaking, reading and writing, are all interconnected it is important children have a broad and open-ended environment where literacy is embedded into their everyday activities.*”

4 Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early Childhood Curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

5 The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on a child’s natural development. It is child-centred and directed; taking the philosophy that learning must make sense to the child in order to be effective and meaningful. A child’s point of view is completely respected and the child is encouraged to follow their interests.

The service has a strong focus on developing children's emotional literacy and defined this as: *“developing the ability to identify and communicate our feelings and emotions and then respond with empathy. Teachers make sense of their observations of children to find out what is and is not emotional literacy.”*

For teachers, emotional literacy is about their relationships with the children, particularly their observations and interactions. Their understanding of this has been strengthened by recent PLD, and professional discussions and readings. Teachers' self reflections show the progress they have made in interpreting children's expressions, body language, and early language attempts to respond to children's needs, strengthen relationships, and promote language and literacy development.

In 2009, teachers participated in a PLD programme to make literacy more visible in their centre, particularly for parents. Teachers shared this PLD with parents through visual displays, documentation and parent evenings. They also shared their developments with other centres in the Bear Park organisation and the wider community. The PLD presentation showed:

- their developing understanding of literacy
- their reflection on current practice, focusing on verbal and non-verbal communication
- an awareness and enhancement of emotional literacy, especially with their younger infants
- their acknowledgement of the importance of literacy to be widely interwoven in the daily programme, for example, using puzzles to help children decode, sequence, and understand symbols.

Teachers documented the process for making literacy learning visual and displayed this documentation in the centre. The display defined what teachers wanted to achieve, listed professional readings, presentations and discussions that they participated in. It also identified how these events influenced teaching practices and understandings of literacy. Teachers discovered *“that literacy is about making sense and meaning of various language conventionsthat being literate is crucial to social development and educational opportunities and it is an essential skill for successful participation in society.”* As teachers documented more of their literacy developments and the changes that were happening to children's learning and their teaching, parents asked more questions and wanted to participate. Parents' stories and photographs of literacy activities with their children at home were added to the display. Teachers and parents commented that the sharing of the literacy PLD strengthened relationships between them and developed a shared understanding of literacy.



Sharing expectations

Literacy learning is visible and well documented at Bear Park. The wall displays tell the story of how literacy learning is integrated into the children's activities and experiences. Teachers display the rationale for their professional development, what they know, and what they want to know more about. They record how new information is integrated into the programme, and into the outcomes for teaching and learning. Large photographs of children engaging in literacy activities and responding to new initiatives support the written information. Children's next steps for learning and teaching are also displayed for parents and whānau.

The service displays monthly evaluations that provide an overview of the programme. The displays show what teachers have observed children doing in relation to literacy and how teachers have responded. The display includes teachers' reflections that highlight literacy outcomes for children.

Teachers observe and analyse children's learning through considering their literacy development. Learning stories and their analysis show the depth of literacy teaching practices, and how teachers adapt their knowledge to support children's learning in different literacy contexts.

Teachers discuss information with parents and whānau about how to support literacy by making activities more child-initiated and linked to children's interests. Parents and whānau are also involved in assessment. Parents share home based literacy experiences both orally and by writing their own learning stories.

Literacy teaching and learning practice

Teachers respect and respond to children's cues and follow their interests. They clarify their understanding with the children and give them time to think and respond. Through their questioning and modelling, they weave literacy into everyday situations that engage the children and make their literacy learning meaningful.

Story telling time

Four children are listening to a story read by a teacher. The children interrupt to share what is happening in their lives that relate to the story. The teacher allows the children time to share and includes all children. They return to the story, with the teacher asking what happens next, and getting the children to finish the sentences. Time is allowed at the end of the story for the children and the teacher to revisit favourite pages

Teachers engage children in investigations based on their favourite stories, such as *'We're going on a bear hunt'* and *'The very hungry caterpillar.'* These investigations incorporate dramatic play; expressive arts such as paint, clay, collage, and drawing; puppets; and magnetic stories. The outcomes of these investigations are displayed around the service.

The environment for infants and toddlers uses natural materials and their presentation is a feature. Furniture, wall displays and resources are at children's levels. These are displayed in ways that attract children and make them want to explore, experiment and use the materials and resources in many ways. Large photographs of children using resources in different ways give children ideas and encourage them to revisit previous learning.

Children are involved in their own assessments. Teachers read and discuss children's daily diaries and learning stories with them. They encourage children to revisit their learning by recalling what they have done. Children often choose to enact the activity again.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Self review is well developed and multi-layered. Bear Park management provides a comprehensive review structure and clear expectations for regular and purposeful self review.

The service's self-review investigations are displayed in the service. Documentation outlines the investigative questions, why the review is being undertaken and what the service already knows. The action plan for the review is also displayed. As the plan is worked through, progress is noted on the wall display, and is supported by more detailed information. This includes teacher reflections on their practice as a result of PLD, and professional discussions and readings. Parents also write comments on the displays about their child's learning and the centre environment. A recent example of self review involving whānau was an investigation to increase the bicultural component of the programme, which resulted in the involvement of grandparents in the review process.

The physical environment is reviewed every six weeks. Teachers sit in the play areas at the child's level to see the environment from the child's perspective. They use learning stories and their observations of children in this area to identify what could be changed to improve learning and children's participation.

ERO asked Bear Park teachers what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. The manager highlighted two aspects:

- communication and collaboration of all team members to make sure that everyone's ideas are valued and there are opportunities for personal growth.
- embarking on a journey of research every year.

6 The Centre of Innovation (COI) Programme was a strategy aimed at improving the quality of early childhood education. It ran between 2003 and 2009.

7 Reggio Emilia's founder Loris Malaguzzi's notion of 100 languages of children. Symbolic languages, including drawing, sculpting, dramatic play, writing, painting are used to represent children's thinking processes and theories. As children work through problems and ideas they are encouraged to depict their understanding using many different representations. As their thinking evolves they are encouraged to revisit their representation to determine if they are representative of their intent or if they require modification. Teachers and children work together towards an expressed intent. See http://www.reggiokids.com/about/hundred_languages.php.

8 Rui Olds, A. "From cartwheels to caterpillars: children's need to move indoors and out" in Neugebauer b. (Ed) 2006 *Exchange: Curriculum: Art, Music, Movement, Drama* Exchange Press Ltd Redmond: 55–58. Pp55–56.

Botany Downs Kindergarten

Background

Botany Downs Kindergarten in Manukau City was identified as a Centre of Innovation⁶ in 2005. The service's practice is influenced by Reggio Emilia approaches, Malaguzzi's notion of 100 languages,⁶ and PLD for a perceptual motor programme (PMP) that develops brain cognition. Over the past three years, the kindergarten has developed their learning programme and teachers' professional development capabilities considerably. The head teacher ensures that the kindergarten's vision is central to an ongoing process of development that is both responsive and emergent. The kindergarten's philosophy places an emphasis on the notion of connectedness and developing children's skills to become confident communicators.

At the time of ERO's visit, the kindergarten had 90 children enrolled (52 percent boys and 48 percent girls). The roll comprised 71 percent New Zealand European/Pākehā, 11 percent Asian, seven percent South African, and four percent Māori, with the remaining seven percent of Pacific, European or Middle Eastern ethnicities.

Defining literacy

Research has had a big impact on teachers' approach to literacy integration. In particular, theories about sensory motor development are strongly reflected in teachers' practice and beliefs. Teachers believe that learning to read and write involves a relationship between physical movement and brain development. They reference research to support this notion including the ideas of Anita Rui Olds:

*"Until children have experiences of actively orienting their own bodies in space by moving up and down, in front or behind, right and left, they may have difficulty in aspects of reading and writing, such as the orientation of letter symbols on a page."*⁸

The kindergarten's PMP and outdoor play area encourage early fundamental movements such as balance, spatial awareness, hand-eye coordination, directionality, memory, visual development, and auditory discrimination. Teachers encourage the exploration of obstacle courses and opportunities for climbing. They see this as developing directionality and spatial concepts such as up, down, in front and behind. These are crucial concepts for reading print and writing.

The head teacher commented that *"literacy is in everything children do; it is not just reading and writing. To understand literacy, we must let go of the term literacy."* The belief at the service is that literacy is a natural part of learning; it is based on children's interests and is embedded in all aspects of the programme rather than separate. Teachers believe that it is their task to celebrate and build upon the many literacy experiences children bring with them to kindergarten.

Sharing expectations

The head teacher emphasises the kindergarten's expectation that teachers need to also see themselves as learners. As such, teachers are open to new ideas and committed to continuing their own learning. Expectations about teaching practice are generally expressed verbally. During lunch breaks and morning set-up times, teachers engage in reflective discussions about the programme and what occurred the day before so they can continue to build on children's ideas and working theories.

Teachers have developed children's individual portfolios. Portfolios include the kindergarten's expectations and philosophy, as well as photos and records of what children do at kindergarten and at home. The framework for portfolios celebrates who children are, and captures their learning experiences. Children's voices are recorded and parents' comments are encouraged. The head teacher also publishes individual books about some children's development as an extension of their portfolio. Connections between facts, the context of the learning, home and kindergarten, events, and prior knowledge to new learning are explicit.

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

The kindergarten's Centre of Innovation research question asked: how does an inclusive environment enhance the learning of all children? One of the two sub questions focused on using communication tools to invite and extend engagement with children and their families. The kindergarten has developed a website and blog that provides a wealth of information and actively connects the kindergarten with its families, schools and community.

The kindergarten has produced a literacy book that shows what literacy at the service looks like. It explains how play supports literacy through photos and captions that make the links explicit. The book also focuses on early literacy and the role of physical play in learning. Teachers have developed posters that communicate the kindergarten's expectations about literacy. In addition to this, the kindergarten provides parents with an information pack that includes a letter formation chart and a pencil grip chart.

During ERO's visit, we talked with some parents. The following comments highlight the parents' understanding of early literacy:

"Children are exposed to words and letters at kindergarten. It sets good foundations and it happens naturally."

“Children have an appreciation for books. Teachers use children’s books from home and use stories to develop their own book for the centre.”

“At parents’ evenings we learn about the importance of play in learning and if this does not take place problems can occur.”

Literacy teaching and learning in practice

Teachers at Botany Downs Kindergarten have explored many strategies to promote literacy. To support their approach to theory, teachers have been involved in centre based action research so that they are able to identify what works for their teaching practice and for children’s development. Teachers implement a child focused approach to learning and support children’s oral skills through listening, extending and playing with vocabulary, ordering and expressing ideas, thinking skills, and letter and sound recognition.

Teachers support children to write stories independently, which are made into books, with the children deciding on the words and pictures used to illustrate.

Writing a Fairy Story

A teacher and some children are making up a fairy story. The children have asked for the story to be written. The teacher writes a child’s initial idea, and then asks questions and uses the answers to build up the story. The teacher asks the children how they can illustrate the story, suggesting options such as drawing, taking photos, or searching the internet for images. The story is built up over several days. Stories are published and are shared at group time in a format of the child’s choosing – book, big screen, or blog. The child and the kindergarten each get a copy of the story so the experience can be revisited.

Throughout the day children have access to writing materials, including the computer. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) play an important part in the programme, both as teaching tools and learning experiences for children. Some communication technologies include ‘Skype’ and ‘ooVoo.’⁹ These resources provide opportunities for children to talk to others via the computer. ICT is used to revisit recent learning experiences. On the day of ERO’s visit, a data show presentation was playing. It was about tadpoles and what the children had said about them.

Children and teachers engage in meaningful conversations. Teachers believe that successful communication underpins everything that the service does. Children construct their ideas and develop their thinking through social interactions, particularly with their peers. Teachers use skilful questioning to challenge children’s thinking and to model questioning. Children have opportunities to retell stories in their own way and to build new vocabulary. Teachers foster the use of imagination and integrate this into children’s writing. For example, ICT was used to record the retelling of the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Plastic characters were used to re-enact the story and children’s voices were recorded to narrate the story.

9 Skype is a program for computers and phones which allows people to share text, video and audio over the internet. ooVoo is an instant messaging program similar to Skype that allows real time recording and six-way chatting.

Children's strong interest in animals is a focus for the programme. The kindergarten has birds, fish, turtles, tadpoles, rats, and guinea pigs that each has their own portfolios. Animal related vocabulary is displayed and the children are able to explore information about the animals on a laptop computer. Fact sheets are also available, such as the lifecycle of the frog.

Teachers hold parent meetings to talk about their knowledge of literacy and explain children's learning and progressions and the importance of physical balance. Parent meetings have also included presentations from external speakers and specific evenings for "dads and their children". These sessions linked in well to what local schools are doing. Teachers work collaboratively to ensure that their relationships with children's families and 14 local schools result in confident children who will transition successfully into school.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Teachers engage in in-depth reflection and effective, consultative self review grounded in their own and others' research. As a result, development of the literacy learning in the programme is well considered and thoughtful. It is implemented through a focus on inclusion and partnership, and recognition of the vital role that parents play in children's learning and development. Teachers have robust systems for documenting children's literacy learning and the programme. They plan to develop this by exploring further theories about learning.

ERO asked Botany Downs Kindergarten teachers what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. The staff highlighted many aspects. They said:

- literacy should be enjoyed
- literacy should capture children's voices on paper, in books and digitally. This shows the child they are capable and competent in the field of literacy
- literacy should encourage problem solving and persistence. A child who is encouraged to take risks is more inclined to 'give writing a go'
- that language is about patterns, so create patterns. Look for 'same and different', 'up and down', and for similarities
- that many literacies build around a practice or an event. For example literacies related to technology, a television programme, a religious or cultural event, a new baby
- literacy should role model word play. Offer different words for the same meaning, be inventive
- that building friendships increases opportunities for communication and expression.



E Tipu e Rea Early Learning Centre

Background

E Tipu e Rea Early Learning Centre was established in 1990 and is situated in the grounds of Aranui High School in Christchurch. Located in a low decile area, E Tipu e Rea is a multicultural service that caters for children from infancy to school age in separate nursery and preschool areas. A community trust board of parents and community members manage the service. At the time of ERO's visit, the services had 58 children enrolled (55 percent girls and 45 percent boys). The service's roll included 57 percent New Zealand European/Pākehā, 36 percent Māori, two percent Samoan and five percent from other ethnicities.

All teachers are fully trained and qualified in early childhood education. Many have worked in the service for a long time and are vibrant and passionate early childhood teachers. A child-led programme is reflected in the service's philosophy and practice.

The outdoor environment was extensively redeveloped during 2009 and 2010 following consultation with the local community, teachers, parents, and children at the service. As a result, the outdoor area provides a wide range of interesting places for children to create, play, interact with the natural environment, and be stimulated by an environment that reflects the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The process of redevelopment illustrates the way staff work hard to include children, their whānau, and the wider community in improving the service.

Defining literacy

Managers and teachers have a broad view of literacy. They believe that being literate is much wider than simply learning the mechanics of reading and writing. Establishing a sound oral foundation, particularly in storytelling and conversations, is seen as integral to literacy learning. Children's developing language competency is supported by providing a wide range of experiences within the service and excursions in and around the community. Building on authentic experiences is integrated throughout the programme. Children play an important role in planning, evaluating and reflecting on the many trips that occur. Their ideas are valued and used to inform teachers' planning.

Teachers model literacy practices in the environment for children, such as writing down morning tea orders for tea and coffee from other staff and referring back to the list when delivering the drinks. They read recipes to children and refer back to them when cooking with the children. There are many opportunities for children to participate in a range of storytelling experiences. Routines include aspects of literacy such as children signing in and out at the beginning and end of the day, karakia, volunteer and helper charts. Music and cooking, including shared kai, play a significant part in the programme and enrich children's oral language and provide opportunities for sharing experiences. Children share their work such as offering their baking to others as part of kai and explaining to children about the recipe when other children ask what ingredients were used.



Service practices promote close relationships between teachers and whānau. Not only are parents on the community trust board, but they also actively participate in assessment evenings about what assessment looks like and how they can contribute. Children have many opportunities to interact with adults and peers, and to work and play together in pairs and small groups in a range of activities that encourage communication. The integration of each child's own cultural and linguistic background is valued and promoted.

Parents and whānau actively support the service's focus on the experiential teaching and learning of literacy through a child-led and focused programme. They have contributed to a review of the literacy programme through conversations and a survey, and understand the value of children engaging in authentic experiences to develop literacy competence.

“E Tipu e Rea is a special place for every child to create their future dreams and be fully equipped with quality tools for adulthood”.

Parent Comment.

Sharing expectations

A regular review of literacy is part of E Tipu e Rea's annual philosophy review. This review helps them strategically plan such things as staff professional development. Teachers identify and agree on individual and team goals that include a focus on literacy teaching and learning.

A culture of high trust and professional collaboration exists among teachers and managers. Teachers regularly reflect on their practice and discuss the impact of their teaching strategies for children's oral language development and literacy learning. A sound, collaboratively developed staff contract provides the basis for team meetings where 'brave conversations' can occur. Staff critically challenge ideas and assumptions about literacy teaching and learning in a supportive environment. All reflection meetings include a discussion on how teachers can include some aspect of literacy for a child's next learning step.

Each teacher develops individual appraisal goals linked to literacy. Appropriate professional development is provided to support teachers to meet this goal. The strengths and interests of individual teachers are recognised and used to enrich the programme. For example, a teacher with strong ICT skills helps others with the presentation of visual, oral and written information. Another teacher has developed strong networks with other literacy leaders in the local community. In 2009, five teachers participated in, and shared good practice with, a local literacy cluster that included local primary schools and early childhood services.

Strong and positive relationships between staff, whānau, and children are seen as critical for children's learning and success. Parents receive ongoing information about the literacy programme. They are kept up to date with regular newsletters that discuss things such as the outcomes of a parent survey of the literacy programme, and plans developed to support children's learning. Reflection and planning meeting notes are displayed on the notice board for parents to access. They are encouraged to discuss the programme and their child's learning and development with teachers.

Literacy teaching and learning practice

High quality relationships between staff, children, and whānau encourage children to take a lead in their own learning. Children are supported to take risks in their literacy learning when appropriate. They make choices and decisions about their learning and are equipped with appropriate social skills for learning with and alongside others. Whānau are encouraged to participate in a range of activities at the service. A camp and picnic for whānau is held each year where staff and whānau spend time getting to know each other. Email is a tool that is used by the service to include parents in their child's learning by sharing digital photographs.

Children have many opportunities to develop strong literacy learning through an integrated approach in the programme. Daily activities for children include a sign in and out register that children take responsibility for. They are able to recognise their own name and the names of other children in the service. This is reinforced during meal breaks as children volunteer for specific responsibilities and their name is put on to a chart. Clipboards are used by children who engage in role play. For example, children set up a cafe where they created signs and a menu, and took orders using order forms. The outdoor area has a path with authentic road signs that are used by children when riding bikes and in their general play. Other experiences include visits to the local school, preparing food and baking, exploration with music and art, and socio-dramatic play that is child led.

Baking Scones

Four children are in the kitchen making scones with a teacher. The recipe is displayed on the table. The teacher makes a link to the story of the gingerbread man and the little old lady as the children use their fingers to rub in the butter. The teacher makes up a song "rub, rub, rub the butter". As they are pouring in the milk the teacher says "the mixture must get swishy" and the song changes to "swishy, swishy, rub, rub, rub". As the children progress through the recipe they "sprinkle, sprinkle" the flour, and "pat it, pat it, pat it until it's flat", and finally "slice it, slice it, until it's nice".

Storytelling is a regular feature of the day. Children are read to by adults, have a wide range of books, and participate in shared storytelling. Magnetic resources are used to promote storytelling. Recounts of children's experiences are displayed throughout the environment. Children are able to see themselves in the stories and can revisit their experiences often.

Teachers at E Tipu e Rea recognise and value children's ideas and interests.

Catching Insects

The children are finding and then examining insects in a bug catcher. A teacher suggests the children use their clipboards to record the number and kind of insects they have found, and where in the service they found them. The teacher then encourages the children to write what the insects might like to eat, depending on their location.

A regular children's meeting is held that, while supported by teachers, is led by the children. Minutes are kept of the meeting and decisions are recorded. Topics for discussion are decided by the children and have included developing rules for the meetings, having a meeting to establish rules for using the new slide, organising a surprise party, and holding a meeting about kapa haka. A children's survey was also conducted where children gathered the thoughts of their peers about eating lunch outside. They used tally charts to gather information, which was then used to plan 'lunch outside'. Data gathered by the children was collated into graphs that were shared with the children so that they could discuss the findings and make some decisions.

Affirming children's identity is also a feature of literacy practice at E Tipu e Rea. Māori language and tikanga is a regular part of the day with karakia and waiata. Teachers use te reo Māori naturally when interacting with children. Karakia and waiata charts are displayed and referred to, with older children leading the karakia each day. Dances from various Pacific cultures are included in the programme, incorporating aspects of music such as rhythms and patterns. Community resources are drawn on to strengthen these cultural practices. Students from the local high school visit to read and talk with the children in te reo Māori. Children also regularly visit the local marae and interact with kaumatua.

ICT provides children with another medium for experiencing literacy in their environment. Daily digital slideshows of children at play are created and are shown during meal times on a big screen when children express a desire to revisit their recent learning. Children talk about the pictures and revisit their experiences. In addition, the digital slideshows give parents a visual record of their child's day.

Teachers reflect on children's learning as part of the assessment process. They include comments alongside learning stories for individual children. Parent feedback on assessment is positive as they appreciate the opportunity to talk with teachers about their child's learning. In all learning stories, regardless of the context, teachers specifically reflect on the literacy learning and consider how to best support the child's next literacy learning steps.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Self-review practices throughout the service are planned, strategic and responsive. Team meetings are a platform for teachers to critique all aspects of their practice and to reflect on children's literacy learning. Well established and agreed protocols for these meetings ensure that staff feel safe and supported to talk honestly about their work.

A recent self review investigated how teachers could provide children with a wide range of opportunities to participate in literacy learning during routines, and other aspects of the service's programme. The review included the development of outcome indicators, and subsequent actions, responsibilities, resources and timeframes. These resulting plans are detailed and provide teachers with specific ideas for practice and evaluation of outcomes for children.

Managers identified that greater parent involvement in the planning and evaluation of their child's learning is an area that they would like to develop further. A more in depth parent survey is planned and will provide staff with useful information to assist this development.

ERO asked E Tipu e Rea teachers what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. Managers highlighted two aspects:

- it takes time to establish a good literacy programme
- child-led and meaningful contexts for learning are important.

Massey University Child Care Centre – Hoiho & Tui Infant and Toddler Centres

Background

The Hoiho and Tui centres are part of Massey University Child Care Centre located on the Massey University campus in Palmerston North. The services each cater for twenty under-two year old children and five children over-two year olds. Each service has its own manager, staff and budget. The director has responsibility for the organisation and operation of these and two other services in the complex. At the time of ERO's visit, Hoiho had 29 children enrolled (48 percent boys and 52 percent girls) and Tui had 25 children enrolled (52 percent boys and 48 percent girls). Between the two services, 74 percent of children enrolled were New Zealand European/Pākehā, 15 percent Māori, and 11 percent from other ethnicities.

The Hoiho service has maintained stable staffing for a number of years, and the staff are qualified early childhood teachers. Hoiho was a Centre of Innovation in 2005, with a focus on educational leadership and the implementation of collaborative culture. The manager and teachers share an approach to learning and teaching that is based on current research, self-reflection, and discussing professional practice within the services and the wider educational community. This team culture remains strong through review, dialogue, challenging practice, trust and openness.

Staff changes have occurred recently in the Tui centre's team. The manager and teachers have begun a process of rebuilding staff capability. The most significant part of this process is establishing relationships that are based on trust, respect and professional responsibility.

Both centres have a philosophy that is articulated and guides practice, where children are central and their diversity is celebrated. Managers support teachers to become reflective practitioners and to use research critically to examine their own values, beliefs and practices. Teachers evaluate and improve their own teaching through professional reading and dialogue with colleagues, critical self-reflection that challenges their practice, and ongoing discussion with their managers.

Defining literacy

Managers and teachers believe that relationships and attachment are the foundation for all literacy learning. Literacy teaching and learning is an integral part of infants and toddlers' daily experiences. Teachers knowing children well and forming close relationships with infants and toddlers gives them confidence to explore their environment and to communicate with others.

Communication between a key teacher and the family, a key teacher and her buddy, and between a key teacher and a child, is vital. Communication or early literacy includes the teacher noticing and responding appropriately to the child's body cues, facial expressions, or sounds, and conveying this understanding to the child. Being able to read children's cues and supporting them when they start to develop verbal language is central to the service's practices.

Sharing expectations

The director and service managers meet weekly in what they call "a spiral force" for future visioning, strategic thinking, and long and short-term planning. These sessions include building leadership capacity, and exploring features of leadership that are linked to outcomes for children, including literacy outcomes.

Teachers keep literacy central in their planning and assessment. A wall display in the Tui centre outlines how children acquire language in the programme. The display explains how children develop language, and how the programme activities and interactions support this process. The display includes examples and photographs of children acquiring language.

Teachers plan for individual children. This includes an evaluation of recent learning, relevant goals from *Te Whāriki*, teaching strategies, and a mini map of opportunities and possibilities that follow the children's interests. Planning for one toddler identified his development with expressing his feelings by using an increasing oral vocabulary. His future learning was linked to the communication strands of *Te Whāriki*, and teaching strategies focused on modelling and demonstrating language and communication by following his current interest in animals.

Teachers also plan for groups of children. ERO saw planning in response to a large group of children who were beginning to play with language and engage in conversations with adults and other children. The planning highlighted a reminder to adults about children's ability to articulate verbally and non-verbally to communicate their understanding. A range of planned experiences included playing games and singing nursery rhymes with a focus on rhyme and alliteration, expressive action songs, puppetry, and sharing storybooks.

Children's portfolios include stories of infants and toddlers learning, and responding to oral language and building relationships. The stories often include information about how children acquire literacy skills and suggestions for teachers and parents to use children's interests to help their literacy development at home or at the centre. The centres also provide parents with information about how children's literacy develops, with information sheets such as "*Before I learn to write I need to...*". One learning story identified the next steps for one child to continue to promote literacy learning as:

- *modelling and demonstrating language and communication skills*
- *talk, talk, talk – about what is happening, what the child is doing, and what is happening*
- *ensuring joint attention of child and adult*
- *supporting literacy through scaffolding and co-construction*
- *providing opportunities for literacy experiences to be repeated.*

Literacy teaching and learning in practice

Relationships and communication are central to the children's literacy learning in the Hoiho and Tui centres. There is a strong sense of whānau and community, and there are lots of conversations between and amongst adults and children. Throughout the day teachers model simple sentence structures and include children in meaningful conversations. Conversations include encouraging children to talk about their home experiences and what happens in the service.

Infants and toddlers choose their activities. Teachers are aware of the child's cues that signal where they would like to be. They talk to infants as active contributors to the conversation, often posing questions like "*I wonder what would happen?*" They allow time for thinking before giving a number of possibilities and the reason they have made a particular choice, for example, "*I know you really like the yellow ones, so let's use yellow ones today.*"

Literacy learning for infants focuses on non-verbal and oral literacy. Infants are included in story sessions and sit on teachers' laps. Teachers often use stories to signal that the child should get ready for a sleep saying "*I think you might be ready for a sleep. You have had your lunch. Choose a book that you would like.*" The child and teacher cuddle up together and read the story. Bubble play, accompanied by "The Bubble Song" encouraged infants to not only perform the associated finger play, but also to try and sing the words.

Teachers provide literacy opportunities where children are able to follow their own interests.

Chalk Drawing

Teachers make large pieces of chalk available to the children outside. The children are using these to draw on the concrete and teachers prompt conversations, asking children what they are drawing. A father is also drawing with the children, talking about what he is drawing, and asking questions about what should come next.

Literacy activities are included in everyday routines. ERO observed a teacher engaging children playing in the sandpit in a conversation about sunblock. She showed the children the sunblock chart and how the chart showed who had sunblock on. The conversation moved on to wearing hats, with the teacher pointing out the children's names in their hats.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Self review is well integrated into all aspects of the centres' management and teaching practice. Spontaneous reviews occur from teachers' reflection on their practice, the environment, and their relationships. These reviews follow a set process of gathering evidence about what is currently happening, deciding what needs to change, developing an action plan, evaluating outcomes for learning and teaching, and deciding if any further action is required.

Planned reviews of literacy teaching and learning include outcomes for children. Examples of these outcomes identified in one review included:

- language development
- recall of song lyrics and actions
- increases in vocabulary and sentence construction
- an increased understanding of oral language as a way to communicate
- an understanding that books are interesting, amusing, delightful and illuminating
- concepts about books.

ERO asked the Massey Hoiho and Tui teachers what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. Managers highlighted four aspects:

- relationships and attachments are everything
- know the children well and do what works for individual children
- think about children in an holistic way
- continue to increase teachers' knowledge, skills and interest.



Peachgrove Playcentre

Background

Peachgrove Playcentre in Hamilton has been operating for over 40 years. The parent led cooperative provides education for parents and their children and is administered by the Waikato Playcentre Association. The service operates seven sessions a week, including one session for children aged three-and-a-half to six years. A parent team is responsible for each session. At the time of ERO's visit, the service had 28 children enrolled (61 percent boys and 29 percent girls) including 71 percent of the roll New Zealand European/Pākehā, 14 percent Māori, eight percent Asian, and seven percent Indian.

A group of dedicated and knowledgeable parents, many of whom have been involved with the playcentre for over ten years, effectively manages the service. Parents have a collaborative approach to leadership that helps them increase their knowledge of good practice for the education and care of children. The Waikato Playcentre Association parent education programme provides parents with the framework for the operation of the service, and the training and support they need to provide effective early childhood education and care. This is reflected in the service's mission statement: "*Educate the parents so that they can educate the children.*"

Playcentre's philosophy promotes children's learning through 16 areas of play, with children choosing and initiating their play, and working at their own pace. Parents encourage learning through their involvement in the children's play, their interactions with the children, and the support that they provide to each other in the playcentre and the wider community. They believe that "*parents have a role to play in children's learning through play.*"

Defining literacy

Peachgrove Playcentre has an holistic approach to literacy. Parents acknowledge the importance of literacy learning developed through appropriate play-based and child initiated learning. Oral, written, and visual literacy is integrated into all sixteen areas of play. Children enjoy and use literacy in all its forms to express who they are, and to interact with others at playcentre, their homes, and the wider community. Parents at the service believe that all children come to the service with emerging literacy skills and a developing understanding of themselves and their place in the world.



Parents recognise their role as children's first and most significant teachers. Their understanding of their role as a teacher and promoter of literacy is increased through participation in the Playcentre parent education training programme and workshops. Some of these workshops focus particularly on literacy. For example, one of the early courses gives guidance to parents in reading a story and involving children in predicting and making connections between the text and their own life experiences.

At the time of ERO's visit, half of the parents at Peachgrove Playcentre were trained primary or secondary teachers. They promote the importance of a play-based, child initiated programme in developing literacy learning to provide a sound foundation for literacy learning at school.

Sharing expectations

Playcentre expectations for literacy are identified in the parent education courses, wall displays and guidelines for learning stories, programme planning and evaluation. There is an expectation that any potential literacy learning in activities will be identified and focused on.

Learning stories are written by the parent or an adult who knows the child and the family well. These stories are often followed by a story about how the Playcentre literacy experience has been followed up in the home. For example, in one child's portfolio the first story identified the child's interest in books about farm animals. The parent wrote the second story. It linked the story about reading and farm animals to a visit to the public library to find more books about farm animals and a visit to a farm.

The supervision team completes programme evaluations at the end of each session by answering a series of questions. The team identifies what has gone well, what were the children's interests, how parents support these interests, and what changes could be made to the next session to improve children's learning. Many of the evaluations are about children's involvement in literacy. For example, a breakfast day was held at the service and children were given menus to order their food. Children made their orders by writing their name on the menu and ticking the pictured item (accompanied by the words). Younger children were helped by adults or older children to complete their orders. During the session evaluation, the parents analysed children's literacy learning in selecting and using a menu to order food, and made suggestions to further promote this kind of activity.

Wall displays at the playcentre provide parents with many suggestions for encouraging conversations and literacy activities with children. For example, one wall display identifies literacy as part of everything that children do. It suggests that when parents talk to children about their play, they should give good feedback about what the children have been doing and suggestions about what the children might do next. Another display suggests asking children ‘thinking’ questions that could begin with “I wonder?” or “what would happen if?”

Literacy teaching and learning practice

Parents use the physical environment, interactions, and resources that reflect oral, visual, and written language to extend literacy learning. Children are well supported by adults who notice, recognise and respond to their play and conversations, and integrate aspects of reading and writing into play.

Parents actively listen to children’s conversations and use a range of questions to encourage children to share their thoughts and knowledge, problem solve, investigate, and make sense of their world. Conversations about activities related to home or in the community (for example, medical play) are extended through introducing vocabulary and asking questions.

Parents observe children’s interest in books and offer to read stories. Stories are read to small groups of children both indoors and outdoors. Children and adults often cuddle together to share stories, discuss the pictures and joke about the content and pictures. The same story is often read and enjoyed over and over again at a child’s request and enjoyment.

Children are encouraged in their writing attempts, with parents ensuring these attempts are positive experiences that build on their skills in a supportive and authentic environment.

tunnel

Bryn* was reluctant to write his name for a long time. Every week he was asked if he would like to ‘sign in’ and every week he would decline. When parents realised he was feeling quite anxious about it, one suggested he might like to draw a picture of himself instead. He did this for some weeks, then, when he felt comfortable, he started to make symbols on the paper. Another parent talked with him about letters and the references he might like to use to remember them (eg n = a tunnel for a train). After only one week, he felt confident enough to write his name on paper. He continued to write his name in various mediums – chalk, paint, clay, sand.

(*NAME CHANGED)

Interesting literacy experiences are part of the programme. For example, in one session parents held a Goldilocks and the Three Bears breakfast. The children listened to the story and shared porridge together. The family, book and outdoor areas were set up with prompts that related to Goldilocks and the Three Bears to encourage children to revisit the story in their own ways.

Letter Fish

Some children are fishing for magnetic fish in the water play trough. Each fish has a letter on it. As the children catch the fish they say the name of the letter and its sound. One child catches lots of “letter fish.” A parent says “You could catch the right fish to spell your name.” The child responds “That would be r-o-s-e”^{*} and starts to catch the fish she needs. (*NAME CHANGED)

The playcentre has a special session once a week for children aged three-and-a-half to six years. The focus of this session is on integrating literacy, numeracy, and transition to school activities into the children’s play. One planned event for these children was a visit of a lamb. The session involved lots of long complex conversations, and the creation of charts for vet check-ups for various animals.

Parents share knowledge about literacy teaching and learning through play in meaningful contexts. This is highlighted by this comment from a parent educator:

We integrate literacy learning in all that we do with the children. We really foster learning through play; we live it. And this means anything from singing songs, to reading books all over the centre (on the couches, at the kai table, outside under the trees, in the fort, books about water at the water trough), to the simple act of asking if they would like to write their own name on their artwork. It starts from a young age with the simple act of making marks. We work with children at whatever stage they are at within their interests.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Self review is a deliberate and ongoing process of finding out how well practices improve children’s learning and development. In 2009, professional development gave the parents a structure and process for review. During 2010, parents reviewed the inclusion of te reo and tikanga Māori in the programme. The review resulted in changes to the programme and a further review to monitor changes. As part of the daily session evaluations, parents review their inclusion and use of te reo and tikanga in the programme. They have introduced a Friday whānau evening to strengthen whānau relationships.

ERO asked Peachgrove Playcentre parents what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. Parents highlighted these aspects:

- develop a shared knowledge of what literacy is and how it develops so that you know what you are doing and why you do it
- develop your own knowledge of the children so that you know who you are doing it with
- recognise that there are so many ways to incorporate literacy learning within the children’s emerging interests by adding books; writing paper and pens, chalk, and even water to make marks on the concrete; songs and rhymes; and conversation
- take time to think and discuss ideas with other adults, but most importantly, with the children
- keep it simple and meaningful.

Reporoa Kindergarten

Background

Reporoa Kindergarten is located in Reporoa, a small, rural township in the central North Island. The kindergarten is administered by the Central North Island Kindergarten Association. There are four qualified early childhood teachers and an administrator at the kindergarten. At the time of ERO's visit the kindergarten had 59 children enrolled (51 percent girls and 49 percent boys). The kindergarten has a high percentage of children identified as Māori enrolled (37 percent). New Zealand European/Pākehā were 61 percent of the roll, and other ethnicities make up the remaining two percent.

The head teacher is an effective leader who is inclusive and empowers all team members. Self review is integral to the culture and philosophy of this team. Reviews are well-documented, systematic, research-based, and focused on improving aspects of the kindergarten and teacher performance.

The kindergarten setting respects and nurtures Māori culture and language. One teacher is Māori and she has been pivotal in establishing protocols, culture, and understandings in the kindergarten.

Relationships that are respectful and reciprocal at all levels are a feature of the kindergarten. These relationships are established and sustained through open communication, meaningful consultation, mutual trust, and friendships between teachers, tamariki and whānau.

Professional partnerships that support children's learning and transition are well established between the kindergarten and five local schools. The head teacher and school teachers meet regularly to discuss their teaching practices and the ways they complement each other to promote children's ongoing learning. The schools value the foundation that the kindergarten teachers provide for children's literacy and preparation for school.

Defining literacy

The teaching team believes that good relationships with children and whānau are critical to the success of literacy. Literacy learning is woven throughout the daily programme. It goes beyond reading and writing to also include listening, speaking, 'techno literacy',¹⁰ and developing critical thinking.

The kindergarten's philosophy is enacted through a child-initiated, resource-based programme. It expresses an aim to support the development of children's well-being and belonging which teachers see as vital for the further development of communication. The teaching team reviews the philosophy annually. This includes making sure all teachers share a common understanding of literacy and the ways it can be included in the programme and assessed as part of children's learning.

10 Techno literacy refers to literacy practices and events mediated by relating to technologies, such as computers, television, and mobile phones. Marsh, J. (2004). The techno-literacy practices of young children. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2, 51–66.

Self review has had a significant influence on the development of literacy learning for children, teachers and whānau. The Central North Island Kindergarten Association's strategic goals provide direction for the development of the kindergarten's annual goals for improving learning and teaching. In 2010, one goal focused on teachers sharing knowledge about children's learning, including literacy, with whānau and the wider community. Another goal focused on providing ICT that promoted high quality learning and teaching experiences.

Sharing expectations

The strong priority that teachers give to fostering children's interest and confidence in literacy learning is also evident in the kindergarten's assessment practices, and the environment.

Literacy is a regular topic at staff meetings and in teachers' discussions about the programme and children's learning. Literacy is well documented in children's profile books and learning stories. Profile books include examples of children's writing, the context of the writing, and why this writing is significant learning. Learning stories record children's interests, thinking and investigations. They identify why these events are important learning for the child and give possibilities to extend the learning. Teachers often ask children what their learning means to them and record the children's responses as an attachment to the learning story. Parents also include comments about the children's learning and the progress that they have observed.

Literacy teaching and learning practice

Teachers plan the environment to provide children with many opportunities to develop their literacy learning.

- Wall displays provide children with clues to help them with reading and writing.
- The library area is an open, inviting, central space with comfortable chairs and cushions. Children and parents regularly sit in this area to talk and share stories.
- Children independently use a computer, printer and scanner. They use word and picture cards to help them log on to the computer and complete their own research. Writing materials are also available in this area. Displays of children's computer work provide ideas and possibilities. Children also use the computer to edit the photographs that they take during the programme.
- A laptop computer and camera are available outside. ERO observed a child trying to photograph a snail but having difficulty making the snail stay in one place. After the snail was finally photographed the child opened the photograph on the computer and magnified the different parts of the snail that he wanted to find out more about.

- A writing ‘house’ outside has a table covered in research books, clipboards, paper and other writing materials. Beanbags are also in the area for children to use.

Visits outside the kindergarten are well documented and displayed. Children are encouraged to take photographs of what they have seen and enjoyed. On returning to the kindergarten the children carefully select a small set of photographs from several shots. They work with teachers to develop a story that relates to the photographs. These are displayed and children share them with each other and their whānau. This activity helps children develop oral literacy, problem solving, sequencing of ideas, and creating stories.

Children, teachers and whānau know local Māori history and customs well. They take pride in this knowledge and include it in the programme and events. Tikanga and te reo Māori is well integrated into all aspects of the kindergarten. It is reflected in the wall displays and the indoor and outdoor environments. Learning stories, DVDs and CDs are used to record children’s te reo and tikanga Māori experiences within and beyond the centre. The children perform at the Tuwharetoa Festival. The service has its own pepeha¹⁰ that children and teachers use to welcome visitors. Te reo Māori is used in the programme by children, teachers and whānau, and is included in the learning stories.

Teachers build on children’s interests and promote literacy. Conversations are respectful and thought provoking, with teachers taking their lead from the child. They ask questions to find out what the child already knows and what they want to know more about. Questions also help children to think, wonder and investigate further. Teachers encourage children to document their experiences through writing, art and by making their own CD and DVDs.

Teachers at the kindergarten and the local schools have a common understanding of literacy and value the contribution that each makes to children’s literacy understanding and development. Kindergarten and school teachers visit each other’s classrooms, and individual children’s progress is shared. The school teachers use the kindergarten profile books to begin to develop a relationship with each child and to understand, use and build on their previous learning at kindergarten and home. The schools and kindergarten have developed a protocol that on the first visit to the school the kindergarten teacher and parent accompany the child as part of a “handing over” of the child to the school.

11 Pepeha: way of introducing yourself in Māori.

Evaluating literacy teaching and learning through self review

Self review is well established and is effectively used to extend literacy learning and teaching. Close links are made between the association and kindergarten strategic and annual plans and self review. Teachers investigate current teaching practices to determine where improvements can be made.

In 2010, teachers identified the need to become more confident and articulate in sharing their knowledge and philosophy for learning with parents and the wider educational community. They used professional readings, research, professional development courses, and parent surveys to help them clarify what they knew and what they needed to convey to parents and the community. Teachers focused on their different audiences and the kinds of conversations that they needed to have with each group. They began to discuss literacy information in planned ways with each group and asked for feedback. Teachers now welcome questions and challenges and have found that they can confidently articulate the value of their literacy practices.

ERO asked Reporoa Kindergarten teachers what advice they would give to other services about developing high quality literacy teaching and learning practice. Teachers highlighted five aspects:

- develop a team research question that focuses on literacy
- use resources from the Ministry of Education, the internet, colleagues, current theory, professional development, and seminars to support your investigation
- work from the children's interests so literacy is meaningful. Children initiate their own learning experiences
- build children's literacy knowledge through discussions and conversations with them
- be able to articulate your knowledge to parents, and build on the understanding that literacy is more than just learning your ABCs and to write your name.



Focusing on aspects of good literacy practice

This section is based on information from the remaining six services and focuses on particular aspects of literacy practice, drawing on practice from one or more of these services.

Who are the services?

Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne

Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne in Lower Hutt is jointly owned and maintained by Barnardos and the Eastbourne Community Childcare Group. The service provides mixed-age education and care from birth to five year old children. At the time of ERO's visit, 29 children were enrolled (52 percent boys, 48 percent girls). New Zealand European/Pākehā make up 72 percent of the roll, Māori 10 percent, Dutch seven percent, with Greek, Indian, and Japanese making up the remaining 11 percent.

The service has six teachers, three who are qualified and registered ECE teachers. Another two teachers are studying towards ECE qualifications. The service's philosophy supports child-directed learning, and literacy teaching and learning often occurs in the context of child-initiated projects.

Nelson South Kindergarten

Nelson South Kindergarten operates under the constitution and philosophy of the Nelson Kindergarten Association. At the time of ERO's visit the kindergarten had 76 children enrolled (68 percent boys, 32 percent girls), with 61 percent of the roll New Zealand European/Pākehā, 14 percent Māori, five percent Pacific, and a variety of other ethnicities made up the remaining 20 percent.

The teaching team of six qualified teachers brings a range of experience and knowledge to their work. They share a commitment to keeping up to date with current research and a passion for literacy teaching. Teachers have a good understanding of research and theory, what it means for their practice, and the ability to put new learning into practice. The culture of the kindergarten is one in which teachers are open to new ideas and 'giving things a go'.

Richmond Kindergarten

Richmond Kindergarten in Nelson operates under the constitution and philosophy of the Nelson Kindergarten Association. At the time of ERO's visit, 49 children were enrolled (51 percent boys, 49 percent girls). New Zealand European/Pākehā were 80 percent of the roll, Māori were 10 percent, Pacific four percent, and other European ethnicities made up the remaining six percent. The kindergarten operates under an all day licence.

The kindergarten has a stable, qualified and experienced teaching team. Teamwork is a strength of the kindergarten and individual strengths are also well used. Teachers have a common and agreed focus that places importance on supporting children's physical and associated brain development. They are very aware of how this focus supports children's literacy learning, particularly the value of gross and fine motor skill development in helping children with skills for writing. They believe that it is important for children to be physically active and this has benefits for them as learners.

Strathmore Kindergarten

Strathmore Kindergarten is located in Whakatane and is administered by the Central North Island Kindergarten Association. The kindergarten caters for 40 children aged from two years to school age. It provides a six-hour session, four days a week and a 4¼ hour session on Wednesdays. The kindergarten employs four qualified early childhood teachers and an administrator. At the time of ERO's visit, 42 children were enrolled (57 percent girls, 43 percent boys).¹² Fifty-four percent of children enrolled identified as Māori, 31 percent as New Zealand European/Pākehā, nine percent from South East Asian ethnicities, and the remaining six percent Indian.

The head teacher's leadership is inclusive and uses team strengths to continue to improve learning and teaching. Self review is well established. Teachers take responsibility for term reviews that are focused on improving the environment for children.

The kindergarten philosophy recognises the importance of children learning through play and active exploration. Children are encouraged to become independent and responsible, and to care and respect themselves, others and the environment.

Taikura Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten – Hastings

The Taikura Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten is one of three kindergartens in the Hawkes Bay affiliated to Taikura Rudolf Steiner School, Hastings. Children can attend the kindergarten from the age of three and transition to the Rudolf Steiner School in their seventh year. At the time of ERO's visit, the kindergarten had 27 children enrolled (52 percent girls, 48 percent boys). New Zealand European/Pākehā children made up 89 percent of the roll, Māori nine percent, with the remaining two percent from other ethnicities.

The Rudolf Steiner philosophy underpins the programme design and implementation, the development of the environment, and the way adults and children interact. This philosophy strongly influences the way literacy is defined, understood and practised in this service. The service has four registered teachers and two teachers in training.

¹² This roll number includes shared place children.

Literacy was a strategic focus for the three Steiner kindergartens and the associated Steiner school in 2008. Through self-directed research teachers deepened their understanding of literacy in a Steiner context and helped them to further develop how they documented children's learning.

Totara Hill Montessori

Totara Hill is a small rural service located on the outskirts of Matakana, north of Auckland. At the time of ERO's visit, 28 children aged from three years to school age were enrolled (64 percent boys, 36 percent girls). Children identifying as New Zealand European/Pākehā made up 86 percent of the roll, and Māori the remaining 14 percent. The service is co-owned by two qualified early childhood teachers.

The service is purpose built in natural materials. Features include a large entry area where teachers greet the children and their parents. An adjoining kitchen is set up for parents who stay. The classroom is spacious, well presented and resourced. The outdoor space provides many opportunities for bush walks and exploring the natural world. The service philosophy is Montessori-based and includes a strong emphasis on children being respectful and caring towards others.

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE IN SIX SERVICES

Written literacy

Nelson South Kindergarten

The Nelson Kindergarten Association conducted a survey of parents of children enrolled in 2008. The findings of this survey highlighted, for Nelson South Kindergarten, a lack of awareness by parents of literacy learning in the programme. Although teachers thought they were providing lots of opportunities for children to develop literacy knowledge and skills, the survey findings caused them to relook at their programme. They decided to make practices and learning more visible in all aspects of literacy, especially in written language.

Children at the kindergarten are familiar with written texts such as lists, letters, words and names. They have many opportunities to recognise and explore the letters that make up their name. A sign-in table, alongside where parents sign in their child, includes sign-in sheets specifically developed for children to use. The location of the table encourages parents to sit with their child while they sign in. The kindergarten also has magnetic letters for children to use to make their names and other words. Children are encouraged to write their name on their paintings and other work they have created.

Recognising Symbols

Grace* was observed writing her name and using what appeared to be Japanese symbols. The teacher asked Grace's mother to write Grace's name in Japanese on her write on / wipe off name card as a model. Grace could now write her name in English or Japanese according to her choice. (*name changed)

Teachers use lists of children's names or encourage children to use lists as a way of signalling they are waiting for a turn at an activity. For example, in preparation for a dramatic retelling of the Three Billy Goats Gruff the children wrote their name alongside the character they wanted to be. The teacher had the story book, turned the pages, and recalled the story with the children. The three billy goats waited for their cue from the group of children who were the audience. There were discussions between actors and the children about how they might be feeling and how they could act this out. The story concluded and the children who had been in the audience and waiting for a turn, took on the roles, while the previous actors became the audience.

Diaries, large pieces of paper, clipboards, pens, pencils, and chalk are available in different places in the environment for children to draw maps and plans, make books, menus, signs and appointments. Children use these writing materials independently and with guidance in their play. For example, assessment information showed how one child had chairs lined up for patients to sit on. The child was using a notebook to write notes about each patient. One of the teachers was also invited by the child to act as scribe, recording some of the prescriptions.

Being architects

A teacher is sitting with some boys who are using clipboards and pens to draw plans. The teacher guides the boys in drawing their designs – “What do you want to happen? Close your eyes and see the picture in your head. Can we draw it?” When the boys have finished their designs they sign them as “this is what architects do”. Then the boys make their designs in the sandpit, with the teacher encouraging them to refer back to their plans.

Children are encouraged to explore letters kinaesthetically, such as writing letters in the sand, with dough, and with water. The children also explore letter writing in their paintings.

Links are made between home and the service in many ways. The children take turns taking Tidy Teddy and his book home. With their parents/whānau, they write a story, draw a picture, and/or use photos to share their adventures with Tidy Teddy.

Strathmore Kindergarten

Teachers at Strathmore Kindergarten provide many and varied opportunities for children to engage in written literacy. The environment gives the children many opportunities to develop their literacy learning in their play. Spacious, inviting and well resourced writing areas are in both the indoor and outdoor areas. Wall displays in literacy areas include letter charts and high frequency words, often in English and Māori. Examples of children's writing, learning stories, and photos of children involved in literacy are also displayed.

Maxwell's Wooden Letters

Maxwell made an M for his name out of pieces of wood nailed together at the carpentry table. His interest was extended by a teacher who encouraged him to make other letters like E for his friend. The next day, he made all the seven letters to spell out his name.

Teachers write books with children about their interests. Children and teachers identify an interest and take photographs. They then make up a story together about the photos. The book also contains the children's reflections about their learning. The books are in the children's library/book area and are often referred to by children. This process also incorporates visual literacy as the children learnt a lot about photos by viewing and discussing these with the teacher. The children understand how they can improve their photos, and which ones to select to use for a learning story.

Children take turns to lead group-time at the end of the session. They put their names on the group leader board. They also plan their group time with the teacher or a parent. This may involve children writing a programme that itemises the songs and stories for the session. The leader may lead the karakia, songs and stories, or ask others to carry out these responsibilities.

Teachers have well equipped teacher-only writing kits to support literacy in the indoor and outdoor areas. These kits ensure the most appropriate materials, such as a variety of pens and pencils, and paper¹³ are available to extend children's literacy learning,

Oral literacy

Taikura Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten

Taikura Rudolf Steiner Kindergarten's philosophy strongly emphasises oral literacy through children's play, and the informal and formal activities they engage in. Oral traditions of storytelling and puppetry are highly valued, and children use their environment to create and recreate stories that are both familiar and imaginative.



¹³ The kits include: tri pencils, felt pens, chalk, paints and brushes, crayons, biros, coloured pencils, whiteboard markers, lined and unlined paper, alphabet and high frequency word charts, and alphabet magnets.

The key feature of teachers' development of children's oral language is storytelling. The kindergarten promotes a rich dramatic play environment and the children act out stories, repeat the words of others, and make up their own words to describe their actions. Impromptu storytelling is valued for encouraging children to use their curiosity and engage with their interests.

Circle time is an opportunity for children to ask their own questions and discuss answers. Teachers prompt the children's thinking with "I wonder...?" These conversations engage children in both speaking and listening. Teachers model using descriptive language during activities: "we are going to make rainbow butter today" as children are cutting up coloured petals to mix into butter. Children's home languages other than English (Dutch, Japanese) are also naturally incorporated into everyday activities.

Children enjoy playing with and using words in a variety of contexts, including rhymes, chants, repeating interesting words, eurhythmy,¹⁴ poetry, puppetry, singing, and verse. ERO observed children using a rich vocabulary when playing or describing their play. A group of children had learnt the names of many plants growing in the garden and were incorporating this new vocabulary into their play. Other children were singing "London bridge is falling down" as they built bridges in the sandpit.

Children are encouraged to make sense of their world through communication and given multiple opportunities to be creative and use their imagination.

Using Information Communication Technologies

Strathmore Kindergarten

Children at Strathmore Kindergarten use ICT in meaningful and purposeful ways. Children who are transitioning to school take the digital camera on their school visits to record their visit. Later they use the photos as a guide to write a story with the help of their teachers. Children are also rostered to take the digital camera home. Photos are shared each day with the child explaining the significance of the photos, or the story they tell.

Kai Time

Two girls want to find out what time their school has lunch so that they can have their lunch at the same time in preparation for starting school. The teacher helps the girls to use the internet to find the school's phone number. The girls look for the numbers on the phone and contact the school. Another child asks if he can contact his school to find out the lunch time. The children find that the two schools have lunch at different times. They decide to have their lunches at the same time as their respective schools.

14 Eurhythmy is a dance-like art form in which music or speech are expressed in bodily movement; specific movements correspond to particular notes or sounds. It has also been called "visible speech" or "visible song". http://www.steiner-australia.org/other/Wald_faq.html

Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne

At Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne, ICT has been the focus of programme development over the previous few years. The service participated in a Ministry of Education ICT contract for early childhood education. This PLD in ICT has led to ongoing team development in this aspect.

Teachers focused their research questions for the PLD on how they could use ICT to build an inclusive community of learners, enhance teaching practices, reflect on their own learning, and work more collaboratively with children and their whānau.

As part of their Ministry contract, teachers introduced children to computers, cameras, digital microscopes, and software such as Artrage, Comic Life, and KidPix.¹⁵ Teachers observed how the children used the ICT in their play and then investigated how they could further children's interest and learning through ICT. The centre also holds parent workshops to share ICT expertise and programmes. Both teachers and parents have expertise and ideas to share.

Children are able to use ICT in their literacy learning both independently and with teacher help. The children have access to two computers and can play various literacy programs.

Children are supported by teachers to use ICT to both record and write about their work. For example, one child drafted and then typed an official invitation for parents to attend a service function. Children also contribute to their own learning stories. This allows them to revisit their learning, as well as share their interests with friends and family.

Igloos

A small group of older children wanted to find out more about igloo building. This was sparked by one child's interest in igloos. The children used the internet to research igloos and discovered plans to make an igloo out of milk bottles. They collected plastic milk bottles over an extended period of time, and built their own life-sized igloo, interpreting the plans during their building phase. Photos were taken and stories written about the igloo building

Teachers use ICT to document and revisit children's learning. The teaching team creatively use Powerpoint, movies, and other publishing programs to do this. During ERO's visit some children were watching a movie on a screen. The movie was one made at the service and showed a group of children learning together. The children were sharing information about their experiences as they watched the movie.

15 Artrage: digital painting program. Comic Life: Comic desktop publishing program. Kid Pix: drawing program for children.

Following children's interests

Totara Hill Montessori

“The growth of the child is by means of activity.....What motivates activity is interest..... The joy of the child is their joy of achievement.” Maria Montessori, What You Should Know About Your Child (provided by the service).

Totara Hill Montessori's philosophy that the child must explore guides literacy teaching and learning. Teachers believe that children must discover things by themselves and not always be told. They recognise that children bring to their learning a lot of life experiences that can be used to build literacy knowledge, skills and confidence. They often write down children's conversations to help them understand that writing is their thoughts and words written down, and that this writing can be shared over and over again. Learning stories include the children's voices of what has happened – the outcomes and the next steps.

Literacy learning and teaching develops from the children's interests. Teachers listen to the children's ideas and work with them to extend their learning and development by encouraging further exploration of their emerging interests. Teachers have identified that the only thing that “gets in the way of children's learning is an adult brain”. Instead teachers encourage, support, and challenge children's thinking, while drawing on children's experiences.

The environment gives the children self-select activities and the space to direct their own learning. Teachers have identified aspects of literacy that the children progress through at their own pace, and which guide teachers' interactions. The first aspect focuses on language enrichment and helping children extend their vocabulary through conversations and learning to ask questions that build their knowledge and confidence. The second aspect focuses on children making connections between the spoken and written word, and letter sounds and what they represent. The third aspect uses letter and word games such as “I Spy” to build children's literacy knowledge, confidence and leadership. The teacher has a box of objects, she sounds the beginning of a word and the children guess what object in the box she is referring to. Clues that relate to the colour and shape of the object are also given. As children's confidence develops they often play this game independently of the teacher.

Teachers at Totara Hill are guided by the need to actively listen and be responsive to children's interests and needs.

Physical development

Richmond Kindergarten

Teachers at Richmond Kindergarten share a common and agreed focus that places importance on supporting children's physical and associated brain development. They are very aware that this focus supports children's literacy learning, particularly the value of gross and fine motor skill development in helping children with skills for writing. They believe that it is important for children to be physically active and that this benefits them as learners.

The development of a literacy focus in the programme is linked to teachers' interest in, and knowledge about, the relationship between children's physical development and literacy learning. It also reflects schools' expectations for children to have the skills for more formal learning. The programme supports children to develop their coordination, spatial awareness, and sequencing skills. It also supports children's brain development.

A professional development workshop five years ago about children's physical development was a catalyst for teachers to build on their interests in this area. Teachers continue to share readings and current research, particularly that which aligns to their focus on children's physical development. They are open to new ideas and willing to try new strategies and approaches. Sharing readings and current research has stimulated discussion and debate about physical development and literacy learning.

The kindergarten's "Early Literacy Framework" focuses on talking, listening, looking, concepts of print, and moving. The focus on the importance of physical development to literacy learning is explained in the document:

"Learning to read and write involves a relationship between physical movement and learning." [This is taught through] fingerplays, dancing, crawling, the challenge course, ukul/clay, and swinging."

A guide for parents "Helping your child to write his/her name" provides guidance on physical developments and includes activities like swinging from bars, pouring water, and building with plastic construction blocks. The kindergarten also holds parent workshops about the importance of physical play to develop coordination for writing. This is supported by written information for parents on early literacy and physical play:

"b and d are both composed of a line and a circle; the only difference is which side of the circle the line is on. We learn this kind of distinction first through our own movement in space."¹⁶

16 Rui Olds, A. "From cartwheels to caterpillars: children's need to move indoors and out" in Neugebauer b. (Ed) 2006 Exchange: Curriculum: Art, Music, Movement, Drama Exchange Press Ltd: 55-58. P56.

Teachers place a strong emphasis on children's gross and fine motor development. This emphasis is evident in indoors and outside play. Both the layout of the environment and imaginative play encourage this development. Finger plays and action rhymes are seen as very important and teachers have a clear rationale for including them. Activities such as paper plane making and the subsequent launching of them are encouraged as it helps develop children's pencil grip. Outdoor games and climbing are actively promoted to develop coordination. Teachers acknowledge that the boys engage in competition, and organise activities like timing running races and competing against own times. Times are recorded and compared.

Working with parents

Richmond Kindergarten

At Richmond Kindergarten relationships with parents are welcoming, informative, informal, and one-to-one. Teachers are proactive in relating to parents, and know them well. They support the parents' own literacy development through parent-help during sessions, particularly focusing on parents understanding stages of writing development. This happens in an informal way with parents on a one-to-one basis.

Parents have an increased understanding of the kindergarten programme and how it develops their children's learning and transition to school. Teachers also provide verbal and written suggestions for how parents can support their children at home, for example, using a stick to draw on the sand at the beach; and about the key role of physical play in developing literacy skills.

Teachers recognise and understand the stages children move through as emerging writers. They give parents information about these writing stages and discuss with them how children develop their writing skills. Teachers also make good use of assessment to increase parent's understanding of children's literacy. In particular they use photographs extensively to document children's literacy learning. These provide a visual record for children to revisit and to share with parents.

Teachers proactively initiate liaison contact with local schools. They are very aware of the expectations schools have for children when transitioning into school, and want children to experience success, particularly when they move from kindergarten to school. Teachers are familiar with the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*¹⁷ and discuss with parents how these relate to children's dispositions, which are a part of the kindergarten's curriculum.

17 Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1–13*. Wellington. Learning Media Limited.

Totara Hill Montessori

Totara Hill's philosophy is Montessori-based and includes a strong emphasis on children being respectful and caring towards others. Parent's responsibility for their children's learning is central. On enrolment, parents commit to working in partnership with teachers to help their children become independent, confident and respectful learners. Regular parent and teachers' meetings help ensure that the home and service environments reinforce similar values and approaches for children's learning by showing parents literacy strategies they can use at home.

Teachers define literacy as part of everything that children do and experience. They have high expectations for children's learning, particularly literacy and the role of parents in promoting literacy. They acknowledge that parents provide children with a wide range of experiences that teachers can then draw on to develop children's oral language skills and interest in reading and writing. At individual or group information meetings, teachers focus on the importance of parents using precise language and the correct terms and names to build children's literacy knowledge. For example, when families are visiting a zoo, parents are encouraged to call animals by their species name rather than a generic name.

Māori, French, Irish and German families have children who are involved in the service. Teachers encourage parents to share their home languages and cultures so that all children can benefit. They also encourage parents to speak their home languages to their own and other children in the service. Teachers try to use the phrases used by parents and often ask the children to help them with pronunciation of home languages. The service has a regular Dad's night with refreshments for the fathers of children who attend the service. Teachers say that the dads talk more when their partners are not there. This provides a good opportunity to share literacy practices from both home and service with the fathers.

Children's individual portfolios record their participation in literacy activities and what the children are learning from an activity. Parents often comment on how they have extended this activity at home. Teachers use these comments to help parents understand the service's aspects of literacy and how each experience builds literacy knowledge and confidence.

Supporting practices – self review, policy, and professional learning and development

Self Review – Strathmore Kindergarten

Self review at Strathmore Kindergarten is well established, and teachers state that children’s learning is the key driver. Teachers have adopted a team approach, with a team leader chosen for a term. Their self review is based on triggers during sessions and reflection. The team develops questions and indicators, and decides what evidence to gather. The gathering, analysing and planning of improvements is done as a team.

Self review is also linked to their Association’s strategic plan and the annual plan goals for the kindergarten. Teachers have used Central North Island Kindergarten Association-based professional development and the Ministry of Education: *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua Self Review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*¹⁸ to complete detailed term reviews to improve the environment. The environment is regularly changed to keep children stimulated and engaged in their literacy learning.

Teachers are members of a local cluster group of schools and early childhood services. At these meetings teachers often discuss literacy practices within each organisation. To support transitions between the kindergarten and schools the cluster identified the need for children to have familiar experiences in each environment.

Teachers have used self review to encourage more parent comments in children’s profile books. They document their reflections of children’s learning, and often ask a series of questions to help parents make links between home and kindergarten learning and what could happen next to support this learning further. The wording of the questions shows that teachers know the families well and that the home kindergarten partnership is strong.

Policy – Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne

Barnardos Early Learning Centre – Eastbourne has developed a written literacy policy that guides the literacy teaching and learning at the service. In 2003, teachers attended a series of literacy workshops and these, along with the work of Hamer and Adam,¹⁹ influenced the development of the literacy policy. Teachers wanted their literacy programme to develop competent, excited and innovative learners.

The literacy policy states:

“The teaching team will provide authentic, holistic, integrated experiences to promote the development of the attitudes, motivation, knowledge, and skills that empower children to become confident and competent members of a literate society.”

18 Ministry of Education (2006). *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-Review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*. Wellington: Learning Media.

19 Hamer, J., & Adams, P. (2003). *The New Zealand Early Childhood Literacy Handbook: Practical Literacy Ideas for Early Childhood Centres*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore.

The policy aims to promote and enhance emergent literacy skills and experiences for the children attending the service.

Expectations for teachers and the environment are clearly set out in the policy. It includes an extensive list of practices for teachers that support good literacy practice.

These include:

- oral, written and visual literacies
- a print rich environment
- the holistic nature of literacy
- following children's interests
- a variety of teaching strategies
- boys and literacy
- e-literacy
- planning for individuals, small groups and larger groups
- literacy research and teaching practices
- networking with schools.

The policy also outlines how to encourage parent input and participation, how to promote equality of experiences for all children, and health and safety issues related to literacy resources and activities.

Professional Learning and Development – Nelson South Kindergarten

A key aspect underpinning literacy practice at Nelson South Kindergarten is the value placed on ongoing PLD. Teachers' understanding of literacy is informed by various PLD activities. The Nelson Kindergarten Association has provided workshops and courses about literacy, in particular oral language development, and transition to school. However, the regular day-to-day discussion, reflection and sharing of professional readings and research make a difference for this teaching team. Teachers ably put into practice new learning and seek feedback from their colleagues as to what works and why. Teachers are clear about why they do what they do and are able to justify their practice. They expect that children will engage in literacy activities in meaningful ways - in the context of their play, and related to their interests and strengths.

Relationships with the schools that children from the kindergarten will attend are developing. Teachers acknowledge the benefits of sharing understandings and practice about literacy teaching and learning. What happens in both settings is valued. Opportunities for joint professional development involving kindergarten and new entrant teachers have had positive outcomes. Teachers have an understanding and appreciation of literacy teaching and learning from both a school and early childhood perspective.

Teachers have replaced their 'Daily Diary' with an online 'wiki'²⁰ – a secure online space where teachers can record their reflections and share information about individual children. The use of a wiki encourages teachers to discuss their practice and what they have noticed about individual children and their interactions with them. This reflective sharing has improved teachers' literacy practices.

Conversations at staff meetings, and the use of the internet to access relevant professional readings, enable teachers to pool their knowledge. The strong link between teachers' involvement in professional learning and development and their practice enables them to reflect on what they are doing and change practice accordingly.

20 Wikis are simple web pages that groups, friends, and families can edit together.



Conclusion

These examples of good practice show that literacy teaching and learning is an integral part of high quality early childhood education. The services in this report promote an holistic approach to literacy where children's literacy experiences are part of purposeful play, and are attuned to their interests.

Strong leadership encourages teachers and parent-educators to push boundaries, to be aware of current theories and research about early literacy, and for this knowledge to inform practice.

Teachers and parent-educators acknowledge children as learners beyond the service, and seek to provide them with the dispositions, skills and knowledge to accompany them at school and as life-long learners. They seek and value the contribution of children, parents and whānau, and others in the community. In particular, partnerships with parents and whānau are a strength, which lends itself to developing a strong awareness among adults and children of literacy experiences both at the service and at home.

Self review of programmes in these services focuses on literacy outcomes for children. It results in changes to teaching and learning that create equitable opportunities for all children.

In these services a strong focus on providing literacy teaching and learning meets the needs of individual children. Teachers recognise that what is engaging and motivating for one child and their whānau, may not be so for another. Services with infants and toddlers focus strongly on non-verbal communication, and the children's developing verbal language. In services with young children, teachers and parent-educators foster children's growing confidence in their literacy learning, follow children's interests, engage them in literacy through their interests and play, and encourage children to take a lead in their own literacy learning.

Services value and provide literacy learning opportunities that recognise and foster children's language, culture and identity. Some services have worked with their Māori and Pacific communities, so that they are able to affirm children's cultural identity through literacy teaching and learning. Other services are paying particular attention to the literacy learning of boys, for instance using sandpit play, biking paths, and carpentry tables, and purposefully involving fathers. Where children's first language is not English, teachers support the use of their first language and encourage parents and whānau to use their language in the service.

Parents and whānau are an integral part of literacy teaching and learning. Teachers and parent-educators draw on home experiences, share centre based experiences and knowledge of early literacy. These practices encourage an holistic view of literacy where infants, toddlers, and young children engage with literacy in ways that reflect their growing expertise, and that incorporates their home literacy practices.





CHILDREN'S DAILY SIGN IN SHEET

DATE: 23/11

K	e	a	a	n	u
H	o	m	g	s	
K	a	t	i	e	
J	a	c	q	u	i
F	a	t	t	e	r
M	a	m	a		

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