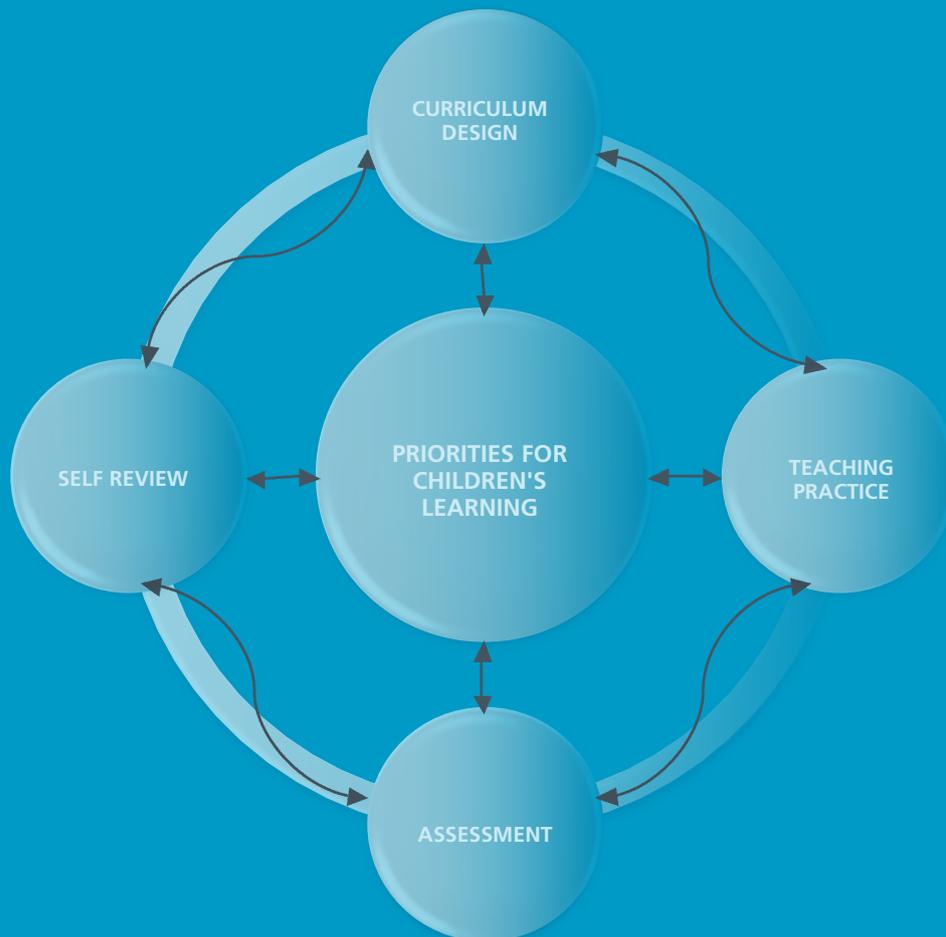


# Priorities for Children's Learning in Early Childhood Services

May 2013



# Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

## The Child – the Heart of the Matter



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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 New Zealand's schools and early childhood services, and reports publicly on what it finds.

The whakataukī of ERO 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.

In 2011, the Early Childhood Education Taskforce report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children*, recommended an evaluation of the implementation of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. This is one of two ERO national evaluation reports undertaken to inform any future review of the early childhood curriculum. This report focuses on early childhood services' priorities for children's learning, how they decide these priorities and the ways in which these priorities are enacted through the curriculum.

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 work.

Diana Anderson  
Chief Review Officer (Acting)  
Education Review Office

May 2013

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## Overview

In 2011, the ECE (early childhood education) Taskforce report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children*<sup>1</sup> recommended an evaluation of the implementation of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.<sup>2</sup> In response, ERO conducted a national evaluation that investigated:

*How effectively are early childhood services across New Zealand determining, enacting and reviewing their curriculum priorities to support education success for every learner?*

Findings from this national evaluation are published in two reports. This report, *Priorities for Learning in Early Childhood Services* presents ERO's findings in relation to how well early childhood services determine, enact and review their stated priorities for children's learning through their curriculum. It complements a companion report, *Working with Te Whāriki* (May 2013).

*Te Whāriki* states that each service will develop its own emphases and priorities for children's learning. These priorities will vary in each service, with programmes being developed in response to the children enrolled in the service, the aspirations of their parents and whānau, and the service's particular setting.<sup>3</sup> Parents often choose a service for their child because of its identified curriculum priorities. Each service's curriculum priorities and emphases – the learning valued in their service – should guide curriculum planning and implementation, inform assessment practices and be visible in assessment documentation, and should provide a focus for self review.

This report presents ERO's findings about the extent to which services reviewed in Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2012 implemented a curriculum that was highly reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning. The findings are presented in relation to:

- how services were determining their priorities for children's learning
- how services were assessing children's learning in relation to their identified learning priorities and emphases
- how information about children's progress and learning was shared with children and their parents and whānau, and used during transitions
- how information about children's learning was used to inform curriculum decisions and in self review
- the extent to which each service's curriculum was responsive to Māori and Pacific children.

1 <http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/>

2 Ministry of Education (1996) *Te Whāriki, He Whāriki Mātauranga mā ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Learning Media Limited.

3 See Appendix 4 for the meaning of Māori words.

Overall, ERO found that 17 percent of the 387 services reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2012, implemented a curriculum that was highly reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning. In these services, curriculum decisions, assessment practices and self-review processes were aligned to, and reflected, the priorities identified as important for children's learning. Priorities took into consideration the aspirations of parents and whānau, children's strengths and interests, and the philosophy and vision of the service. These services were more likely to be responsive to Māori and Pacific children's identity, language and culture.

In a further 54 percent of services the curriculum was mostly reflective of their identified priorities. Although these services had many of the characteristics of the 'highly reflective' services, they needed to improve alignment between their identified priorities and their assessment and/or self-review practices.

The curriculum was minimally reflective of identified priorities in 24 percent of services. In these services, the alignment between their curriculum decisions, assessment practices and self-review processes was more tenuous or did not exist. The purpose of assessment and self review was not well understood and the curriculum focused more on activities than identified priorities for children's learning.

In five percent of services, the curriculum did not reflect priorities, largely because these had not been identified. In these services assessment practices were of poor quality and self review was either not evident or at a very early stage of development.

ERO found a lack of responsiveness to Māori and Pacific children in many services. Only two-fifths of services had thought about a curriculum that might support Māori children to achieve success as Māori, and about one-fifth of services had considered this for Pacific children.

Improvements were needed in many of the services to ensure that:

- assessment information made the learning valued by the service visible to children and their parents and whānau
- their curriculum was responsive to identified priorities for Māori and Pacific children
- self review focused on how well identified priorities for children's learning were being realised through the curriculum.

ERO found that services with certain characteristics were more likely to implement a curriculum that was reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning. Kindergartens were more likely than other service types to do this, as were services with higher percentages of qualified and registered teachers.

## Next steps

ERO recommends that service leaders and teachers:

- consider how well their identified priorities for children's learning are reflected in all aspects of their practice, in particular, assessment practice and self review
- increase their understanding of the desired outcomes in *Ka Hikitia*<sup>4</sup> and the *Pasifika Education Plan*,<sup>5</sup> and how their curriculum and identified priorities for children's learning contribute to these outcomes.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education provides opportunities for services to access professional learning and development that focuses on:

- assessment practices that show continuity of children's learning over time
- the importance of Māori and Pacific children achieving success and how services reflect this in their curriculum and identified priorities for learning
- implementing robust self review to determine how well their curriculum and associated assessment practices reflect their identified priorities for children's learning.

4 <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx>

5 <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PEP2013Consultation.aspx>

## Introduction

This report presents findings from an evaluation of how well early childhood services were determining, enacting, and reviewing their curriculum, and what they knew about successful outcomes for children. The findings focus on how services were enacting their identified priorities and emphases for children's learning in their curriculum and associated assessment and self-review practices; and the extent to which their curriculum was responsive to Māori and Pacific children achieving success.

ERO reviewed the implementation of curriculum in 387<sup>6</sup> early childhood services during Terms 1 and 2, 2012. As part of each service's review, ERO investigated:

- How does this service determine its curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning?<sup>7</sup>
- To what extent are this service's curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning enacted?
- How effectively is this service implementing its curriculum to support children's learning?

ERO reviewed a further 240<sup>8</sup> services in Term 3, 2012. In these services ERO investigated:

- What are the service's curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning?
- What are the links between the service's curriculum and the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*?
- What other influences impact on the service's curriculum?<sup>9</sup>
- How is the service's curriculum (including its priorities and emphases) influenced by children's strengths, interests and abilities; and to changes to the actual children enrolled?

The findings in this report and the report *Working with Te Whāriki* focus on some of these questions.

## BACKGROUND

### *Te Whāriki* and outcomes for children's learning

*Te Whāriki* has an overarching aspiration for children:

*To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (p.9).*

6 See Appendix 3 for information about these services.

7 This question included a focus on awareness of Māori and Pacific children achieving success.

8 See Appendix 3 for information about these services.

9 This question included a focus on awareness of Māori and Pacific children achieving success.

It continues by stating that an early childhood setting:

*provides opportunities for new learning to be fostered: for children to reflect on alternative ways of doing things; to make connections across time and place; establish different kinds of relationships; and encounter different points of view. The experiences enrich children's lives and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to tackle new challenges (p.9).*

*Te Whāriki* describes curriculum as:

*the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development (p.10).*

*Te Whāriki* includes learning outcomes for children that focus on knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions,<sup>10</sup> and it states that each service will develop its own emphases and priorities (p.44). The curriculum's focus on holistic and active learning is restated in the section about outcomes, reiterating the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions in forming children's 'working theories'<sup>11</sup> about the world and encouraging them to learn. The way the curriculum in each service is designed and implemented will influence the working theories and dispositions, knowledge, skills and attitudes that children develop.

**Continuity of learning: *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* and beyond**

The intention of *Te Whāriki* is that it is a curriculum that provides children with a foundation for lifelong learning. *The New Zealand Curriculum*<sup>12</sup> sets out the links between the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* and the values and key competencies of the school curriculum as shown in Figure 1.<sup>13</sup>

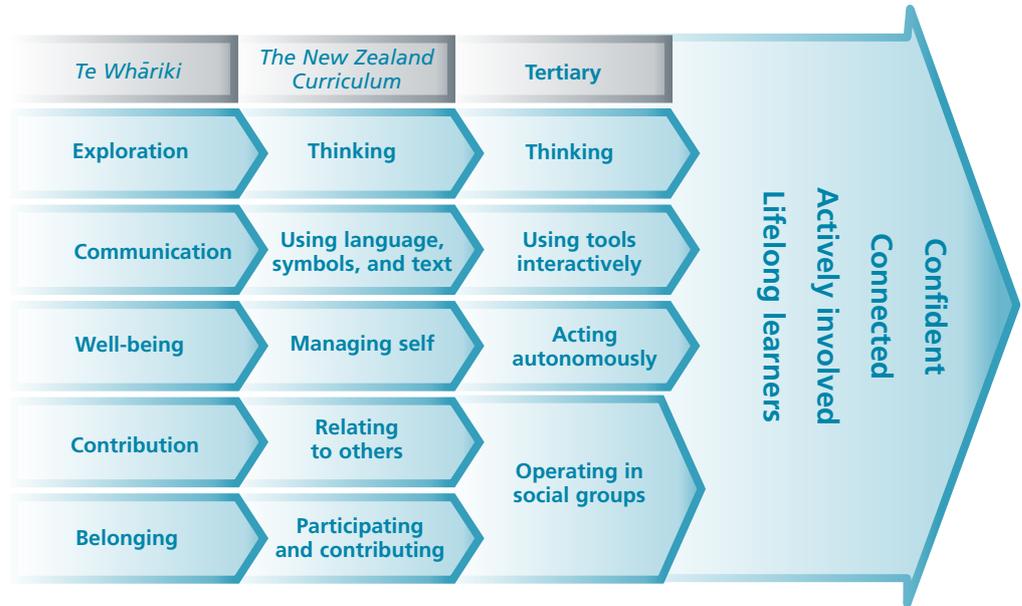
10 *Te Whāriki* includes 117 learning outcomes for children across the five strands of the curriculum.

11 Working theories are the ways in which children make sense of new experiences and ideas so that they can participate more effectively in society. They are developed as children participate in the life of their families, communities and culture, and engage with others. Hedges, H. and Jones, S., (2012) Children's working theories. The neglected sibling of *Te Whāriki's* learning outcomes. *Early Childhood Folio* 6(1): 34-39.

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

13 <http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/Assessmentforlearning/Learningoutcomes/LearningPathways.aspx>

Figure 1: The key competencies: Cross-sector alignment



The alignment between the strands of *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum* shows continuity of learning over time for the learner and the connections between each sector in terms of learning pathways.

## Findings

### Rationale

*Te Whāriki* (p.11) describes each service's curriculum as distinctive and dependent on a number of influences, including:

- cultural perspectives
- structural differences
- organisational differences
- different environments
- philosophical emphases
- different resources dependent on setting
- local community participation
- age range of children.

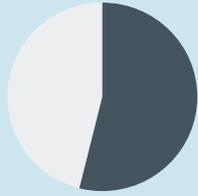
*Te Whāriki* places the child at the centre of the curriculum – as the learner engaged with the learning environment, surrounded by various levels of learning: home, family, and the service; the adult environment and networks; and the nation's beliefs and values about children and their learning and development (p.19). A strong emphasis is placed on each service's curriculum being responsive to the development and changing capabilities of the children at the service.

### Overall findings

ERO evaluated the extent to which early childhood services implemented a curriculum (including assessment and self-review practices) that reflected their identified priorities for children's learning.

ERO found that 17 percent of the 387 services reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2012 implemented a curriculum that was highly reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning. In a further 54 percent of services, the curriculum was mostly reflective of their identified priorities. In 24 percent, the curriculum was minimally reflective of their identified priorities, and in five percent of services it was not reflected. Table 1 highlights the practices associated with each category of services.

Table 1: Reflecting identified priorities for children's learning

Highly reflective 17%	Mostly reflective 54%	Minimally reflective 24%	Not reflective 5%
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service's curriculum and associated priorities for learning were responsive to children's interests and learning, and to parent and whānau expectations and aspirations for their children.</li> <li>The service's curriculum was consistent with the principles and strands of <i>Te Whāriki</i>.</li> <li>Assessment information clearly showed children's progress over time.</li> <li>Assessment information was well analysed and used to inform curriculum decisions.</li> <li>Assessment information reflected children's diverse cultures, was highly individualised, and responsive to each child's age and interests.</li> <li>Assessment information showed continuity between learning at home and at the service.</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Priorities for learning were reflected in philosophy statements or planning documents but not always linked to assessment information and self review.</li> <li>Learning was visible in a variety of ways, but the analysis of this learning was not always robust.</li> <li>Assessment practices were responsive to children's age and interests, but often did not reflect children's culture.</li> <li>Parents and whānau were well informed about children's participation in activities, but not necessarily so well informed about their learning.</li> <li>Assessment information was used for transitions within services, but less so for transitions to school.</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service's curriculum focused more on activities than learning, and planning did not reflect priorities for children's learning, except for limited links to some strands of <i>Te Whāriki</i>.</li> <li>The service's curriculum was often teacher directed, rather than responsive to children's strengths, interests and abilities.</li> <li>Assessment information lacked a focus on individual children and did not identify progress or next steps for learning.</li> <li>Assessment information only referred to the <i>belonging</i> and <i>wellbeing</i> strands of <i>Te Whāriki</i>.</li> <li>Assessment practices were inconsistent and not responsive to children's age or interests.</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services in this category had not identified their priorities for learning.</li> <li>Consequently, their curriculum was largely teacher directed and informed by activities and the resources available to children.</li> <li>Assessment practices were not responsive to children's age, interests or culture.</li> <li>Assessment information was either not easily available to parents and children, or it was available but of poor quality.</li> <li>Limited assessment information was provided to parents and whānau about their children's learning at the service.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about children's learning was highly visible and accessible to children and parents and whānau through wall displays, portfolios, digital media, and formal and informal interactions.</li> <li>• Parents and whānau were well informed about their children's learning in relation to the service's priorities for children's learning.</li> <li>• Assessment information was shared between services and schools, and services were aware of how useful this information was to support transitions for children within the service, and on to school.</li> <li>• Self review was well embedded and aligned to the principles and strands of <i>Te Whāriki</i>.</li> <li>• Self review informed strategic planning, professional development, appraisal and curriculum design.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-review practices lacked greater depth and were largely related to staffing or environment issues rather than children's learning.</li> <li>• Many of these services were engaging in professional development related to self review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment practices were limited in the extent to which they were responsive to children's culture, identity and language.</li> <li>• Although information about children's learning was shared with parents, its poor quality meant that it was of limited use.</li> <li>• Assessment information focused on activities, not learning; and continuity, next steps, and links to curriculum priorities and emphases were not evident.</li> <li>• Children's learning was not visible to parents and whānau.</li> <li>• Assessment information was sometimes used informally or anecdotally to support transitions.</li> <li>• There was limited networking with schools.</li> <li>• Self-review practices lacked rigour and depth and were not well aligned to priorities for children's learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about children's learning was not shared during transitions and there was little or no understanding as to why this would be useful.</li> <li>• Self review was either not evident, or at a very early stage of development.</li> <li>• These services had little or no understanding of the purpose and usefulness of self review.</li> <li>• Where self review was evident it was largely informal and unstructured.</li> </ul>
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Figure 2: Reflecting identified priorities for children's learning by service type

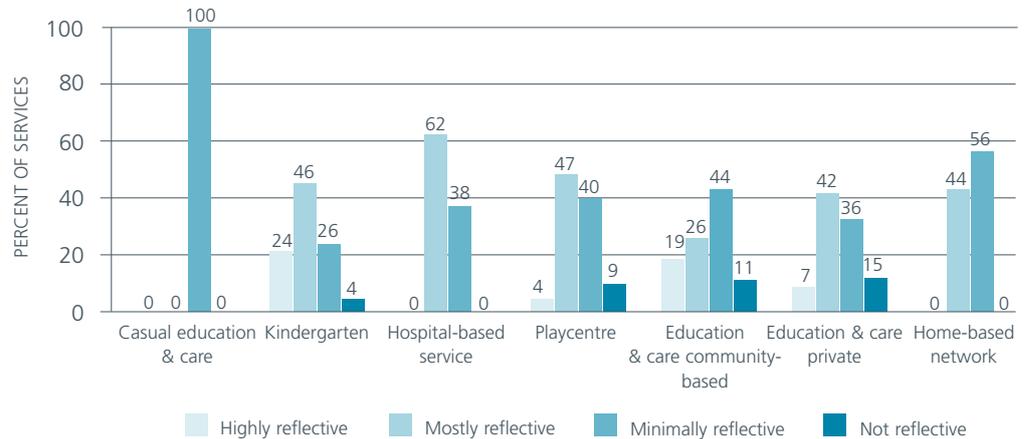


Figure 2 shows the extent to which the 387 services reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2012 implemented a curriculum that was reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning by service type.<sup>14</sup> The differences between service types were statistically significant.<sup>15</sup> Kindergartens were more likely than other service types to implement a curriculum that was reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning.

ERO also tested for differences based on other characteristics, as follows:

- there were no statistically significant differences by location or EQI rating (Equity Index Assessment)<sup>16</sup>
- services with 100 percent, and 80-99 percent, of qualified and registered teachers were more likely than services with less than 80 percent qualified and registered teachers to implement a curriculum that was reflective of their identified priorities for children's learning.<sup>17</sup>

### Aligning practices

In services where the curriculum was highly reflective of their priorities for children's learning, the processes associated with curriculum design, teaching and assessment practices, and self review were well aligned. Although many services in this evaluation were implementing the various processes associated with curriculum, assessment and self review, the alignment between these was often lacking. Some services had the various processes in place but had not identified their priorities for learning.

14 See Appendix 3 for details of the sample.

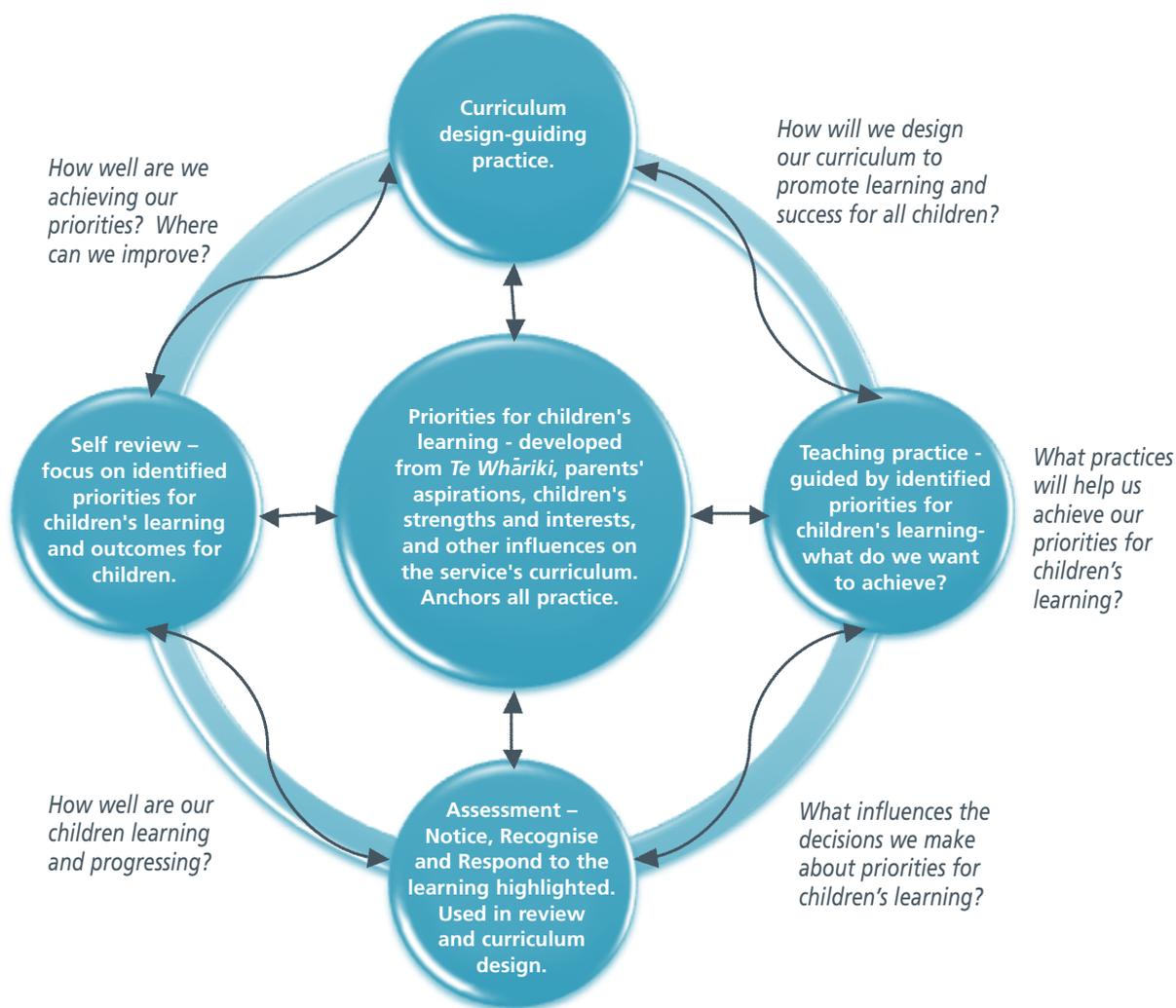
15 Differences in ratings between location, EQI rating, and teacher qualifications and Kruskal-Wallis H test, as were the differences between location, EQI rating, and teacher qualifications and registration. Differences between community and private-based services were tested using a Mann Whitney U test. The level of statistical significance for all statistical tests in this report was  $p < 0.05$ .

16 See <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/collecting-information/collection-forms/equity-index-assessment>

17 Playcentres were not included in this particular testing.

Figure 3 shows the alignment between the various processes and suggests some questions that services can consider when determining and responding to priorities for children's learning.

Figure 3: Priorities for children's learning



## IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

ERO investigated what influences services' curriculum priorities and emphases,<sup>18</sup> including:

- *Te Whāriki*
- the aspirations parents and whānau have for their children
- children's strengths, interests and abilities
- teachers' interests, beliefs and knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

### Rationale

*Te Whāriki* (p44) states that each service will develop its own emphases and priorities for children's learning. These priorities will vary in each service, with programmes being developed in response to the children enrolled in the service, the aspirations of their parents' and whānau, and the service's particular setting. Parents often choose a service for their child because of its identified curriculum priorities.

Each service's curriculum priorities and emphases – the learning valued in their service – should guide curriculum planning and implementation, inform assessment practices and be visible in assessment documentation, and provide a focus for self review. A strong emphasis is placed on each service's curriculum being responsive to the development and changing capabilities of the children at the service.

### Effective practice – identifying priorities for children's learning

In the services with effective practices, their priorities for children's learning were clearly underpinned by the service's values and beliefs as expressed in their philosophy. These priorities were enacted through curriculum, assessment and self-review practices. Teachers in these services 'walked their talk' by aligning the learning valued in their service with what happened in all aspects of the curriculum. They understood *Te Whāriki* well and used this knowledge to make links between the principles and strands and the priorities they identified for children's learning.

In these services, priorities for learning reflected and acknowledged the aspirations parents and whānau had for their children. Teachers found out about these aspirations both formally and informally. Formal means included using surveys, holding parent evenings, organising hui, and seeking parents' contributions to their child's assessment records. However, it was more often during the informal discussions where aspirations and expectations were shared. Day-to-day interactions between teachers and parents provided opportunities for two-way sharing of information about children's learning.

18 These findings are based on data collected in Terms 1 and 2 2012.

19 The term teacher as used in this report refers to teacher, educator, and kaiako.

Teachers identified children's individual strengths, interests and abilities. They knew children well. Assessment information made learning visible and provided a basis for teachers to review the extent to which identified priorities were reflected in assessment information.

In these services, teachers kept up to date with current research and developments in early childhood education. They engaged in professional reading, robust discussions and debate about practice. Teachers were well supported with planned and relevant professional development. The curriculum experienced by children was meaningful and contributed to their growing competence.

Self-review processes helped services identify their priorities for learning and use the priorities as a basis for evaluating their curriculum. Teachers in these services had a well considered and thoughtful approach to identifying priorities that balanced information from different perspectives. A culture of review and improvement prevailed. Leaders played a critical role in promoting a coherent approach to managing and implementing a curriculum that reflected the learning valued in these services.

### **Less effective practice – identifying priorities for children's learning**

In services where ERO identified less effective practice, there was often a lack of purpose or direction and the curriculum was not well defined. Good intent in terms of priorities for learning was evident in philosophy statements but this intent was not aligned with practice. *Te Whāriki* was not well understood and therefore did not inform the curriculum. Teachers lacked the professional knowledge to usefully reflect on or challenge their practice.

The curriculum experienced by children focused largely on their interaction with resources or participation in activities. Curriculum decisions were not connected to what teachers knew about children or to any priorities for learning. These services lacked the processes to identify children's strengths, interests and abilities and teachers often viewed children in a deficit way, responding to them as having needs rather than building on their strengths.

In many of these services, issues associated with leadership and turnover of leaders and/or teachers negatively impacted on their capacity to implement a curriculum that reflected the learning valued in their service.

## ASSESSING CHILDREN'S LEARNING

ERO investigated how:

- assessment processes and practices reflected each service's priorities for children's learning
- assessment information showed children's progress towards meeting these priorities
- assessment information showed that teachers recognised and responded to the different cultures, ages and interests of the children, and led to positive outcomes for children.

### Rationale

*Te Whāriki* identifies the purpose of assessment as improving the programme provided for children (p.29). The links between curriculum, assessment, self review and a service's identified priorities for children's learning are highlighted in Part A of *Te Whāriki*. Explicit links are made between the purpose of assessment and the four principles of *Te Whāriki* – *empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships* (p.30).

Each service's curriculum priorities and emphases – the learning outcomes they want for the children enrolled at their service – should guide assessment practices and be visible in assessment documentation. As noted in Book 6 of *Kei Tua o Te Pae*:

*“Assessments can make learning visible and foster learning that is valued.”<sup>20</sup>*

Curriculum criterion 2 (C2), which is part of the regulated Curriculum Standard,<sup>21</sup> outlines how assessment information informs a service's curriculum in ways that take into account children's current learning, interests, whānau, and life contexts.

Assessment documents the learning that is valued in the service. The importance teachers place on certain learning is in turn reflected in curriculum decisions and in self review. When a service is effectively documenting children's learning and making links to the principles, strands and associated goals and outcomes in *Te Whāriki*, this information becomes an integral part in the assessment, planning and evaluation process.

### Effective practice – assessing children's learning

In services where teachers understood *Te Whāriki* and what the service was trying to achieve through its curriculum, this knowledge was used to plan for and assess children's learning. The principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, in particular *relationships, wellbeing, belonging, exploration* and *communication*, were valued and made visible in assessment. Where educational philosophies such as Montessori, Steiner, Reggio Emilia

20 Ministry of Education (2004) *Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment and Learning: Competence. Te Aromatawai me to Ako: Kaiaka (Book 6)*. Wellington: Learning Media Limited, pg2.

21 See: <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum/ProfessionalPractice/C2Assessment.aspx>

or Pikler<sup>22</sup> influenced a service's curriculum, this was reflected in assessment information. Assessment information was documented for individuals and for groups of children and was well analysed to show continuity of, and next steps for, learning.

Effective assessment practices included:

- valuing children's social and cultural backgrounds
- linking assessment to children's goals and next steps
- using children's and parents' first languages where appropriate
- using assessment to guide planning and the curriculum
- recognising and incorporating parents' aspirations and perspectives.

In services with effective practices, assessment information informed their curriculum's emergent nature, and showed how the curriculum responded to identified priorities for learning. It showed that children were well supported in their learning, and that planned next steps led to progress over time. The service's curriculum acknowledged and was responsive to children's interests and cultural identity, and to their parents' aspirations.

### Less effective practice – assessing children's learning

In services where ERO identified less effective practice, assessment information was not analysed to show children's progress, continuity, or next steps for learning. Assessment information related only to aspects of *Te Whāriki* and was usually the *wellbeing* and *belonging* strands, and the principle relating to *relationships*. The poorest performing of these services had not established any priorities for children's learning, and assessment practice was poor overall.

In these services, there was little evidence of how teachers were building on or extending children's learning. For children aged up to two assessment generally focused on age-stage developmental milestones with limited evidence of how teachers were following or developing children's interests and building on their strengths.

### SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

ERO investigated how:

- teachers were sharing information about children's learning, in relation to identified priorities, with children and their parents and whānau
- teachers were using this information to support transitions, both within the service and to school.

23 Montessori: see <http://www.montessori.org.nz/what-is-montessori>  
Steiner: see <http://www.rudolfsteinerfederation.org.nz/steiner-education>  
Reggio: see <http://www.reanz.org/about/Pikler>: see <http://pikler.org/PiklerPractices.html>

## Rationale

Parents and whānau can support positive outcomes for children through involvement in assessment.

*Including families and whānau in the early childhood centre's curriculum and assessment enhances children's learning. Families enrich the record of learning, reduce some of the uncertainty and ambiguity, and provide a bridge for connecting experiences.<sup>23</sup>*

## Effective practice – sharing information about children's learning

Services with effective practice had well-developed links between the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, other educational philosophies and their particular priorities for children's learning. In these services, teachers shared information about children's learning with parents and whānau in a variety of ways. Parents were well informed about their child's progress. They had opportunities to contribute to their child's learning during conversations with teachers about children's activities and learning at home. In many services, portfolios or profile books had space for parents to record information about their child's interests and activities outside of the service, and this was followed up by teachers in their work with children.

Assessment information was well analysed in children's portfolios and reflected the service's priorities for learning. Assessment records were most effective when they identified:

- what learning had taken place
- how it related to children's interests and dispositions
- what steps could be taken to extend and support future learning.

Services also shared information about children's learning to support transitions, both within the service and to school. Effective transition to school practices included sharing portfolios, face-to-face meetings with new entrant teachers, and reciprocal school visits. Parents and whānau were an integral part of these transition practices.

Particularly effective practice involved services engaging in self review to find out how useful their assessment information had been for the school. Leaders at these services said the response from schools was variable. Some services received positive feedback about their assessment information and its usefulness to schools, while others did not.

23 Ministry of Education (2004)  
*Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment  
and Learning: Community. Te  
aromatawai me to ako: Hapori  
(Book 5)*,p.5. Wellington: Learning  
Media Limited.

### Less effective practice – sharing information about children's learning

In services with less effective practices, their priorities for children's learning were often not visible to parents, usually because these were not explicit in assessment information or because the service had not yet identified such priorities. In many of these services, assessment information was not well aligned to the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, or only related to selected strands, for example the *wellbeing* and *belonging* strands.

One of the most critical differences between effective and less effective practice was the sophistication of the assessment information. In services with less effective practice, assessment was more of a record of children's participation in activities and did not include any analysis of, or next steps for, learning. Consequently, the information shared with parents was not useful in helping them to see continuity in their child's learning over time.

In many of the services with poor practices, assessment information was either not used to help support transitions or this use was very limited. Where assessment information was shared with schools, there was a strong focus on children's social competence, but not on the service's identified priorities for children's learning. Some services were sharing information with schools, but only on an informal or anecdotal basis. In a few services, the quality of assessment information was so poor that it was of little use to schools, as it did not show children's learning or progress.

### USING INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

ERO investigated how:

- a service's self review was linked to their priorities for children's learning
- a service's self review was ongoing and responsive to priorities for children's learning
- priorities for children's learning were evident in a service's curriculum design and implementation.

### Rationale

Each child learns in his or her own way. *Te Whāriki* recognises there can be wide variations in the rate and timing of children's growth and development and in their capacity to learn new things in new places (p.20). Designing the curriculum should be a continuous process, involving careful observation, identification of interest and capabilities, provision of resources, and ongoing assessment and evaluation (p.28).

*The service needs to understand what young children are learning, how the learning happens, [and] the role that both adults and other children play in such learning (p.28).*

Robust and rigorous self review of teaching and learning helps teachers to continually improve outcomes for children. When services undertake effective self review linked to *Te Whāriki* and their identified priorities for children's learning, they are better placed to know how well they are promoting positive outcomes for all children.<sup>24</sup>

The Ministry of Education provides some guidance in the form of questions for services to consider in relation to implementing a curriculum that is consistent with the prescribed curriculum framework.<sup>25</sup> Self review is referenced as important in helping services to identify the influences on teaching and learning. Services are asked to consider why they do certain things with regard to their curriculum, and where self review fits into their service's curriculum.<sup>26</sup>

Self-review findings can be used to inform decision-making, improve the quality of practice, and promote positive outcomes for all children. Services are able to use these findings to identify contributing factors and priorities for enhancing children's learning.<sup>27</sup>

### Effective practice – using information about children's learning

In services with effective practices, self review was ongoing, well embedded, responsive to the service's priorities for children's learning, and linked to the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. Self review was a mix of spontaneous and responsive practice, and longer term planned self review.

In services where self review was effective, it informed strategic planning, professional development, teacher appraisal, and curriculum decisions. Teachers reflected critically on their practice. Self review was improvement oriented, with a clear focus on strengthening the service's emergent curriculum and teaching practice. It was collaborative and inclusive of parents' views and children's perspectives.

In services with effective practice, self review was strongly focused on their priorities for children's learning. Typical topics for self review included:

- providing a bicultural curriculum
- incorporating te reo and tikanga Māori
- improving literacy and numeracy, and science teaching and learning
- developing children's social competence
- valuing parent and whānau contribution and communication
- developing assessment practices
- strengthening the sense of family
- transitioning children to school
- managing relationships with and between adults and children

24 ERO (2007) *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Services*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

25 <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/RegulatoryFrameworkForECEServices/EarlyChildhoodEducationCurriculumFrameworkForAotearoaNewZealand.aspx>

26 <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum/ProfessionalPractice/C1CurriculumConsistent/Considerations.aspx?p=2>

27 ERO (2012) *ERO's Approach to Reviews in Early Childhood Services (Draft)*. Wellington: Education Review Office p12.

- developing children's learning through outdoor play
- incorporating other philosophies such as Reggio Emilia, Montessori and Steiner
- weaving *Te Whāriki* into children's learning.

In these services, there was a strong alignment between their identified priorities for children's learning, and their assessment practices, curriculum decisions, self review and teaching practices. Children's interests, strengths and dispositions identified through assessment were used to design a responsive curriculum. Parents' perspectives and their aspirations for their children informed curriculum decisions. Such decisions were also influenced by teachers' daily discussions and reflection. The programme was regularly evaluated, and teachers could discuss the rationale for changes made and how they related to the service's priorities for children's learning.

### **Less effective practice – using information about children's learning**

In services with less effective practice, there was a general lack of understanding of self review. In many of these services, self review was at a very early stage of development and, when undertaken, focused mostly on describing what was happening in activities, children's use of resources, and aspects of compliance. Self review often reinforced poor practice. Teachers were not good at reflecting on their service's priorities for children's learning, or on the quality of their teaching practice.

Curriculum implementation in these services was variable. In some of these services, the curriculum was based on selected principles and strands from *Te Whāriki* and there was a lack of focus on children's dispositions, strengths and interests. Services with the poorest practice had little or no evidence of how their curriculum related to their priorities for children's learning.

## **RESPONSIVENESS TO MĀORI AND PACIFIC CHILDREN ACHIEVING SUCCESS**

### **Responsiveness to Māori children**

ERO investigated how responsive each service's curriculum was in supporting Māori children to achieve success as Māori. ERO found very responsive practices that focused on achieving success for Māori children in 14 percent of services.

In these services, teachers worked with whānau to design and implement their curriculum, and encouraged them to share their expertise, experiences, aspirations, whakapapa and iwi history. Local iwi and kaumātua were also consulted so teachers could improve their knowledge and practices relating to local history and kawa, and kaupapa Māori. Teachers and leaders were aware of, and responded to Ministry of

Education initiatives such as *Ka Hikitia* and *Tātaiako*.<sup>28</sup> Each service's curriculum, environment and assessment practices reflected Māori values and celebrated Māori children as competent learners, celebrating their language and culture. In a few of these very responsive services, success for Māori children was highlighted in teachers' performance goals.

In services with some responsive practices (25 percent), there was an understanding of the approaches and strategies that enabled Māori children to experience success. Whānau aspirations were sought, and their knowledge was valued. Teachers responded to these aspirations and included them in their assessment practices. Self review led to:

- changes in teaching and assessment practices
- increased participation by teachers in relevant professional learning and development
- more involvement of whānau of Māori children in the service's curriculum.

In 28 percent of services, understanding was limited in terms of how to provide a curriculum that was responsive for Māori children. Although these services made a commitment to a bicultural curriculum in their philosophy statements, only half were implementing aspects of a bicultural curriculum such as basic te reo, waiata, karakia, poi, pepeha, korowai and some tikanga, along with a celebration of Matariki. A few of these services were beginning to explore ways to provide a responsive curriculum for Māori children, but this was very much in the early stages of development.

Twenty-six percent of services were not providing a curriculum that was responsive to Māori children achieving success as Māori. There were no Māori children enrolled in the remaining seven percent of services, and few of these services were well placed to promote success as Māori for any Māori children that might enrol in the future.

### **Responsiveness to Pacific children**

ERO investigated how responsive each service's curriculum was in supporting Pacific children achieving success. Six percent of services had very responsive practices. An important feature of these services was their robust self review that reflected a desire to improve outcomes for Pacific children. Leaders and teachers recognised the importance of Pacific children's culture, language and identity and provided a culturally responsive environment that reflected Pacific ethnicities. This was achieved through the employment of Pacific teachers, implementing an appropriate curriculum, supporting children's language development, developing partnerships with parents, celebrating cultural events, having appropriate teaching and learning resources and including relevant visual displays. Children displayed a strong sense of pride and knowledge about their culture, and this was reflected in their assessment records.

28 <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/Tataiako.aspx>

In these very responsive services, warm, trusting, respectful and affirming relationships were integral to developing children's social competence and emotional wellbeing. Getting to know children and their parents was an important first step for teachers in developing relationships. In some cases, the service provided opportunities for parents to meet and contribute their ideas to the curriculum. Some services also used external research in Pacific education and health and their knowledge of the *Pasifika Education Plan* to inform their curriculum.

Fifteen percent of services had some responsive practices that enabled Pacific children to experience success. Parents were encouraged to share their ideas about their child's learning and development and this information was used to build teachers' knowledge about Pacific children's culture, language and identity. Pacific teachers in these services were proactive in creating an environment that reflected Pacific ethnicities. This was mainly related to resources and the use of Pacific languages. However, children's assessment records did not often reflect their Pacific heritage. Some of these services were familiar with the *Pasifika Education Plan* and used aspects to strengthen experiences for Pacific children.

The curriculum in 21 percent of services had very little or no impact on Pacific children's success. Teachers had discussions with Pacific parents on aspects of culture, language and identity, but made limited use of the information to design the service's curriculum. Some services showed a desire to support Pacific children, but lacked the necessary knowledge and skills to move beyond welcoming relationships. ERO found that even when there were Pacific teachers in some of these services, leaders did not seek to use their knowledge to improve outcomes for Pacific children.

Thirteen percent of services had no awareness of how to promote success for Pacific children and some indicated that they applied the same approach for Pacific children as others. In the remaining 45 percent of services, there were no Pacific children enrolled. A few of these services recognised the need for a more responsive curriculum if they were to enrol Pacific children in the future.

## Conclusion

ERO's evaluation has highlighted the variability across early childhood services in how well they identify and respond to their priorities for children's learning. While most services have identified their priorities, in many these were not reflected in their curriculum and associated assessment and self-review practices.

ERO is concerned that assessment remains an area for improvement in many services. ERO's report, *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education, November 2007*,<sup>29</sup> noted that good assessment practice was underpinned by two factors: teachers' understanding of *Te Whāriki*, and the alignment between the focus of their assessment of children's learning and their service's philosophy. These two factors guided what they noticed and valued about children's learning.

An evaluation of the implementation of *Kei Tua o te Pae* in 2008 identified that while making learning visible was a major focus of the *Kei Tua o te Pae* professional development programmes, this was not reflected in services' assessment information. The authors of the evaluation argued that by making children's learning visible, children are better able to identify themselves as capable and competent learners.<sup>30</sup>

*...although services had strong practices to make assessment documentation visible, the assessment items did not always make learning [ERO's emphasis] visible. Participation was described and children were validated as competent and confident, but a number of narratives [76 percent] did not address learning.*<sup>31</sup>

The findings of this evaluation highlight the improvements needed in the area of assessment if services are to be more responsive to all children enrolled in their service. Services need to be clear about their priorities for children's learning and reflect these in the design of their curriculum and associated assessment practices.

*Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua* describes self review as an opportunity to evaluate the impact of practice on children's learning.<sup>32</sup> Self review can help teachers improve their practice by considering how what they do supports children's learning. Priorities for learning provide an important focus for self review. In this evaluation, some services were using self review to determine how well their practices were responsive to their identified priorities for children's learning. However, this was an area to be strengthened in many services, particularly in relation to the responsiveness of their curriculum to the aspirations of parents and whānau, and to the service's priorities and emphases – the learning that is valued in their service.

29 ERO (2007) *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Services*. Wellington: Education Review Office. Available at <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/The-Quality-of-Assessment-in-Early-Childhood-Education-November-2007>

30 Ministry of Education (2004) *Kei Tua o te Pae, Assessment and Learning: Competence. Te Aromatawai me to Ako: Kaiaka, Book 6*. p2. Wellington: Learning Media Limited.

31 Stuart, D., Aitken, H., Gould, K. & Meade, A. (2008) *Evaluation of the Implementation of Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars: Impact evaluation of the Kei Tua o te Pae 2006 professional development*. p107. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Available at <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ece/26255/26256>

32 Ministry of Education (2006) *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua, Self Review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education*. p4. Wellington: Learning Media Limited.

Also of concern was the lack of responsiveness to Māori and Pacific children in many of the services. Only two-fifths of services had thought about how their curriculum might support Māori children to achieve success as Māori, and about one-fifth of services had considered this for Pacific children. Two previous ERO reports have raised concerns in relation to such responsiveness. *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services, May, 2010* noted:

*One of the biggest challenges for early childhood managers and educators is to understand, review and develop processes that enable them to listen, respect and respond to what parents and whānau of Māori children expect of the service. To make such a commitment, early childhood services have to find out about parents' aspirations and expectations, and acknowledge and respond to these in authentic ways.<sup>33</sup>*

*Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services, February 2012* reported that:

*...while a significant proportion of early childhood services built positive relationships with whānau (78 percent), only 10 percent had built effective and culturally responsive partnerships. The difference between a good relationship and a culturally responsive partnership is substantial for whānau. Conversely the view held by many educators that 'all children should be treated the same' typically fails to acknowledge the culture of Māori children.<sup>34</sup>*

Early childhood services need to reflect on the extent to which their curriculum is aligned to achieving the vision and intent of *Te Whāriki* for all children.

## NEXT STEPS

ERO recommends that service leaders and teachers:

- consider how well their identified priorities for children's learning are reflected in all aspects of their practice, in particular, assessment practice and self review
- increase their understanding of the desired outcomes in *Ka Hikitia* and the *Pasifika Education Plan*, and how their curriculum and identified priorities for children's learning reflect these outcomes.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education provides opportunities for services to access professional learning and development that focuses on:

- assessment practices that show continuity of children's learning over time
- the importance of Māori and Pacific children achieving success and how services reflect this in their curriculum and identified priorities for learning
- implementing robust self review to determine how well their curriculum and associated assessment practices reflect their identified priorities for children's learning.

33 <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Success-for-Maori-Children-in-Early-Childhood-Services-May-2010/Executive-Summary>

34 <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Partnership-with-Whanau-Maori-in-Early-Childhood-Services-Feb-2012>

## Appendix 1: Methodology

### ERO'S FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION

#### Overall evaluation question

How effectively are early childhood services across New Zealand determining, enacting and reviewing their curriculum priorities to support education success for every learner?

ERO gathered information during regular education reviews in 387 early childhood services during Terms 1 and 2, 2012. ERO asked the following key questions in each service:

- How does this service determine its curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning?
- To what extent are this service's curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning enacted?
- How effectively is this service implementing its curriculum to support children's learning?

ERO also gathered data from 240 services in Term 3, 2012. In these services ERO asked:

- What are the service's curriculum priorities and emphases for children's learning?
- What are the links between the service's curriculum and the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*?
- What other influences impact on the service's curriculum?<sup>35</sup>
- How is the service's curriculum (including its priorities and emphases) influenced by children's strengths, interests and abilities; and to changes to the actual children enrolled?

Appendix 2 includes some investigative prompts and a rubric used in the evaluation which may be useful for services' self review.

#### DATA COLLECTION

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

- discussions with managers and teachers at the service
- informal discussions with parents and whānau
- documentation related to the operation of the service and children's learning.

Appendix 3 has more information about the samples. All data was collected by ERO review officers in the normal course of their review activities.

<sup>35</sup> This question included a focus on awareness of Māori and Pacific children achieving success.

## Appendix 2: Investigative prompts and rubric for self review

### Investigative prompts to use in your service

<b>Enacting identified priorities and emphases for children's learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is our <b>self review</b> ongoing and responsive to identified priorities for learning?</li> <li>• To what extent are our identified priorities for learning evident in our <b>curriculum design and implementation</b>?</li> <li>• To what extent is children's progress towards meeting our identified priorities for learning evident in <b>assessment</b>?</li> <li>• To what extent does our assessment information show that we recognise and respond to the <b>different cultures, ages and interests</b> of children in our service, and lead to positive outcomes for them?</li> <li>• To what extent is children's learning in relation to our identified priorities <b>visible to parents, whānau, and children</b> in our assessment?</li> <li>• To what extent do <b>parents, whānau and children know</b> about their child's learning in relation to our identified priorities?</li> <li>• To what extent do we know how useful our assessment processes are for supporting learning continuity when children <b>transition</b> within the service, between services, and to school?</li> <li>• Are there any <b>other ways</b> we respond to our identified priorities for children's learning, and how well do we do this?</li> </ul>
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### What would ERO expect to see in services that are highly effective in determining, enacting and reviewing their curriculum to support children's learning?

Review officers used the following rubric to support them to form judgements about the effectiveness of a service in determining, enacting and reviewing its curriculum to support children's learning.

<b>Highly effective</b>	With no more than one or two very minor areas for improvement in either determining, enacting or reviewing curriculum priorities and emphases, which do not significantly influence outcomes for children.
<b>Mostly effective</b>	With a few minor areas for improvement in either determining, enacting or reviewing curriculum priorities and emphases, which do not significantly influence outcomes for children.
<b>Somewhat effective</b>	There are one or two major areas for improvement in either determining, enacting or reviewing curriculum priorities and emphases, which influence outcomes for children.
<b>Not effective</b>	There are major areas of improvements in either determining, enacting or reviewing curriculum priorities and emphases, which influence outcomes for children.

### Appendix 3: Sample

Data for this evaluation was gathered from 387 services reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2012. Table 1 shows the types of services in this sample.

*Table 1: Service types for Term 1 and 2, 2012 sample*

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage <sup>36</sup>
Casual education and care	2	1	1
Hospital-based service	8	2	<1
Home-based network	9	2	9
Playcentre	53	14	12
Kindergarten	96	25	17
Education and care	219	56	61
Total	387	100	100

This sample is representative of national figures. While kindergartens are over-represented, and home-based networks and education and care services are under-represented, these differences are not statistically significant.<sup>37</sup>

Data for the findings about 'Success for Māori and Pacific children' was also gathered from 240 services reviewed in Term 3, 2012. Table 2 shows the types of services in this particular sample.

*Table 2: Service types for Term 3, 2012 sample*

Service type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Casual education and care	2	1	1
Home-based network	18	7	9
Playcentre	14	6	12
Kindergarten	75	31	17
Education and care	131	55	61
Total	240	100	100

This sample is not representative of national figures. Kindergartens are over-represented, and Playcentres and education and care services are under-represented. These differences are statistically significant.

<sup>36</sup> The national percentage of each service type is based on the total population of services as at February 2013. For this study, it excludes kōhanga reo.

<sup>37</sup> The differences between observed and expected values in Tables 1 and 2 were tested using a Chi square test.

## Appendix 4: Glossary

Te Reo Māori	English meaning
hui	forum for discussion which is underpinned by Māori values
iwi	tribe, wider kinship group
kaiako	teacher
karakia	prayer, grace
kaumātua	adult elder, usually male
kaupapa Māori	Māori way of being
kawa	protocol
korowai	cloak
Matariki	signals the Māori New Year (first appearance of the Pleiades star cluster)
pepeha	speech about where you come from
poi	ball on string (used by females as a prop in kapa haka)
te reo	Māori language
tikanga	customary practices
waiata	song(s)
whakapapa	genealogy
whānau	family



# NOTES

# NOTES

PRIORITIES FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

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