

National Report Summary

ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This handout is a summary of a recent national report – it captures the key points and highlights findings that you may find useful. The full report is available on our

Extending their language—expanding their world

Children’s oral language (birth-8 years)

This evaluation investigated how effectively young children’s oral language learning and development were supported in their early years of education.

What did ERO ask?

What is the early learning service or school doing in response to children’s oral language learning and development, including concerns about and needs of particular children?

ERO’s findings are based on the analysis of data gathered from 176 early learning services and 104 schools.

Research evidence shows early in a child’s life is a critical time in terms of the rapid language development that takes place, particularly in the first two to three years.

Language is a vital part of communication. In early childhood, one of the major cultural tasks for children is to develop competence in and understanding of language. Language does not consist only of words, sentences and stories: it include the language of images, art, dance, drama, mathematics, movement, rhythm, and music.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: The Ministry: p72.

The report is structured as follows:

The **Introduction**—*Why responsive oral language teaching and learning is important* gives an overview of the guidance available to early learning services and schools to support oral language teaching and learning. It includes a summary of some of the latest research evidence about the importance of oral language learning and development in the early years.

Responding to linguistically diverse learners

provides a snapshot of the findings from ERO’s evaluation looking at language diversity in Auckland services and schools.

ERO’s findings in services and schools provides an overview of the key findings from this oral language evaluation.

Oral language learning and development: birth to eight years of age

ERO’s findings, particularly in relation to what well-focused early learning services and schools were doing to support children’s oral language learning and development, are described and presented in a way that shows the learner pathway from infancy through to eight years of age.

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For more ideas and information, you can read the full report online at www.ero.govt.nz/publications

Key findings: early learning services

In order to support oral language learning and development, leaders and teachers in early learning services need to know about how children's oral language develops, recognise the fundamental ways the curriculum can promote rich oral language learning and use deliberate teaching strategies.

Professional and pedagogical leadership was critical in building the capability and capacity of teachers to promote and support children's oral language learning and development. In the services that were strongly focused on supporting children's learning:

- teachers had in-depth knowledge of every child and a shared understanding of, and expectations for, their oral language learning and development
- leaders and teachers worked in partnership with parents and whānau, and with external agencies and specialist support where necessary
- their curriculum was highly supportive of children's oral language learning and development
- evaluation, inquiry and monitoring processes were driven by the need to promote and support children's oral language learning and development.

Improvements were needed in many early learning services to support oral language learning and development. These included leadership capability to support teachers to design and implement a curriculum that:

- gives priority to oral language and recognises oral language as an integral part of early literacy learning
- is based on a shared and explicit understanding of children's oral language development
- includes deliberate teaching strategies to support all learners, making children's oral language learning and development visible in assessment information
- evaluates the impact of practices and strategies on improving oral language outcomes
- capitalises on home languages as a foundation for other language learning
- is prompt and proactive where concerns are identified about children's oral language learning and development.

Key findings: the first three years of primary school

Similarly there were common themes in the way the most effective primary schools supported students' oral language learning and development. These included:

- transition-to-school programmes through which information was shared about oral language learning and development (including any strengths and needs)
- both formal assessment and informal daily monitoring of oral language progress of all learners, particularly in the early months after starting school
- explicit oral language learning expectations developed as part of school-wide progressions
- daily literacy programmes having a strong oral language focus
- identifying students needing additional support early and responding appropriately.

Improvements were needed in many schools to support oral learning and development. These included:

- giving greater attention to oral language learning of new entrants within a rich curriculum
- developing formal expectations for monitoring oral language progress or development across Years 1 to 3 and beyond, across all key learning areas
- taking a formalised approach to identifying students' oral language strengths (including capabilities in languages other than English), needs and concerns, rather than relying on informal observation and 'gut feeling'
- systematically planning for interventions, where particular concerns or needs for oral language learning and development are identified
- teachers building on the advantage linguistically diverse learners bring to language learning
- building and strengthening teacher capability to support oral language teaching and learning.

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