

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 which you may find useful. The full report is available on our website - www.ero.govt.nz

Infants and toddlers: competent and confident communicators and explorers

Good quality early childhood education and care for infants and toddlers has lasting benefits for children and their parents and whānau. This time is a critical and fundamental period of development for children as it lays the foundations for lifelong learning.

The communication and exploration strands of *Te Whāriki*, the Ministry of Education's curriculum for early childhood, are crucial to these foundations.

This report presents the Education Review Office (ERO)'s findings about how well 235 early childhood services reviewed during Terms 1 and 2, 2014 supported infants and toddlers to become competent and confident communicators and explorers.

Emphasis on relationships

Early childhood services in this review generally focused on establishing warm and nurturing relationships with infants and toddlers and had less emphasis on communication and exploration.

A responsive curriculum

Just over half of services had a responsive curriculum that supported infants and toddlers to become competent and confident communicators and explorers.

***Making choices and communicating:** Only two of five children aged between 12 and 16 months are ready for morning tea. A teacher helps them into their chairs and gives them their morning tea, also talking to them about what they are doing. Another teacher reads a story to the other three, talking to them about the pictures and asking questions to prompt them to communicate with each other.*

In the most responsive services, children experienced a high quality curriculum and responsive interactions and relationships. Children's interests and their parents' aspirations informed the curriculum and daily routines.

How well each service promoted positive learning outcomes for infants and toddlers was most influenced by:

- high quality leadership
- a highly reflective culture where teachers inquired into and regularly reflected on their teaching practice
- whole-staff professional learning and development in relation to infants and toddlers.

The table over the page shows the characteristics of the services in four categories – from highly responsive to not responsive – in relation to eight aspects of practice ERO investigated.

***Exploration:** The teacher sets up some water play and the toddlers rush to the water trough and watch as the teacher fills it with water. They start splashing and laughing. The teacher and the children talk about the temperature of the water, the colour, texture and even what it smells like. They have many different resources in the trough to stimulate exploration and experimentation – sieves, funnels, pipes, cups, jugs, plastic bottles and bowls.*

SELF-REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SERVICES

How well does our curriculum promote positive learning outcomes for infants and toddlers, particularly in relation to the communication and exploration strands of *Te Whāriki*?

- Do we use the aspirations and expectations of parents and whānau to plan our curriculum for infants and toddlers?
- How do we use our assessment information to make decisions about the curriculum for infants and toddlers?
- Is the culture, language and identity of each child acknowledged, valued and reflected in our curriculum?
- Do our teachers know each child well, particularly in relation to the strands of communication and exploration?

What do we know about current research and approaches to curriculum for children up to three years of age?

- How do we use the principles of *Te Whāriki* to help us critique and evaluate the relevance of the research and approaches to infant and toddler education and care in our service?

How well do we engage in one-to-one, highly responsive **interactions** with infants and toddlers?

- How do we support infants' and toddlers' verbal and non-verbal language development?
- How effective are we at intentionally building on and extending each child's vocabulary and conceptual understandings?
- Do we know and respond to the language used by each child?

How effective are our assessment and planning processes in supporting us to notice, recognise and respond to the strengths, interests and capabilities of infants and toddlers?

How well does our assessment information build infants and toddlers' identity (includes culture) as confident and competent communicators and explorers?

- What information do we include about infants' and toddlers' working theories and dispositions in their assessment records?
- Do our assessment records clearly show how infants and toddlers are developing and progressing as communicators and explorers over time?
- Do we include the perspectives of children and their parents and whānau?
- How well does our assessment information reflect the deepening and increasing complexity of infants' and toddlers' learning?

How well do we plan and regularly review the physical environment to ensure it supports the learning and development of infants and toddlers?

- Does our environment reflect and celebrate the languages, symbols and artefacts of children's cultural backgrounds?
- Do our infants and toddlers experience an environment that stimulates their interests and includes appropriate challenges?
- Do we have sufficient space to prevent overcrowding?
- How do we ensure that infants and toddlers are not placed in situations where they are exposed to stress that they cannot control?
- Do children always have support from an adult who can soothe and comfort them when necessary?

What do we know about the impact of our curriculum decisions on infants and toddlers? How do we know this? What actions do we take to improve our practice?



FIND OUT MORE

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

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa
The Child – the Heart of the Matter