Good practice:
Oral language development in the early years

GOOD PRACTICE REPORT

Contents

About this report

Oral language is foundational for children's ongoing learning, through and beyond their early years.

ERO looked at how teachers and service leaders support children's oral language in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services, and what good teaching practice looks like for supporting oral language development.

This report is focused on good practice for early childhood teachers and leaders. It uses robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' for supporting oral language, and how teachers and service leaders can implement good practices in their own service.

The Education Review Office (ERO) is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the performance of early childhood services, kura, and schools. As part of this role, ERO looks at how the education system supports early childhood services to provide quality education for children. In this case, we looked at how oral language in the early years is going currently, and what good practice for supporting oral language looks like.

This report is part of a set of two reports

This **good practice report** is focused on what we found out about good practice for early childhood teachers[a] and service leaders. It is designed to be a practical resource.

There is also a companion **evaluation report** which details what ERO found out about how oral language is currently going in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services. In Chapter 1, we give a brief overview of the findings of the evaluation report.

What is oral language?

Language is key to human connection and communication. It is essential for people to navigate through the world effectively. People communicate in a variety of ways, ranging from gestures to written and oral language. **Oral language** includes:

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a   In this report, the term teacher is used for qualified and non-qualified staff working in early childhood services. In some services, they may be referred to as 'kaiako' or ECE educators.

→ listening (receptive language) skills: the ability to hear, process, and understand information

→ speaking (expressive language) skills: the ability to respond and make meaning with sounds, words, gestures, or signing.[b]

Through listening and speaking, children learn to communicate their views, understand others, and make and share their discoveries. In *Te Whāriki*, Aotearoa New Zealand's Early Childhood Education curriculum, oral language includes any method of communication the child uses in their first language.

What about New Zealand Sign Language and use of assistive technologies?

Children communicate and talk in a range of ways, including through sign language, assistive technologies, and more. This report is specifically focused on the oral language component of children's communication. ERO's 2022 research report, 'A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood'[1] has useful information on NZSL and use of assistive technologies for communication.

Why is oral language important?

Oral language is the foundation of literacy.
Before children can read and write, they need to be able to understand language. Children's early reading, writing, and comprehension skills all build on their oral language.[2] Oral language development links to better outcomes in reading comprehension, articulation of thoughts and ideas, vocabulary, and grammar.[3]

Oral language helps children succeed at school.
Oral language development in the early years makes a big difference to educational achievement later. It predicts academic success and retention rates at secondary school. Early measures of language, such as vocabulary at 2 years of age, predict academic achievement at 12 years of age and in secondary school.[4,5]

Oral language helps children collaborate and problem-solve.
Oral language is used for sharing thoughts and transmitting knowledge. It is needed for conversational skills in small groups, including being able to initiate, join, and end conversations. It also helps children learn more effectively, apply their learning through problem-solving, and address challenges.[6]

Oral language skills help children communicate their needs and wants.
Poor social communication skills in childhood relate to behavioural problems when children have difficulty communicating what they need and want, and get frustrated, which is estimated to affect up to 10 percent of children in Aotearoa New Zealand.[7,8]

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b   We recognise *Te Whāriki* includes non-spoken methods of communication (e.g., NZSL, and use of assistive technologies). However, in this report, we refer to oral language as spoken communication in a child's first language (the language they speak at home), because the evidence base available is robust for spoken language, while non-spoken language encompasses vastly different skills and strategies.

What did ERO look at?

In ERO's companion *evaluation report*, we explore a range of questions about what is happening with oral language in English-medium early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Within this *good practice report*, our investigation explores:

→ what the existing research evidence says about good practice in supporting oral language in early childhood services

→ what the existing research evidence says about good support for teachers and service leaders

→ what these practices and supports look like in our Aotearoa New Zealand context, and across a range of early childhood service types and regions

→ what insights, strategies, and stories we could gather that could be useful for the sector – teachers, service leaders, parents and whānau, and early intervention services.

How does oral language fit in to *Te Whāriki*?

Te Whāriki includes specific goals and outcomes related to oral language – such as developing non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes (goal), and understanding oral language and using it for a range of purposes (learning outcome).[9] The Mana Reo | Communication strand focuses on children's communication skills, both spoken and non-spoken. As of May 2024, the principles, strands, goals, and learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* are gazetted – which means that all licensed early childhood services are required to implement them.[10]

Where did ERO look?

We have taken a mixed-methods approach to deliver breadth and depth in this research. We built our understanding of the current state of oral language and what is good practice through literature review, surveys, interviews, and site visits.

We took a deep dive into the literature on good practice for supporting oral language. This covered both the national and international literature base.

To check our understanding and establish our supports, practice areas, and key practices, we worked closely with an Expert Advisory Group. The group included Aotearoa New Zealand academics, teachers, practitioners, and sector experts. We also worked with speech-language therapists over the course of this study.

In our fieldwork, we focused our investigation on the experiences of early childhood service leaders, teachers, and parents and whānau across Aotearoa New Zealand, in primarily English-medium settings. We also looked at some new entrant school classrooms in primary schools to further broaden our understanding. Our 16 site visits included a wide range of English-medium, teacher-led ECE services, including two Pacific services, one Steiner kindergarten and one Montessori preschool. In total, we heard from:

→ 43 early childhood service staff (including eight service leaders)

→ 25 school staff (including eight school leaders)

→ 15 parents and whānau.

As part of these conversations, we asked teachers and service leaders about ways that they bring evidence-based practices to life in their early childhood service. We wanted to know about the particular strategies that have worked well in their experience. You can find their ideas in the 'real-life strategies' throughout Chapters 3 and 4 of this report. It is important to think about which of these strategies will be the right fit for each early childhood service, and how they might be adapted for particular communities of children and parents and whānau.

This report is not just about English language learning

This evaluation draws on examples of practice from a range of ECE services, including education and care, home-based early childhood services, and kindergartens from rural areas, small towns, and cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our site visits took place in 'English-medium' (or 'non-Māori medium') services. (For resources specific to Māori-medium services, see the box below.) Some of our visits occurred in Pacific bilingual services, many of which 'phase in' English language learning over time.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, all licensed ECE services are expected to provide opportunities for children to build their understanding of te reo Māori as well as English (and/or other languages relevant to the community), as part of the everyday experiences and learning that happen there.[11] Ensuring children are able to access te reo Māori, and reflecting the cultures and languages of children and families, is required and affirmed by our guiding curriculum and regulatory frameworks. This is the rich oral language environment that children benefit from in ECE settings.

While many of our examples of practice use the English language, it's important to note that the key practices and supports that underpin our examples are from the international evidence base about oral language development. These draw on studies across a range of language contexts. The practices and supports have also been reviewed by Aotearoa New Zealand experts to ensure that they are relevant and useful for our bicultural context and diverse communities, and align to our curriculum and licensing requirements.

ERO has additional resources that are specific to te reo Māori language learning

As of 2020, over ten thousand children were undertaking their early learning education through te reo Māori most of the time. In these Māori-medium and Māori-immersion settings, children will learn through te reo Māori between 51 percent and 100 percent of the time.[12]

In **kōhanga reo** services, language acquisition and cultural acquisition are interlinked. Language acquisition within these settings is framed around whānau working to revitalise and strengthen te reo Māori me ōna tikanga – culture and language.

A similar focus can be found within **puna kōhungahunga**, where language acquisition is part of a broader kaupapa Māori approach. In these spaces teachers and whānau work together to deliver culturally centred learning with te reo Māori as a key focus.

ERO's 2021 report, 'Āhuru mōwai, Evaluation report for Te Kōhanga Reo',[13] examines how the Kōhanga Reo language approach supports the learning aspirations of children and their whānau. ERO's 2016 report 'Tuia te here tangata: Making meaningful connections', explores Puna Reo practice, including language learning strategies and their impacts.[14]

ECE teachers may also find some value in ERO's 'Poutama Reo self-review framework',[15] which is designed for schools around supporting improvement in te reo Māori provision.

These resources are linked in the 'Useful Resources' section of this report, as well as on our evidence website evidence.ero.govt.nz

What about bilingual or multilingual children?

It's well-established in research that speaking more than one language has many learning advantages for young children, as well as ongoing life benefits.[16,17] Around 200 languages are spoken in homes around Aotearoa New Zealand, and 18 percent of children between 0-14 years of age speak more than one language. Young children who are learning English as an additional language benefit cognitively from building their skills across multiple languages at the same time; it is a positive and useful process.[18]

The practices and supports highlighted in this report are relevant for teachers of all children, whether or not they have one, two, or more languages. It's important for teachers to work in partnership with families and whānau to support children's home languages.

In the short term, it's important for teachers to be aware that children learning more than one language might take longer than their single-language peers to grow their English word bank, combine words, build sentences, and speak clearly compared to children who have one language. This is normal and expected. They might also have stronger oral language skills or confidence in one language than the other, so teachers shouldn't make assumptions about multilingual children's oral language capability based on one language alone.

ERO identified five key areas of practice and four supports

Below are the five evidence-based areas of practice and four evidence-based supports that we focus on in Chapters 3 and 4.

Good teaching practice areas		
	Practice area 1	**Teaching new words and how to use them** This practice area includes intentionally using words to build a child's understanding of words (their receptive vocabulary) and encouraging them to use and apply words in the right context (expressive vocabulary).
	Practice area 2	**Modelling how words make sentences** This practice area includes intentionally using language to show how words are put together to make sentences (grammar) and providing opportunities for children to use this in their own speech.
	Practice area 3	**Reading interactively with children** This practice area includes encouraging children to be active participants during book-reading. Teachers use prompts to encourage interactions between children and the person reading the book.
	Practice area 4	**Using conversations to extend language** This practice area includes intentionally using language to engage children in activities that are challenging for them. It encourages them to hear and use language to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.
	Practice area 5	**Developing positive social communication** This practice area includes providing opportunities for children to learn social norms and rules of communication – both verbal and non-verbal – so they can change the words they use, how quietly/loudly they speak, and how they position themselves when they listen and communicate with others, to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.

Supports for good teaching practice	Support 1	**Early childhood service leadership and priorities** This support is about early childhood service leaders providing teachers with the conditions and resources required for quality oral language support.
	Support 2	**Teacher knowledge and assessment** This support is about teachers' professional knowledge about how children's oral language is developed, taught, assessed, and supported.
	Support 3	**Partnership with parents and whānau** This support is about the partnerships that need to be in place with parents and whānau, to support oral language development at the early childhood service and at home.
	Support 4	**Working with specialists** This support is about teachers having a good understanding of when and how to work with specialists around oral language support.

Report structure

This report is divided into four sections.

→ Chapter 1 sets out our **key findings from our companion evaluation report**, about the current state of oral language in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services.

→ Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of ERO's **recommended areas for action across Aotearoa New Zealand**.

→ Chapter 3 is one of the main parts of the report. It sets out **five areas of evidence-based teacher practice** for supporting oral language development.

→ Chapter 4 is one of the main parts of the report. It sets out **four evidence-based supports** for oral language support that should be fostered in early childhood services.

As well as our companion evaluation report, ERO has also produced short practical guides for ECE teachers, ECE leaders, new entrant teachers, and parents and whānau, with guidance that is specific to their roles. These can all be downloaded from our website, evidence.ero.govt.nz

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this research, particularly the teachers, service leaders, parents and whānau, and experts who shared with us. Their experiences and insights are at the heart of what we have learnt.

Chapter 1: What do we know about oral language in our early childhood services?

ERO looked at how well oral language learning is going in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services. These findings are set out in more detail in our companion evaluation report, *Let's keep talking: Oral language development in the early years*.

This chapter gives a brief overview of our 18 key findings.

ERO identified 18 key findings about the state of oral language in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services. For more detail and additional findings, see our companion evaluation report: *Let's keep talking: Oral language development in the early years.*

Key findings

Oral language is critical for achieving the Government's literacy ambitions.

Finding 1: Oral language is critical for later literacy and education outcomes. It also plays a key role in developing key social-emotional skills that support behaviour. Children's vocabulary at age 2 is strongly linked to their literacy and numeracy achievement at age 12, and delays in oral language in the early years are reflected in poor reading comprehension at school.

Most children's oral language is developing well, but there is a significant group of children who are behind and Covid-19 has made this worse.

Finding 2: A large Aotearoa New Zealand study found 80 percent of children at age 5 are doing well, but 20 percent are struggling with oral language.[c] ECE and new entrant teachers also report that a group of children are struggling and half of parents and whānau report their child has some difficulty with oral language in the early years.

Finding 3: Covid-19 has had a significant impact. Nearly two-thirds of teachers (59 percent of ECE teachers and 65 percent of new entrant teachers) report that Covid-19 has impacted children's language development. Teachers told us that social communication was particularly impacted by Covid-19, particularly language skills for social communication. International studies confirm the significant impact of Covid-19 on language development.

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c   Growing Up in New Zealand (GUiNZ) is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest longitudinal study of child health and wellbeing, following the lives of more than 6000 children and their families.

Figure 1: *Percentage of teachers reporting Covid-19 had an impact on children's oral language development*
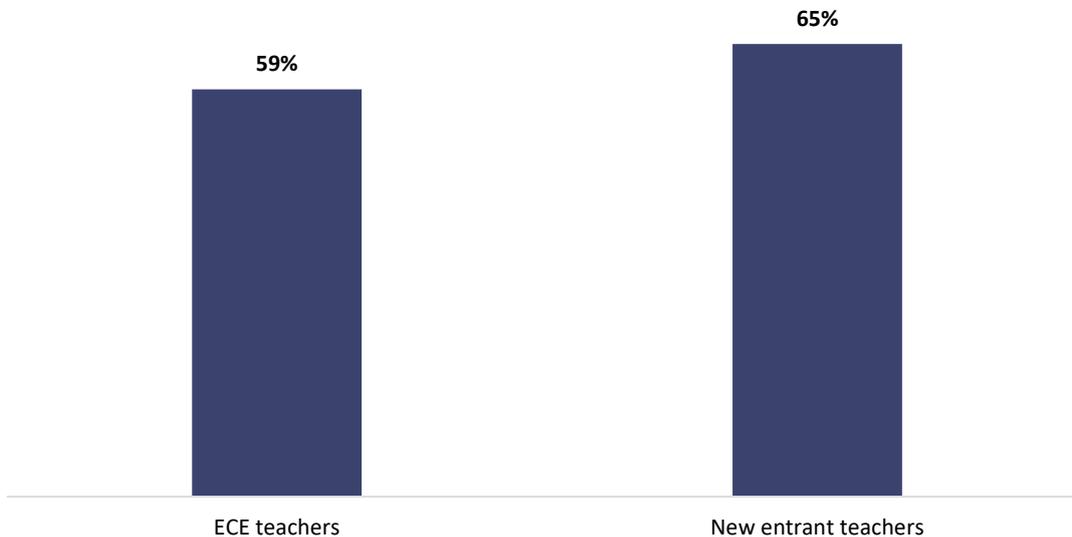
> "A lot of children are not able to communicate their needs. They are difficult to understand when they speak. They are not used to having conversations."
>
> **TEACHER**

Children from low socio-economic backgrounds and boys are struggling the most.

Finding 4: Evidence both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally is clear that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to struggle with oral language skills. We found that new entrant teachers we surveyed in schools in low socio-economic communities were nine times more likely to report children being below expected levels of oral language. Parents and whānau with lower qualifications were also more likely to report that their child has difficulty with oral language.

Figure 2: *New entrant teachers reporting that most children they work with are below the expected level of oral language, by socio-economic community*
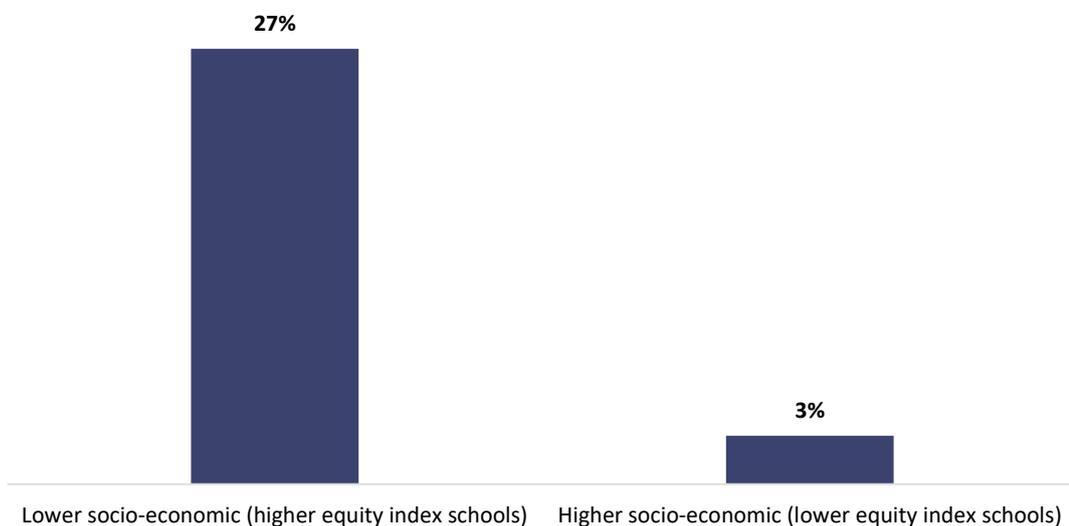
Finding 5: Both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, boys have more difficulty developing oral language than girls.[d] Parents and whānau we surveyed reported 70 percent of boys are not at the expected development level, compared with 56 percent of girls.

Figure 3: *Proportion of parents and whānau that report their child has some difficulty in oral language*
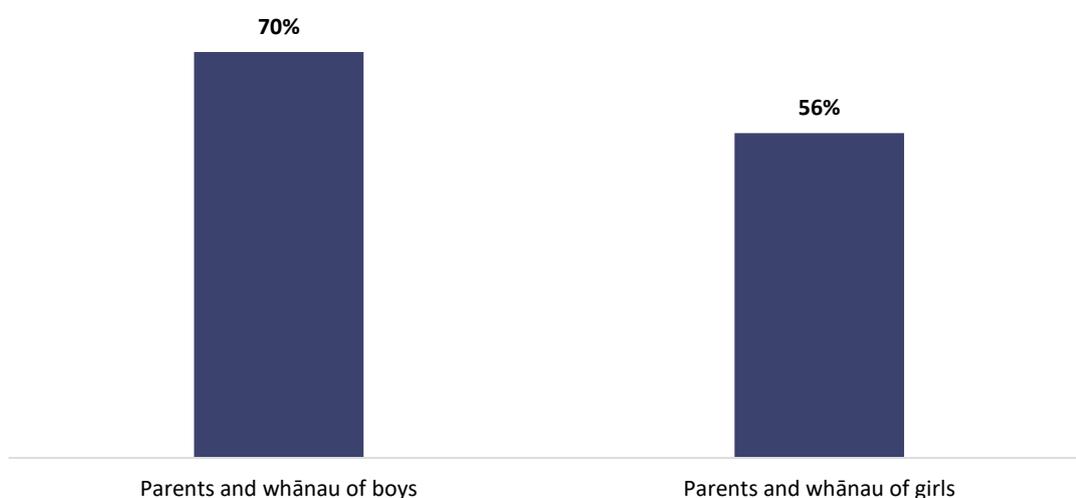

d   Numbers of parents and whānau of gender diverse children were too low in our sample to statistically analyse.

Difficulties with oral language emerge as children develop and oral language becomes more complex.

Finding 6: Teachers and parents and whānau report more concerns about children being behind as they become older and start school. For example, 56 percent of parents and whānau report their child has difficulty as a toddler (aged 18 months to three years old), compared to over two-thirds of parents and whānau (70 percent) reporting that their child has difficulty as a preschooler (aged three to five).

Finding 7: Teachers and parents and whānau report that children who are behind most often struggle with constructing sentences, telling stories, and using social communication to talk about their thoughts and feelings. For example, 43 percent of parents and whānau report their child has some difficulty with oral grammar, but only 13 percent report difficulty with gestures.

Figure 4: *Proportion of parents and whānau who report their toddler or preschooler has difficulty with oral language*

Toddler (age 18 months-3 years)	Preschooler (age 3-5 years)
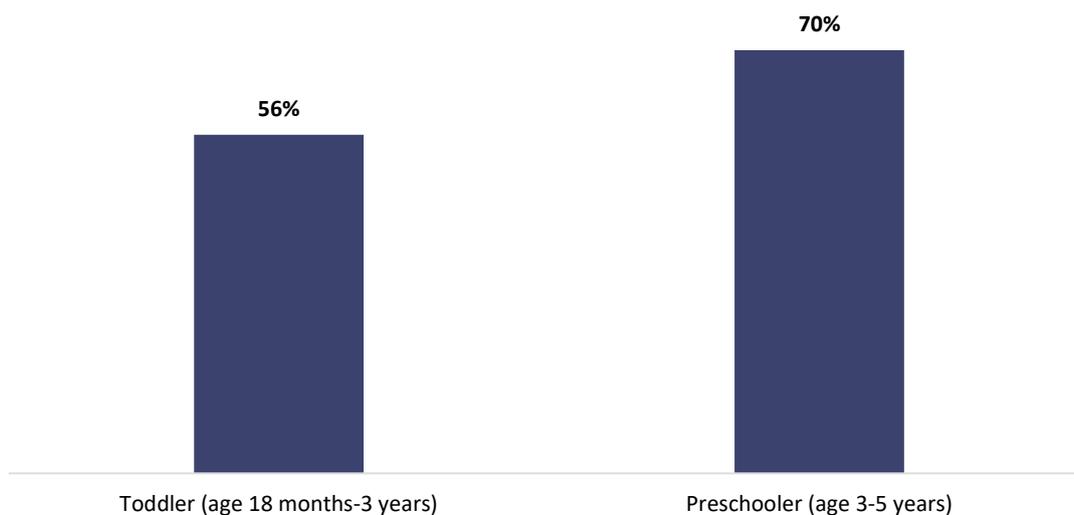
Quality ECE makes a difference, particularly to children in low socio-economic communities, but they attend ECE less often.

Finding 8: International studies find that quality ECE supports language development and can accelerate literacy by up to a year (particularly for children in low socio-economic communities), and that quality ECE leads to better academic achievement at age 16 for children from low socio-economic communities.[19]

Finding 9: Children from low socio-economic communities attend ECE for fewer hours than children in high socio-economic areas, which can be due to a range of factors.

Figure 5: *Intensity of ECE participation of 3- and 4-year-olds in 2023, by socio-economic community*

	High socio-economic community	Medium socio-economic community	Low socio-economic community
3-year-olds	74%	69%	60%
4-year-olds	81%	76%	67%

■ 3-year-olds　■ 4-year-olds
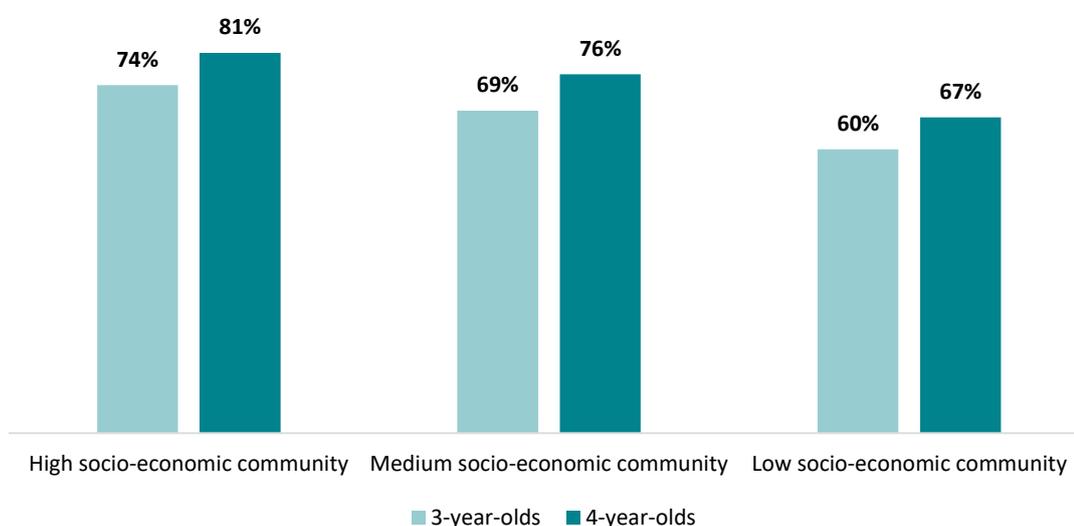
The evidence is clear about the practices that matter for language development, and most teachers report using them frequently.

Finding 10: International and Aotearoa New Zealand evidence is clear that the practices that best support the development of oral language skills are:

Practice area 1	Teaching new words and how to use them
Practice area 2	Modelling how words make sentences
Practice area 3	Reading interactively with children
Practice area 4	Using conversation to extend language
Practice area 5	Developing positive social communication

Finding 11: ECE and new entrant teachers we surveyed reported they use these evidence-based practices often. ECE teachers reported that they most often teach new words and how to use them (96 percent), use conversation to extend language (95 percent), and read interactively with children (95 percent). New entrant teachers we surveyed reported they most frequently read interactively with children (99 percent), teach new words and how to use them (96 percent), and model how words make sentences (95 percent).

Figure 6: *ECE teachers' reported frequency of using teaching practices*
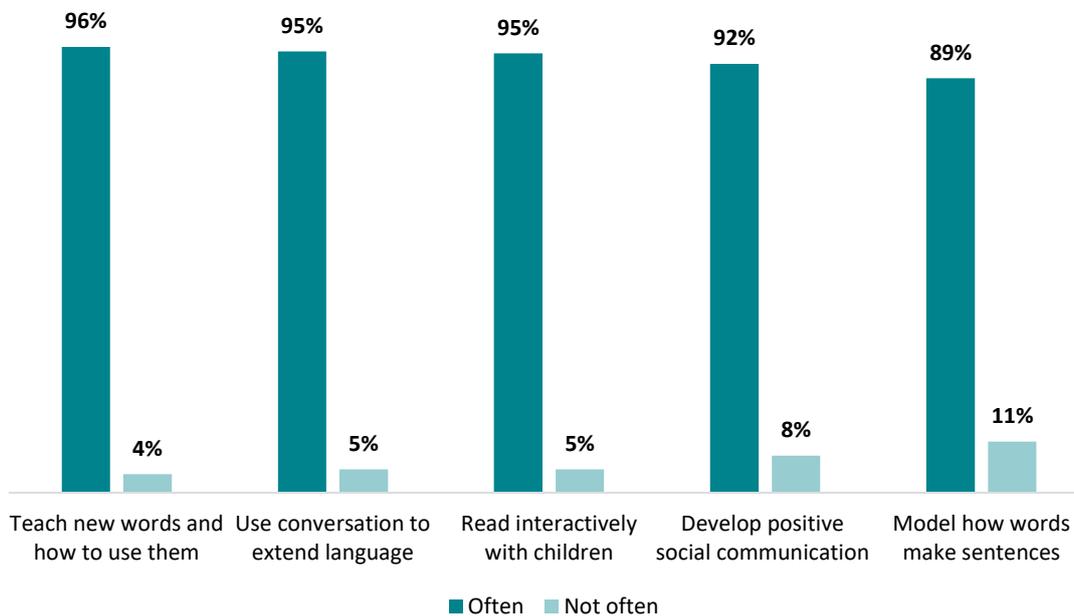
Teachers' practices to develop social communication are weaker.

Finding 12: ECE and new entrant teachers we surveyed both reported to us they develop social communication skills least frequently.

Professional knowledge is the strongest driver of teachers using evidence-based good practices. Qualified ECE teachers reported being almost twice as confident in their knowledge about oral language.

Finding 13: Qualified ECE teachers we surveyed reported being almost twice as confident in their knowledge about how oral language develops than non-qualified teachers. Most qualified ECE teachers (94 percent) reported being confident, but only two-thirds (64 percent) of non-qualified teachers reported being confident.

Finding 14: Qualified teachers reported more frequently using key practices, for example, using conversation to extend language (96 percent compared with 92 percent of non-qualified teachers).

Finding 15: ECE teachers who reported being extremely confident in their professional knowledge of how children's language develops were up to seven times more likely to report using effective teaching practices regularly.

Figure 7: *ECE teachers' reported confidence in their professional knowledge of how oral language develops, qualified compared with non-qualified teachers*
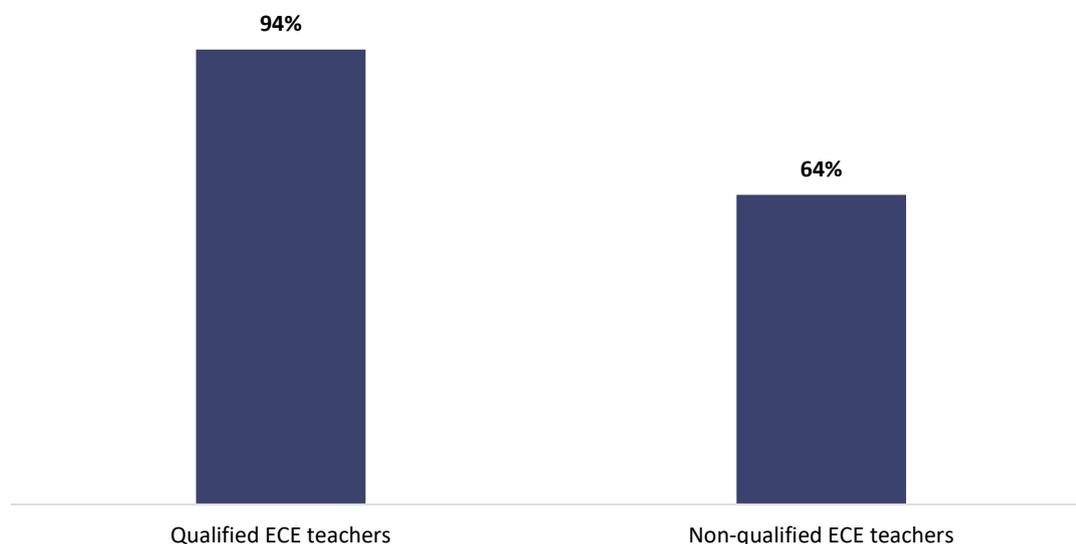
> "We got the [provider] to come in and talk to us about the science, and the brain, and the neuroscience behind basically play-based learning."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "You know that you are using this strategy that is researched and proven to work."
>
> **TEACHER**

Teachers and parents often do not know how well their children are developing and this matters as timely support can prevent problems later.

Finding 16: Not all ECE and new entrant teachers are confident to assess oral language progress. Of the new entrant teachers we surveyed, a quarter reported not being confident to assess and report on progress. The lack of clear development expectations and milestones, and lack of alignment between *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*, makes this difficult. Half of parents (53 percent) do not get information from their service about their child's oral language progress.

Finding 17: Being able to assess children's oral language progress and identify potential difficulties is an important part of teaching young children. However, not all ECE and new entrant teachers are confident to identify difficulties in oral language (15 percent of ECE teachers and 24 percent of new entrant teachers surveyed report not being confident).

Figure 8: *ECE teachers' and new entrant teachers' reported confidence to identify difficulties in children's oral language development*
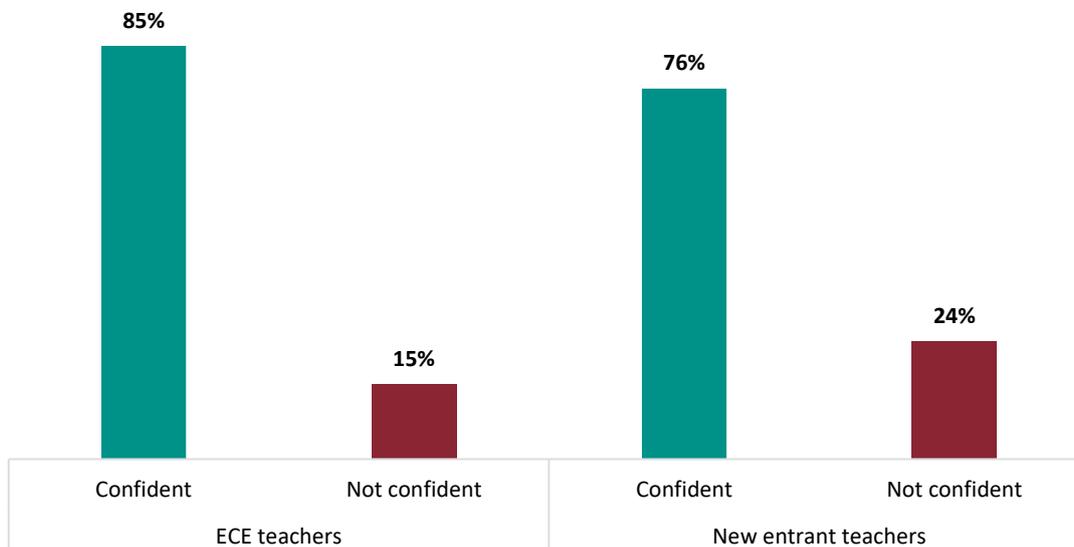
Finding 18: For children who are struggling, support from specialists, such as speech-language therapists, who can help with oral language development is key. But not all teachers are confident to work with these specialists, with 12 percent of ECE teachers and 17 percent of new entrant teachers reporting not being confident.

> "Many are attending ECE, but not being referred early enough once the delay in oral language is noticed. Then when trying to get intervention, the wait times are too long and the support is inconsistent."
>
> **NEW ENTRANT TEACHER**

Conclusion

Oral language in our Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services is a significant problem, and it has been getting worse. We know that oral language in the early years predicts outcomes later in life. More needs to be done to ensure that oral language support is effective, well-supported, and embedded across our early childhood services.

In the next sections of this report, we set out what actions ERO is recommending at the higher level to support services (Chapter 2), and what teachers (Chapter 3) and service leaders (Chapter 4) and can do to improve oral language teaching.

Chapter 2: What does ERO recommend for change?

This good practice report is focused on what ECE leaders and teachers can do to impact children's oral language development within their early childhood services. However, we know that improving oral language isn't just up to early childhood services – it requires shared responsibility and deliberate, joint actions.

Based on what we found out about the state of oral language across Aotearoa New Zealand, ERO is recommending changes to the supports and structures available to services. In this section, we outline the five areas that require action across agencies, to ensure all ECE services are well set up to support oral language – and to be able to focus on great teaching and learning.

ECE teachers and service leaders can make a big difference through their everyday practices and priorities. The most powerful service-level practices for supporting children's oral language are set out in Chapters 3 and 4 of this report.

However, the significance of the oral language challenges that ERO identified (detailed in our companion evaluation report and summarised in Chapter 1 of this report) need strong and decisive actions to enable ECE services to do their best work in supporting children's oral language. In this chapter, we outline the five action areas that ERO is putting forward as recommendations for a cross-agency response.

ERO's recommendations

ERO has identified five areas for action, and 10 recommendations, to support children's oral language development.

Area 1: Increase participation in quality ECE for children from low socio-economic communities
1) Increase participation in quality ECE for children from low socio-economic communities through removing barriers.
2) Raise the quality of ECE for children in low socio-economic communities – including through ERO reviews and Ministry of Education interventions.

Area 2: Put in place clear and consistent expectations and track children's progress

3) Review how the *New Zealand Curriculum* at the start of school and *Te Whāriki* work together to provide clear and consistent progress indicators for oral language.

4) Make sure there are good tools that are used by ECE teachers to track progress and identify difficulties in children's language development.

5) Assess children's oral language at the start of school to help teachers to identify any tailored support or approaches they may need.

Area 3: Increase teachers' use of effective practices

6) In initial teacher education for ECE and new entrant teachers, have a clear focus on the evidence-based practices that support oral language development.

7) Increase professional knowledge of oral language development, in particular for non-qualified ECE teachers, through effective professional learning and development.

Area 4: Support parents and whānau to develop language at home

8) Support ECE services to provide regular updates on children's oral language development to parents and whānau.

9) Support ECE services in low socio-economic communities to provide resources to parents and whānau to use with their children.

Area 5: Increase targeted support

10) Invest in targeted programmes and approaches that prevent and address delays in language development (e.g., *Oral Language and Literacy Initiative* and *Better Start Literacy Approach*).

Conclusion

Oral language is a critical building block for all children and essential to setting them up to succeed at school and beyond. More needs to be done to ensure that oral language support is effective, well-supported, and embedded across our early childhood services. Quality ECE can make a difference.

We have identified five key areas of action to support children's oral language development. Together, these areas of action can help address the oral language challenges children face.

In the next sections of this report, we set out practical guidance for teachers (Chapter 3) and service leaders (Chapter 4) to take their own actions to improve oral language support.

Chapter 3: How can teachers support children's oral language development?

Oral language is foundational for children's ongoing learning, through and beyond their early years. ERO reviewed international and local evidence to find the most powerful practices that teachers can use to support children's oral language development. Then we visited early childhood services across Aotearoa New Zealand and gathered examples of how teachers bring these evidence-based practices to life.

This part of the report provides practical guidance for teachers to reflect on and build their practice. Each practice area is unpacked into key practices, with real-life examples of what we saw and heard in early childhood services. We encourage teachers to use the examples of practice to help them consider how they can apply these in their own service.

Overview of this section

This section sets out:

1) how we found out about good practice
2) five key practice areas.

1) How we found out about good practice

We looked at the evidence base, talked to early childhood services and experts

ERO looked at good practice in supporting oral language in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services and classrooms.

We took a deep dive into the literature on good practice for supporting oral language development. This covered both the national and international literature base, and then we checked our understandings with Aotearoa New Zealand experts.

In our fieldwork, we asked teachers about the practical ways that they bring evidence-based oral language practices to life in their early childhood service. We wanted to know about the particular strategies that have worked well in their experience. You can find their ideas in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

Which teachers will find these practices useful?

This chapter of the report is focused on early childhood teaching practice – we draw from evidence and fieldwork around teaching and learning for children aged 0-6 years old in early learning contexts.

However, new entrant teachers, and other school teachers who work with students within Level 1 of the *New Zealand Curriculum*, may also find some of the practices outlined in this chapter useful for their practice.

2) Five key practice areas

Practice areas are ways that teachers can actively support children's oral language development in early childhood education. These are drawn from the established evidence base.

We have broken down each of the five practice areas into specific 'key practices' that make the most difference for children. These are illustrated by real-life stories, strategies, insights, and ideas from early childhood services, including education and care, home-based early childhood services, and kindergartens from rural areas, small towns, and cities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The five practice areas are:

Practice area 1	**Teaching new words and how to use them** This practice area includes intentionally using words to build a child's understanding of words (their receptive vocabulary) and encouraging them to use and apply words in the right context (expressive vocabulary).
Practice area 2	**Modelling how words make sentences** This practice area includes intentionally using language to show how words are put together to make sentences (grammar) and providing opportunities for children to use this in their own speech.
Practice area 3	**Reading interactively with children** This practice area includes encouraging children to be active participants during book-reading. Teachers use prompts to encourage interactions between children and the person reading the book.
Practice area 4	**Using conversations to extend language** This practice area includes intentionally using language to engage children in activities that are challenging for them. It encourages them to hear and use language to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.
Practice area 5	**Developing positive social communication** This practice area includes providing opportunities for children to learn social norms and rules of communication – both verbal and non-verbal – so they can change the words they use, how quietly/loudly they speak, and how they position themselves when they listen and communicate with others.

Practice area 1: Teaching new words and how to use them

This practice area is about teaching and modelling a wide range of words and their meanings to children.

When this is going well, teachers use a range of strategies to build children's vocabulary, including naming, labelling, explaining, showing, repetition, and extending.

In this section, we set out why teaching and modelling new words is so important for supporting children's oral language development. We also offer practical guidance on how teachers can build this area of their own practice.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about teaching new words and how to use them. It includes:

1) what this practice area is

2) why this is important

3) what good practice looks like in real life

4) a good practice example

5) reflective questions for teachers.

1) What is this practice area?

This practice area is about deliberately teaching and modelling words to children through everyday interactions. This includes intentionally using words to build a child's understanding of words (their 'receptive vocabulary') and encouraging them to use and apply words in the right context ('expressive vocabulary'). To support children, teachers use strategies like naming, labelling, explaining, showing, repetition, and extending.

2) Why is this important?

Adults teaching and modelling different words for children is necessary for children to be able build and use a larger vocabulary themselves.[20] This means children are increasingly able to comment on and describe things around them, interpret their world, and use more specific words (rather than general terms).[21] Repeatedly naming and labelling the things children take an interest in helps them understand new words and store them in their memory. It also helps children understand that words can mean different things in different contexts.

3) What does good practice look like in real life?

The key evidence-based practices that we focus on are:

a) **Naming**

b) **Labelling**

c) **Explaining**

d) **Showing**

e) **Repeating**

f) **Extending**

As part of this study, we talked to teachers and service leaders about strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It is important to think carefully about which of these will be the right fit for the unique context and community of each early childhood service – no strategy is one-size-fits-all.

a) Naming

This key practice involves supporting children to use the words for objects, people, and ideas in their environment. Teachers do this by tuning in to the things that children are experiencing or gesturing towards, so they can provide children with the right words to match what they see, play with, and think about.
For example, 'ball', 'cat', or 'funny'. Teachers might use a 'sportscasting' strategy with infants and non-speaking children, where they narrate activities and describe things and events in the child's view.

Teachers can also support multilingual children by affirming their use of home language words to name things, and then explaining what the word is in English, te reo Māori, or relevant Pacific or other languages that are used at the service. This privileges children's capabilities as well as growing their word bank in the language(s) used most at the service.

> "If it's a play-based learning environment, they get used to working with other children and they hear other vocabulary. So that's a gifting of vocabulary and practising their oral language skills."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "We expand their emotions and identify key words that they can use to express themselves."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Pointing at objects while naming them. Teachers shared how they would support children to name objects within 'serve and return' interactions, pointing to clarify what they are naming and "making sure that we give the vocabulary to what the children are trying to express." (Teacher)
Naming feelings and emotions. We heard that during conflict resolution conversations, teachers would name and repeat the feelings involved for the children, supporting them to build their vocabulary in a key area of their social learning.

b) Labelling

This key practice involves using words to identify objects, people, and ideas across different mediums – such as relating something learnt from a screen to something seen in real life, or pointing to something in the ECE environment that is also being labelled in a story book.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Talking about what's in the environment during daily activities with children. We saw teachers intentionally use care routines and mealtimes as opportunities to label things in the child's view and talk about how they relate to other contexts.
Modelling correct words after children make errors. Teachers told us how they support children to use a more appropriate word when they made a labelling error. Teachers emphasise the correct word when they reply to children – for example, "That's right, you're going to the *library* this afternoon".

c) Explaining

This key practice involves explaining the meanings of words to help children express ideas. Children benefit from teachers clarifying and unpacking words to gain a deeper understanding of new vocabulary.

> "They can generally talk about it. Even if they can't give you specific names, they can tell you what it looks like or feels like."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "We see a change in our playground behaviours. We've seen a change in children's wellbeing. They're actually expressing their feelings and needs… [they're] actually able to articulate and feel okay about going and articulating to people."
>
> **LEADER**

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Making it a habit to explain the meaning of new words. When teachers describe new words to children, it helps children to not only *know* a word, but also know how to *use* it.

> "They're then using that vocab that they've heard, but they understand the vocab because we've explained it – we've broken it down. And then they might be using it in different tenses."
>
> **TEACHER**

Using different words to explain the same concept or idea. Teachers shared that through such modelling, they've noticed children become more articulate because they've heard multiple ways to express a concept or idea.

d) Showing

This key practice involves being clear about the mouth and tongue movements used when saying particular words, to help children get used to the sound as well as the feeling of saying the word. Teachers might say parts of new words extra clearly, loudly, or slowly, or talk with children about what the mouth movements look like or feel like. However, teachers should be cautious about *over*-exaggerating their mouth movements, as this can distort sounds.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Focusing on speech sounds that tend to be trickier. We heard that teachers occasionally emphasise sounds or parts of words, to prompt discussion with children.

> "You can pick up how they might pronounce certain things, like the 'th' is really hard. So, we really stick our tongues out for that one."
>
> **TEACHER**

Pointing towards the mouth when saying a new word. We saw teachers gesture towards the shape their mouth was making when introducing new vocabulary. This draws the children's attention, and they imitate the movement.

e) Repeating

This key practice involves intentionally repeating certain words to help children gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of a word, and how the word is used in context.

> "Always repeat the words as well, and what you want them to do."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Using call-and-response to get children speaking. We saw teachers say a word, then prompt children to repeat it together. This can be done with individuals or groups of children.

Encouraging children to repeat new words. This can help children consolidate new vocabulary.

> "I said, 'Well, you can use your words. How could you say it?' So, if she hasn't got the word, I give her the words and I let her repeat the words."
>
> **TEACHER**

f) Extending

This key practice involves adding extra words, for example, adjectives or adverbs, to descriptions (e.g., 'big red ball'). This helps children to extend and expand their knowledge, by giving them the words to do so. Teachers can also encourage sustained shared thinking by responding to questions that children ask and helping them to articulate and extend their ideas by modelling new vocabulary.[22] For infants and children who are not yet speaking, 'serve and return' interactions which involve teachers responding to gestures, eye contact etc., with spoken words, are another useful form of extending.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Actively listening to children and adding on to what they say. For example, we saw teachers verbally engaging with children as they arrive in the morning. When children share about their morning or family experiences, teachers build on their words, relating to what they already know about the children and their families.
Introducing groups or categories of similar words that relate to children's play. Teachers take the opportunity to introduce a group or category of similar words to children, such as different types of animals, vegetables, or tools. This is a simple way to help increase children's exposure to words during the day.

"I've actually seen great results…… I've got one child in the toddlers' room that's really keen to speak, and he keeps repeating everything we say. [He's] really determined to use the language. He would point at his shoes and say, 'On the shelf, up, up there, up there'. Then from this… I'd give him extra words and a week later he would say, 'My shoes, they are up there' – which was incredible."

TEACHER

Good practice example

Real-life example: Encouraging playful and creative language

At one service, we heard how leaders and teachers encourage children to use language and experiment with new vocabulary in a playful and creative way.

> "We're noticing – and particularly encouraging – our 3-year-olds to be really creative, imaginative, and playful with their language. We know that that's an important developmental step…We had a young boy here… who started saying to the teacher 'See you later, alligator'. His mother was horrified that he was being rude to the teachers!…Obviously we're not fazed by it at all and recognise that playful language, mucking around with words, doing silly rhymes, and joke words is all part of normal healthy development."
>
> **LEADER**

4) Reflective questions for teachers

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

→ How often do I repeat words when speaking to children? How about explaining or discussing what they mean?

→ How often do I ask children to vocalise what they are doing and their ideas or emotions? Can I add to their word bank, for example, by *naming* objects, or *labelling* connections to other contexts?

→ When working with infants and non-verbal children, how regularly do I maximise interactions with 'serve and return' responses to their gestures and non-verbal cues, or use 'sportscasting' strategies to describe what is happening around them?

→ How do we show children that the language they speak at home is welcomed in our service and that their added vocabulary is a strength?

→ When could I say a bit more or add complexity to my language, to increase children's knowledge of words? (E.g., during care routines, mealtimes, discussing children's construction creations, etc.)

Practice area 2: Modelling how words make sentences

This practice area is about teachers deliberately modelling the way that words are linked together.

When this is going well, teachers use a range of strategies to show children how words are put together, including storytelling, using songs, questioning, sequencing, and recapping.

In this section, we set out why teaching and modelling how words make sentences is so important for supporting oral language. We also offer practical guidance on how teachers can build this area of their own practice.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out information about modelling how words make sentences. It includes:

1) what this practice area is

2) why this is important

3) what good practice looks like in real life

4) a good practice example

5) reflective questions for teachers.

1) What is this practice area?

This practice area includes intentionally using language to show how words are linked to make sentences (grammar), and providing opportunities for children to practice this in their own speech. To support children, teachers use strategies like storytelling, songs and waiata, questioning, sequencing, and recapping.

2) Why is this important?

Teaching and modelling how words link together helps children become familiar with the different sounds in words, rhythm, and rhyme, gain an interest in storytelling, and be able to be creative and expressive through describing and telling stories.[23]

These learning outcomes and strengths are emphasised in *Te Whāriki* and are pivotal to children's ongoing literacy learning. Good practices to foster early language and communication development include using songs, nursery rhymes,

and stories.[24] When teachers ask children follow-up questions and recap previous learning, this helps consolidate children's language.

Building children's understandings of language construction helps children to use oral language at mealtimes and take the lead during care rituals, and increases their interest in group action songs and waiata.[25]

3) What does good practice look like in real life?

The key evidence-based practices that we focus on are:

a) Storytelling
b) Singing
c) Questioning
d) Sequencing
e) Recapping

As part of this study, we talked to teachers and service leaders about the strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It is important to think carefully about which of these will be the right fit for the unique context and community of each early childhood service – no strategy is one-size-fits-all.

a) Storytelling

This key practice involves using stories to intentionally model the use of language. For example, emphasising how words and language are used when reading books with children. In Pacific language services, teachers might engage in talanoa with children to share stories and build language skills

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Putting emphasis on new words while reading books. Teachers read stories expressively to children, emphasising new or tricky words so children can hear how the word is pronounced and talk about what it means.
Choosing books that have new words children have been learning. Teachers shared how they pick stories that match the current topics children are learning about in the service. This helps children notice similarities and make connections across key learning areas, and discover rich descriptive vocabulary and grammar that isn't found in everyday speech.

b) Singing

This key practice involves using songs and rhymes to intentionally model the different uses and forms of language. For example, the use of rhyming words, rhythm, music, and songs and waiata to engage children and teach language patterns and rules.

> "We have different songs for different seasons… So it's all linked with the rhythm of the earth."
>
> **LEADER**

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Using songs to teach rhyming words. We saw teachers introduce songs to children by talking them through the words of the lyrics, helping them see the way different words rhyme with each other.
Creating rhyming phrases for instructions. We heard about teachers using rhymed instructions and prompts for routines. Children join in with saying the rhyme.

> "You would not say it, you sing it… in a gentle way… 'wash the dishes, dry the dishes, turn the dishes over'… You sing songs while you do that…They sing all those songs now too, because they're used to it."
>
> **LEADER**

c) Questioning

This key practice involves asking a range of questions to invite different forms of responses from children. For example, asking children both closed questions (with only a few possible answers, eg., 'yes' or 'no') and open-ended questions during different types of interactions, to allow them opportunities to practice a range of oral language skills when giving answers. It helps when teachers listen to what children are talking about and the ideas they're expressing, in order to ask relevant, engaging questions that challenge children to consider more expressive or complex answers.

It's important to keep in mind that *relentless* questioning can reduce children's participation in conversation – so teachers should balance their use of questions with statements and comments that encourage children to think, respond, and take the lead in conversation too. 'I wonder about…' statements can be useful for this.

> "We did shift our language a little bit as well, to talk with the children about what do you want to *learn about* today, not what do you want to *do*…it changes their thinking and also makes the space a lot safer to get things wrong as well."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Planning open-ended questions to ask children. Open-ended questions prompt children to use more words when answering. We heard from some teachers that they are more likely to ask questions in an open way if they have intentionally planned to do so.

> "I'll… write down some questions [that are] open-ended… I can ask *these* questions for *these* tamariki."
>
> **TEACHER**

Asking questions and waiting, before giving away the answer. This gives children time to think and engage with the question, and practice constructing sentences in response.

> "They know that they are expected to speak, but we also give them that prep time beforehand… so they have that time to turn and talk… And then you know that they've all had that processing time and then they can share."
>
> **TEACHER**

d) Sequencing

This key practice involves telling stories to model how events and activities are put into order. For example, choosing books to read to and with children that show clear sequences and timelines. This helps children develop scripts for how things happen (an order of events) and learn the language used for signalling sequences and what to expect in a narrative. For example, words like 'then', 'next', 'just before', or 'finally'.

> "It's the warning, saying, 'Hey, we're going to be finishing and packing this away soon'."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Emphasising words and phrases that relate to the timing of events during storytelling. Teachers focus on time prepositions (e.g., after this, then, next) when reading stories, to help children understand the order in which things happen.
Using props and materials to show a sequence of events. Teachers shared how they would put pictures on a magnet board with scenes from a story that children have read, and encourage children to put the pictures in order based on what they remember.

e) Recapping

This key practice involves intentionally recapping and repeating language used, to review children's learning. For example, going over topics and subjects that children have previously learned about, to revisit what was covered and help children remember the language that was used.

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Prompting children to recap prior events. Teachers would encourage children to tell short, sequenced stories through recapping questions. > "'Can you remember what you did in the morning?' – Actually getting the sequence of events, just getting them to start to talk to us." > **TEACHER**
Talking to children about previous learning topics. At one service, teachers ask children what the 'word of the week' or 'letter of the week' is, and to think about the previous weeks.

4) Good practice example

Real-life example: Grandparents connect children with their culture

One home-based service has Chinese grandparents as teachers, which allows for the transmission of cultural knowledge and language use. For children that share their home language, these teachers support their understanding of rhyme, rhythm, story, and sequence through the use of Chinese poems. Service leaders encourage this practice.

> "Particularly with some of our older grandparent educators, some of the things they do are really quite beautiful – like that back-and-forth communication with babies. But it's acknowledging that and letting them know how important that is, what they're doing. A lot of them do it so naturally anyway, but just letting them know that we see that and that actually, 'what you're doing is amazing for language development.'"
>
> **VISITING TEACHER**

> "It's a very traditional thing to teach them these traditional poems. And just the pride when these little children can recite these little poems – connecting them to their home culture, because obviously they're growing up in New Zealand."
>
> **LEADER**

5) Reflective questions for teachers

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

→ Am I intentional about supporting children to explore language and construct sentences?

→ Do I ask open-ended questions (or comments like 'I wonder...') that encourage children to talk and experiment with language? Do I allow them enough time to consider their answers?

→ How can I use songs and stories to engage children in different aspects of oral language – like rhyme, rhythm, narrative, etc.?

→ What opportunities do children have to reflect and recap on past learning, language, and new words? How could I build this into my everyday practice?

Practice area 3: Reading interactively with children

This practice area is about teachers engaging children in interactive reading activities.

When this is going well, teachers use a range of strategies to prompt active interaction from children during book-reading, including using questioning, recalling, expanding, extending, explaining, retelling, and rereading.

In this section, we set out why interactive reading is so important for supporting oral language. We also offer practical guidance on how teachers can build this area of their own practice.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about reading interactively with children. It includes:

1) what this practice area is

2) why this is important

3) what good practice looks like in real life

4) a good practice example

5) reflective questions for teachers.

1) What is this practice area?

This practice area is about involving children in the process of reading aloud from books. This means encouraging children to be active participants during teachers' book-reading. To support children, teachers use strategies like questioning, recalling, expanding, extending, explaining, retelling, and rereading.

2) Why is this important?

Reading with children supports children to enjoy poetry, pūrākau, fiction, and non-fiction, and encourages them to be confident storytellers.[26] Teachers can stimulate children's interest in reading by regularly sharing interesting books with them.[27] Following up by asking questions, explaining in further detail, retelling the story, and reading it again make the process of reading more engaging. Oral storytelling is a valued form of oral language teaching and learning, in the evidence base and within many cultures – for example, some Pacific communities use storytelling as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and promoting cultural values.

Reading

Children who are learning in more than one language can benefit from hearing stories that feature one or more of their languages - see the 'Useful resources' section at the end of this report for links to some dual language story books.

3) What does good practice look like in real life?

The key evidence-based practices that we focus on are:

a) **Questioning**

b) **Recalling**

c) **Expanding**

d) **Extending**

e) **Explaining**

f) **Retelling**

g) **Rereading**

As part of this study, we talked to teachers and service leaders about the strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It is important to think carefully about which of these will be the right fit for the unique context and community of each early childhood service – no strategy is one-size-fits-all.

a) Questioning

This key practice involves asking questions while reading, to prompt discussion and encourage active engagement. This supports children to answer logically using clues from the book and its context, such as the title of the story, and also to answer creatively and use their imagination.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Talking about a new book before starting to read it. Teachers ask children questions about the words and characters in a new story. Guessing and imagining things about the characters is a way they can interact with the story before the actual storytelling has even begun.
Using questions to encourage children to share. We saw a teacher aide doing shared reading together with a child. The teacher aide asked the child questions related to the book, which helped the child engage with the story and practice their oral language skills through their answers.

Reading

b) Recalling

This key practice involves linking ideas in books to prior learning. For example, helping children to make links between the content that they read and hear in stories, and what they learn about in other areas of their learning.

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Linking stories to previous outings and learning activities at the service. For example, helping children to recall the different things they saw on their last bush walk when reading a book about nature.
Linking books to children's life experiences. Teachers ask children whether an event in a book has ever happened to them. This helps children make connections and add words learnt from books to their own vocabulary.

c) Expanding

This key practice involves identifying and adding new vocabulary from stories or rhymes being read, to expand children's vocabulary. This way, rather than just listening or reading along, children can also start practising new words that they hear.

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well
Checking children's understanding of words. Teachers ask what children's prior knowledge is for new vocabulary, so they can expand on this through discussion, and with thoughtful selection of the next book.
Actively using new words learnt from books. Teachers incorporate new vocabulary that children have recently read during book–reading, into their interactions. This ties into choosing books that match or overlap with current learning topics.

d) Extending

This key practice involves intentionally extending on ideas from books, using the specific ideas and themes in books to broaden children's thinking. In this way, children can start verbalising concepts that are familiar to them through stories they have heard or read.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Being intentional about the books that are accessible and available.

> "Putting less out on the bookshelf, but being more intentional about what it is and leaving it there for a longer period of time so that children are able to revisit and have those conversations again and develop those ideas further over time… that was something that sounds so simple, but it was a really big shift."
>
> **TEACHER**

Creating activities based on books. Teachers use the content of books children are reading to create follow-on activities that extend on similar ideas and themes.

e) Explaining

This key practice involves using different words to clarify ideas from books. For example, thoughtful use of language to explain ideas that come up in the stories children hear and read. By clarifying the meaning of a concept in different ways, teachers can help children to understand difficult-to-grasp concepts when they are reframed in a slightly different way.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Adding in extra detail when reading a book more than once. Teachers use repeated book-reading as an opportunity to go into more detail about the story and characters.

Encouraging and facilitating peer book-reading. Many teachers that we talked to encourage tuaka-teina interactions between older and younger children with diverse vocabularies.

> "[Two boys] actually sit together and they're reading. Not necessarily reading the words, but they're capturing the moments in the story pictures. They're telling each other the stories [and] taking turns in that."
>
> **TEACHER**

f) Retelling

This key practice involves encouraging children to retell stories in different formats. For example, teachers might model retelling a story in a creative way and provide physical props and tools to help children retell a story themselves. Teachers can also encourage children to use dance, art, music, or drama performances to retell stories in new ways.

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Using puppets, magnets, or blocks to creatively retell stories. Teachers use different materials to retell stories.

> "(We) put pictures on the wall in the right sequence, and the children will come and look at the pictures, point at things, and use certain words to retell the story that they are familiar with."
>
> **TEACHER**

Acting out stories as a group. Teachers engage with children to physically act out stories that they read.

> "We read the stories, maybe act the stories out so that the children internalise the story."
>
> **TEACHER**

g) Rereading

This key practice involves being intentional about the selection of stories that will be read again and again. For example, carefully choosing which books children can most easily access, to maximise opportunities for engagement and target particular oral language skills.

Reading

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Displaying familiar books at children's eye level. We heard how teachers intentionally display familiar or popular books, which promotes rereading. Teachers note that children enjoy remembering and saying what happens next in a story, which can build children's enjoyment of books.

Setting up space in the service that allows for a mix of teacher-led and child-led reading. We saw that when books are accessible and inviting, children will reread on their own, with peers, or with a teacher.

Dual-language books

In our interviews, we heard about children hearing stories that use languages that are familiar to them, which aligns with research evidence around the positive impacts of dual-language stories.[28] See the 'Useful Resources' section of this report for some links for dual-language story books in English and te reo Māori, and English and Pacific languages.

4) Good practice example

Real-life example: Picture books transcend the language barrier

At one service, we heard about how teachers use interactive reading to support a multilingual child's oral language.

"There's one new child, he speaks three languages – mum and dad have two different languages, then [he's learning] English... We got to know that he's very interested in reading books, so it's very easy for us to extend his language through reading books and showing the pictures. Now even his mum says that he can understand... He actually came from another centre, [that] had informed the parents that they were really concerned with his speech delays – but he speaks really well. We were like, 'Let us observe and let us get to know him and see what his interests are'. Then the team incorporated his interests a lot more. He doesn't have speech delays... He wasn't able to have his interests met and his strengths deepened."

TEACHER

5) Reflective questions for teachers

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

→ Do I actively involve children in reading, by asking them questions, commenting on the story, and allowing opportunities for retelling?

→ Are we purposeful about the selection of books and reading material that is accessible to children? What specific areas of oral language learning are we working to promote with this selection?

→ Are our books interesting and relevant to our children? For example, do we choose books with characters that look like the children at the service, and reflect the cultural backgrounds of the children at the service?

→ How can I use books and stories as a jumping-off point for more oral language learning? For example, by extending on the story in a performance or through a construction activity, or by relating stories to rich discussions about children's home lives and interests?

Reading

Practice area 4: Using conversations to extend language

This practice area is about teachers having conversations with children as a deliberate language teaching strategy. This is sometimes called 'collaborative talk'.

When this is going well, teachers use a range of strategies to engage children in activities where they can practice sharing their ideas out loud with others, including making links, evaluating, and testing working theories.

In this section, we set out why extending language through conversations is so important for supporting oral language. We also offer practical guidance on how teachers can build this area of their own practice.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about using conversations to extend language. It includes:

1) what this practice area is

2) why this is important

3) what good practice looks like in real life

4) a good practice example

5) reflective questions for teachers.

1) What is this practice area?

This practice area is about teaching through purposeful discussions with children. This means intentionally using language to engage children in challenging activities which encourage them to hear and use language to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.[29,30] Teachers support children by using strategies like making links, evaluating, and testing working theories.

2) Why is this important?

Teaching through discussions with children allows children to increase their language ability and use language to communicate complex information and engage in problem-solving.[31] Talking together helps children make connections between different concepts and ideas, make evaluative judgements, and test out their ideas about how the world works. These skills are foundational to their ongoing learning.

3) What does good practice look like in real life?

The key evidence-based practices that we focus on are:

a) **Making links**
a) **Evaluating**
a) **Testing working theories**

As part of this study, we talked to teachers and service leaders about the strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It is important to think carefully about which of these will be the right fit for the unique context and community of each early childhood service – no strategy is one-size-fits-all.

a) Making links

This key practice involves talking with children to help them make connections between ideas, experiences, and events. For example, intentionally starting conversations about topics that relate to children's own experiences. This can help them see similarities across different areas in their lives, and in how language is used in different contexts.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Recognising and responding when children group similar words together. This can be used as a learning opportunity to teach children about categories and differentiation.

> "Sometimes the child would be saying 'blue' when they're trying to talk about this book about a yellow digger."
>
> **LEADER**

Conversations

> **We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well** *(continued)*
>
> **Starting the morning by asking about children's experiences.** We saw teachers asking children about their evening or morning. Through this verbal engagement, children make links about the similarities and differences between their experiences.

b) Evaluating

This key practice involves supporting children to evaluate their own learning through talking about it. For example, teachers creating opportunities for children to reflect on their learning and talk about why they think or do things in a certain way. More complex ideas – like metacognition (thinking about your own thinking) – often require more nuanced language, and teachers have a key role in equipping children with that language.

Real-life strategies

> **We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well**
>
> **Regularly asking children questions to prompt self-reflection about their learning progress.** At one service, it is common for children to evaluate themselves and their skills. They are comfortable sharing about their progress in different learning areas. For example, teachers might ask, 'Do you think you understand now, or would you like to talk about this some more?'
>
> **Probing with 'why' questions.** Teachers help children unpack their thinking by asking them 'why' (e.g., 'why do you think that?'). We heard that this gives children an opportunity to think through and articulate their reasoning.

c) Testing working theories

This key practice involves engaging with children's play to identify the learning taking place and then encouraging children to test their own and each other's thinking through talk. Teachers can make the most of opportunities within interactions to support children to talk through their theories about the world. For example, this could include talking about why their peers show certain emotions during conflict, how the sun helps plants to grow, or why they feel good when someone listens to them during a conversation.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Talking about being unsure. We heard that this helps children to feel safer to share their ideas, and to be open to others' working theories.

> "If they don't have an idea they say, 'I don't have an idea'. That's huge. That's been a huge learning curve, actually a huge shift to the 'It's okay if you don't know' – that we all don't know something. And that's the biggest shift I think we've seen."
>
> **TEACHER**

Encouraging children to share and debate their ideas.

> "They're not afraid to share with their peers because they know their peers might be like, 'I disagree with you', and that's okay. That's been our big one – that's very powerful."
>
> **TEACHER**

Good practice example

Real-life example: Exploring ideas during physical play

At one service, we saw a teacher using conversations with children as a way to explore one another's ideas about physical challenge and safety. As a group of children are climbing a tree, the teacher uses this as an opportunity to collaboratively discuss with the children about strategies to safely climb the tree.

> "Hold the branch... Are you going to stay there?"
>
> **TEACHER**

Sustained conversation between the teacher and group of children explores the feelings and sense of challenge experienced by climbing the tree. The teacher uses more prompts at the start of the talk, and then takes a step back to observe and listen when the children's conversation has gained momentum.

Conversations

4) Reflective questions for teachers

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

→ How can I enhance the learning environment or daily schedule to maximise small group activities and peer interactions?

→ Do I take time to listen carefully to children's ideas, and encourage them to do the same and listen to others? Are all children, including quieter or non-speaking children, invited to contribute?

→ How often do I support children to talk about the links between their experiences and ideas, and others' experiences and ideas? How about making links back to past learning?

→ How can I prompt children to evaluate their own learning and progress through talk? How can I ensure that these conversations are safe, fun, and challenging?

Practice area 5: Developing positive social communication

This practice area is about teaching and modelling positive and inclusive social communication skills.

When this is going well, teachers use a range of strategies to deliberately teach children verbal and non-verbal social communication skills, including waiting, body positioning, mirroring, gesturing, and reminding.

In this section, we set out why teaching and modelling social communication skills is so important for supporting oral language development, and offer practical guidance on strategies teachers can use to build this area of their own practice.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about developing positive social communication. It includes:

1) what this practice area is

2) why this is important

3) what good practice looks like in real life

4) a good practice example

5) reflective questions for teachers.

1) What is this practice area?

This practice area includes providing opportunities for children to learn social 'norms' (the ways we tend to talk with each other in social situations) and rules of communication. Positive social communication is both verbal and non-verbal, and will help them to navigate interactions with others in education contexts and beyond. This includes children building skills like changing the words they use, how quietly or loudly they speak, and how they position themselves when they listen and communicate with others. To support children, teachers use strategies like waiting, body positioning, mirroring, gesturing, and reminding.

2) Why is this important?

Teaching and modelling how to communicate well with others helps children learn how to respond to verbal and non-verbal requests from others and be responsive and reciprocal in their interactions (e.g., by taking turns to talk and listen).[32,33] Social communication is an important skillset, and the key to success in a range of life and learning areas. A lot of social communication is picked up through interactions, but deliberate and purposeful teaching is needed too. Social communication norms vary between cultures.

When teachers role-model good social communication – such as using gestures to complement oral language, eye-contact with a conversational partner, and mirroring body language – children can pick up these unspoken rules and social norms and learn to apply them independently.

> "You can't separate oral language and social competencies. They all kind of come together... And they complement each other."
>
> **TEACHER**

3) What does good practice look like in real life?

The key evidence-based practices that we focus on are:

a) **Practising the social rules of communication**

b) **Waiting**

c) **Body positioning**

d) **Mirroring**

e) **Gesturing**

f) **Reminding**

As part of this study, we talked to teachers and service leaders about the strategies that have worked well in their experience. We've collected their ideas and strategies here. It is important to think carefully about which of these will be the right fit for the unique context and community of each early childhood service – no strategy is one-size-fits-all.

a) Practising the social rules of communication

This key practice involves establishing and clarifying the social norms (expectations) of play and communication with children. For example, clearly and regularly talking about the service's expectations about how to talk kindly to others or expectations for listening and responding to others.

> "They know in all circumstances that their voice is heard and valued…It's okay to disagree,… But it's disagreeing respectfully."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "They know that that's also okay – that if you can't hear it that it's fine to ask. And the speaker knows that that's fine as well."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real–life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Discussing what makes a good conversational partner. This includes affirming positive interactions.

> "They understand what a good listener is, what a good speaker is. It's being modelled all the time. It's being encouraged."
>
> **TEACHER**

Establishing and communicating golden rules for how to treat others. This can include having posters or pictures showing how we listen to others or raise our hand to ask a question at mat time. Teachers use consistent language, so children become familiar and confident with these rules.

Real-life example from a new entrant classroom: Normalising speaking in front of others

Staff in this new entrant classroom regularly invite children to speak in front of a wider group, and to listen to others' stories.

> "That's really normal every day, getting kids up to share their story… Every day, all day. And so it's not big and scary to share your thoughts or your ideas and speak up."
>
> **TEACHER AIDE**

Social communication

b) Waiting

This key practice involves teachers consistently giving children time to respond after asking a question, to model respectful waiting as part of the conversation. Teachers also discuss the reasons for this with children – for example, that often people need to think about what they're going to say before they are ready to speak out loud. In Pacific services, teachers model and discuss the warmth and respect that are a key part of unhurried conversations that include waiting (e.g., mafana ofa fakaaloalo).

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Discussing why waiting is respectful and important. We heard that this is important so that children can learn that just like they sometimes need extra time in social situations, so do others.

> "They've done a lot of work on wait time and processing, and now they're actually giving each other wait time."
>
> **TEACHER**

Modelling what it looks like to wait in a social situation. Teachers at this service deliberately demonstrate wait time and talk about the importance of sharing.

> "Introducing the language of sharing. Teaching them the words like 'wait', but you've actually got to *show* them what 'wait' means."
>
> **TEACHER**

c) Body positioning

This key practice involves modelling positive social body language. For example, teachers maintaining open, welcoming postures and gestures when interacting with children – like meeting children at their eye-level when speaking to them, and not having their arms crossed. This practice also includes supporting children to practice positive body positioning themselves.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Providing opportunities for children to grow confidence when positioned in front of a group.

> "They stood up in front of the whole group, projected their voice all the way to the back and shared. It was fabulous. It was so cool, wasn't it?... You could see their mana... She was so confident."
>
> **TEACHER**

Matching the eye-level of a conversational partner. We saw teachers getting down to the same level as children when speaking and interacting.

d) Mirroring

This key practice involves mirroring children's engagement to model active listening. For example, teachers taking time to listen to children during one-on-one and group interactions, matching eye-contact, and repeating back what children say to support them to feel heard.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Showing what mirroring looks like by actively engaging when listening to children. For example, we saw teachers nodding, maintaining eye-contact, and mirroring children's body language during conversation.

Being mindful of words and actions while in the service.

> "They often imitate what we do. And all of a sudden you would hear the story you just told... Wherever we do something, we need to make sure we are worthy to imitate."
>
> **TEACHER**

Social communication

e) Gesturing

This key practice involves modelling the use of gestures to support and complement oral communication. For example, nodding along while listening to someone speak or using hand motions during a story or while giving instructions to help show what is being talked about.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Using familiar and repeated gestures across the teaching team for consistency. For example, teachers motioning to their ears when asking children to listen.

Focusing more heavily on gesturing with particular groups of children.

> "That eye contact and gesture... speaking with our hands is really big with our 3-year-olds."
>
> **LEADER**

f) Reminding

This key practice involves using social language to reinforce established social expectations and support children to communicate positively. For example, gentle reminders for children about the social rules of behaviour like asking for a turn.

Real-life strategies

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well

Talking regularly with children around social norms and rules to help them reflect.

> "Now it's kind of natural to get kids to self-assess where they are. 'I'm a good listener because I make eye contact[e] – they're constantly taught those things and where they fit on their listening ladder, and things like that."
>
> **TEACHER AIDE**

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e   For some neurodivergent children, looking *towards* the speaker, rather than direct eye contact, can be a more appropriate marker for listening. Teachers can check in with the child's family, whānau, or with a specialist.

We heard from teachers and service leaders that the following strategies work well *(continued)*

Linking social norms and rules back to children's prior experiences. Teachers prompt children to remember back to a time when they or someone else followed a positive social rule, like listening when someone is speaking, and it helped the speaker to feel good and respected.

Good practice example

Real-life example: Older children demonstrate and model social skills with their peers

At one service, serving a Pacific community, teachers support groups of children to engage in different routines that build their understanding of social norms involved in being a part of a group and contributing within the service. While some older children are guided by teachers to help to set up for a morning tea, another group engage in 'circle time', singing Samoan action songs. Some of their neurodivergent peers position themselves outside of the circle and work with sensory resources, occasionally choosing to join the singing group. The atmosphere is relaxed, with teachers using gentle reminders and gestures to guide those children that choose to help with setting up for morning tea time.

4) Reflective questions for teachers

These questions may be useful to reflect on individually or discuss as a team. Think carefully and critically about your day-to-day practices.

→ Do I use non-verbal communication, like gestures and body positioning, to complement my spoken communication with children and support their understanding?

→ Do the children at my service know why different social expectations and rules about communication are important? Would it be useful to be clearer and more explicit about how and why we communicate in particular ways in this place?

→ How well do I model being a respectful conversational partner?

→ What communication 'rules' or norms are valued by parents, whānau, and community?

Social communication

Chapter 4: What needs to be in place to support teachers?

This report is mostly focused on effective teaching practices. But there are also some foundations that need to be in place before teachers can do their best work in supporting oral language.

To be well set up, teachers need good service leadership and conditions that prioritise oral language teaching. They also need good professional knowledge and assessment understandings themselves, positive partnerships with parents and whānau, and an understanding of how and when to work with specialists around oral language.

This chapter of the report will be useful for service leaders, to reflect on how well set-up their teachers are for supporting oral language in their service.

Overview of this section

This section sets out:

1) how we found out about the foundational supports that need to be in place for teachers

2) the four key supports that make the biggest difference for supporting oral language.

1) How we found out about foundational supports

We took a deep dive into the literature on the key supports that need to be in place for supporting oral language. This covered both the national and international literature base, and then we checked our understandings with Aotearoa New Zealand experts. We established four key supports that need to be in place for teachers to be able to do their best work.

In our fieldwork, we asked teachers and service leaders about what these four key supports look like at their service. You can find their stories in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

2) Four key supports

These supports are the foundations that need to be in place for teachers to do their best work in supporting oral language. These are strongly established in the evidence base as effective for improving oral language provision.

The **four key supports** are each broken down into specific 'elements of good support'. These are illustrated by real-life stories, strategies, insights, and ideas from early childhood services – including education and care, home-based early childhood services, and kindergartens from rural areas, small towns, and cities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The four supports are:

Support 1	**Early childhood service leadership and priorities** This support is about early childhood service leaders providing teachers with the conditions and resources required for quality oral language support.
Support 2	**Teacher knowledge and assessment** This support is about teachers' professional knowledge about how children's oral language is developed, taught, assessed, and supported.
Support 3	**Partnership with parents and whānau** This support is about the partnerships that need to be in place with parents and whānau, to support oral language development at the early childhood service and at home.
Support 4	**Working with specialists** This support is about teachers having a good understanding of when and how to work with specialists around oral language support.

Support 1: Early childhood service leadership and priorities

This support is about service leaders prioritising oral language teaching and support. This includes ensuring that teachers are provided with the conditions and resources they need.

To be well set up, teachers need access to relevant and ongoing professional learning that includes mentoring and coaching, time to do observations and analyse assessment data, and a staff culture that prioritises oral language teaching and learning.

In this section, we set out why early childhood service leadership and priorities are important for supporting oral language, and provide real-life examples of what this looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand services.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about why and how early childhood service leadership and priorities support oral language teaching. It includes:

1) what this support is

2) why this support is important

3) what this support looks like in real life

4) reflective questions for service leaders.

1) What is this support?

This support is about prioritising oral language teaching and learning, and making sure that teachers are set up with what they need to deliver good oral language support. This includes service leaders setting clear expectations for teachers, ensuring they have the right tools and resources, arranging staff appropriately, and providing learning opportunities. Service leaders can prioritise professional learning that is specifically about children's oral language development, so that teachers can increase their knowledge and extend children's oral language with evidence-based strategies.[34]

2) Why is this support important?

Service leadership and priorities have a powerful influence on the overall quality of early childhood services and the oral language support that happens there.[35] When service leaders share their expectations for teaching and learning oral language in a structured way, it reduces the chance of misunderstandings and sets a consistent standard of teaching practice across the service.

It is important that – alongside the right professional learning – teachers have the right tools and assessments to use, and time to analyse the data they collect from these. This way, teaching can be informed by tools and assessments to deliberately support and improve children's oral language skills. Appropriate staffing allows teachers to spend more time focusing on oral language within quality interactions, rather than managing the environment.

3) What does this support look like in real life?

The elements of good support that we focus on are:

a) **Service leaders set clear expectations for teaching and learning**

b) **Service leaders ensure teachers have the right tools and resources**

c) **Service leaders provide appropriate staffing**

d) **Service leaders provide opportunities for staff to learn**

As part of this study, we asked teachers and service leaders about what these elements of good support look like at their service. Their stories are reflected in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

a) Service leaders set clear expectations for teaching and learning

When service leaders are clear and consistent about their expectations for oral language teaching and learning, teachers are better equipped to deliver practice that aligns with current evidence and is consistent across the team. Sharing this information in a structured way reduces the chance of misunderstandings. This might include service leaders working to weave together the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*, to support smooth pathways of teaching and learning between early childhood services and schools and kura. Linking these learning outcomes can help the teaching team see the bigger picture of how their practice will support children's transitions and ongoing learning.

> "We have a huge buy-in from the teachers. The teachers want to learn. They know that this is a centre that prioritises that."
>
> **LEADER**

Leadership

Service leaders' expectations should aim to reduce barriers to education for all children, particularly for Māori children, Pacific children, disabled children, and those with learning support needs.[36] When service leaders clarify for teachers how their service intentionally reduces barriers to education through strong oral language support, this empowers teachers to join in helping to make this happen.

Real-life example: Embedding what good looks like

At one kindergarten association, expectations for oral language teaching practices form an important part of their induction and support processes. Association leaders shared that in their experience, teachers benefit from clear, explicit expectations as soon as they join the team, about what good looks like in this area of teaching – and why it is so important.

> "When we first bring people into our service, it [good oral language support] is not embedded practice. It can be quite a journey, through PLD and building their practice."
>
> **LEADER**

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b) Service leaders ensure teachers have the right tools and resources

Assessment tools can help teachers notice and recognise when children are having difficulty with particular skills or aspects of oral language.[37] Providing the right tools and resources equips teachers to tailor their practice to the needs of individual children, and to find out how effective their teaching practice has been.[38] This can include leaders accessing, and providing training in, dedicated tools for assessing children's oral language progress. Assessment information can then inform teaching – teachers can respond by tailoring their teaching to the specific oral language needs of children. Some tools and resources are included in the 'Useful Resources' section at the end of this report.

Real-life example: Video assessments and working with experts

In one kindergarten, a teacher has been trained by a speech-language therapist in video-based oral language assessments and associated tools, which the teacher uses to reflect on the effectiveness of her teaching practice. She works with the speech-language therapist to interpret the video data and make plans in response, via email and phone calls.

We heard that this means that the children and teachers at this kindergarten can benefit from this in-house expertise even when speech-language therapists aren't able to visit regularly in person. We also heard that the teachers value that these video assessments 'aren't intrusive' – recordings occur during everyday play and 'aren't about testing children'.

c) Service leaders provide appropriate staffing

There are a range of evidence-based ways that service leaders can make strategic staffing decisions to foster oral language learning. When leaders arrange staffing according to legal frameworks, regulations, and funding protocols, they should also consider how they can maximise benefits for children through the range and arrangement of teaching staff.

Unhurried group interactions between teachers and a small number of children, which are sustained for more than just a few minutes, are highly effective for supporting children's oral language development.[39,40] Service leaders can support teachers to engage in these sorts of back-and-forth interactions through rostering and arranging staff to enable some smaller, slower-paced interactions alongside larger group activities.

> "Part of our curriculum that allows them to have… that time in the centre where they're in a small group of children with a shared interest or a shared learning experience happening… and the teacher is dedicated to those children at that time… that teacher is really there to give their full attention to those children – and I think that's quite important in a busy space."
>
> **LEADER**

Employing diverse staff, with diverse cultural backgrounds and linguistic capabilities, can foster multicultural and language-rich learning spaces for all children.[41] Using home languages within interactions with multilingual children is well-established to be beneficial for their oral language development.[42,43] Service leaders can support diverse staff to enrich the learning environment through encouraging the use and visibility of multiple languages, particularly those that reflect the languages of enrolled children and their families.

Leadership

Real-life example: Creating discrete quiet spaces

In one early childhood service, a space has been repurposed to support those children that find the busy playground overwhelming. It is a quieter space that has lower teacher-to-child ratios, to allow for slower-paced interactions.

Real-life example: Arranging staffing to promote mealtime conversations

One early childhood service arranges staff to allow for extending and expanding children's oral language during routines and daily transitions.

ERO observed a teacher talking to a group of toddlers about how a drink bottle from the fridge left a circle of water droplets on the table. The teacher used this opportunity to engage the children in a "wondering" conversation about what condensation is and how it works.

We heard that unhurried, complex lunchtime conversations like this are more commonplace at this service because the teachers are rostered in a way that allows them to sit and eat with the children at mealtimes. Teachers draw on professional knowledge gained from PLD provided in-house by service leaders to enrich these interactions.

d) Service leaders provide opportunities for staff to learn

When service leaders provide opportunities for staff to learn about oral language teaching strategies, staff are more likely to use evidence-based practices. Promoting and supporting the ongoing learning and development of teachers is a key responsibility of educational leaders.

ERO's evaluation found that teachers with strong professional knowledge are nine times more likely to use effective practices.

This could include offering professional learning about oral language to all staff – or where a particular staff member has received professional learning, making sure they can share their learnings with other staff to build capability and consistency across the team. It can also include listening to staff requests for learning about particular topics or subject areas, that may help them with individual children's oral language concerns, or trends they are seeing across children's oral language at the service. Professional learning provision also includes sharing useful resources and readings (like this report), offering modelling and observation opportunities, or working with local speech-language therapists.

> "We had a lot of PLD for all of our teachers, on how to integrate poetry and music and rhythm and rhyme."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "Sometimes it used to feel awkward talking to the children and not getting the language back. And throughout that [professional learning] workshop, I guess it helped overcome these sorts of barriers, because you know that you are using this strategy that is researched and proven to work."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real-life example: Evidence-based professional learning supports confidence

In one early childhood service, a teacher told us how professional learning provided by the service leadership has helped them "buy in" to using oral language strategies, because they learnt how the strategies are based on strong evidence. This teacher has now seen real-life results from using the strategies learnt from their PLD, with a particular child making noticeable progress with their oral language.

> "I've actually seen great results, especially with expanding. I've got one child in the toddlers' room that's really keen to speak, and he keeps repeating everything we say. [He's] really determined to use the language. He would point at his shoes and say, 'On the shelf, up, up there, up there'. Then from this... I'd give him extra words and a week later he would say, 'My shoes, they are up there' – which was incredible."
>
> **TEACHER**

4) Reflective questions for service leaders

These questions about the elements of good support may be useful for service leaders to reflect on individually or to discuss as a team.

→ Do teachers have regular opportunities for discussion about all children's oral language, where leaders can support them to develop their skills? Is this prioritised?

→ Do leaders and teachers work together to make sure learning environments and staffing arrangements are set up to facilitate oral language development? How could we improve these arrangements?

→ Do our staffing arrangements allow for quality one-on-one and small group teacher-child interactions and authentic situations for facilitating language development?

→ What assessment and/or teaching tools might staff need for their professional toolkit? How will they build their confidence to use those tools?

→ Are there particular areas of oral language development that staff would benefit from professional learning on? How can we ensure this professional learning is shared among all staff for consistent practice?

Leadership

Support 2: Teacher knowledge and assessment

This support is focused on teachers' own professional knowledge – about how oral language is developed, taught, assessed, and supported.

To be well set up, teachers need good foundational training about oral language teaching and up-to-date knowledge around what to expect and how to respond as children's oral language develops. It is important that teachers know how to assess progress and recognise language difficulties so additional support can be provided.

In this section, we set out why teacher knowledge and assessment are important for supporting oral language and provide real-life examples of what this looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand services.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about why and how teacher knowledge supports oral language. It includes:

1) what this support is

2) why this support is important

3) what this support looks like in real life

4) reflective questions for service leaders and teachers.

1) What is this support?

This support is about teachers having sufficient knowledge about the development of children's oral language, to help them observe, monitor, and support children's progress across the different aspects of oral language development. Initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning play an important role in this area of support.

This includes teachers understanding how children's language develops (including for bilingual and multilingual children), knowing about indicators of progress, knowing how to assess children's oral language skills, knowing how to identify and seek support to address possible difficulties, and knowing strategies that support oral language development. For example, teachers can learn about the different aspects of development, such as speech sounds and vocabulary, that children typically display at different stages of their oral language learning.

They can then carry this knowledge with them in their everyday interactions, using this knowledge to make informed in-the-moment decisions about how to extend children's oral language learning through play.

2) Why is this support important?

Good teacher knowledge is strongly linked to teacher capability.[44] Teachers need specific knowledge, skills, and supports to be able to support oral language successfully and this learning needs to be developed deliberately over time. Ongoing professional learning in this key area of teaching should build on the foundations of initial teacher education.[45]

Teacher knowledge fosters key aspects of oral language development and learning, as well as a strong understanding of the holistic nature of children's development and learning.[46,47] When teachers have a good evidence-based understanding of oral language progress indicators, this helps them to recognise evidence of progress within interactions and to adapt their strategies in response. When this progress indicator knowledge is combined with knowledge about how to spot possible speech and language difficulties, and where to go to request additional specialist support as needed, teachers are better equipped to quickly source extra help.

3) What does this support look like in real life?

The elements of good support that we focus on are:

a) **Teachers understand how children's language develops**

b) **Teachers know the indicators of progress**

c) **Teachers assess children's progress**

d) **Teachers know how to identify and address possible language difficulties**

e) **Teachers know strategies for supporting children's oral language**

As part of this study, we asked teachers and service leaders about what these elements of good support look like at their service. Their stories are reflected in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

Assessment

What about oral language development for multilingual children?

The practices and supports highlighted in this report are relevant for teachers of all children, whether they have one, two, or more languages.

When it comes to assessment, it's important for teachers to be aware that children learning more than one language might take longer than their single-language peers to grow their English or te reo Māori word bank, combine words, build sentences, and speak clearly compared to children who have one language. This is normal and expected. These children might also have stronger oral language skills or confidence in one language than the other, so teachers shouldn't make assumptions about multilingual children's oral language capability based on one language alone.

Teachers should work with families and seek expert advice, for example from speech-language therapists, about how to assess and support the oral language progress of multilingual children.

Is 'oral language assessment' about labelling children?

In our interviews, we heard that some ECE teachers can be reluctant to engage in assessment practice around oral language, as they are worried about 'labelling' children or 'focusing on the deficit'. We heard that it is useful for leaders and guiding documents to clarify how and why assessments are used, and that they are intended to inform teachers' practice and responses. Many services saw positive changes when team discussions had focused on discussing concerns and clarifying that assessments "aren't about labelling children" (Service leader), but about knowing how to tailor their teaching for children based on evidence of what works best for those children.

We also heard that teachers had 'aha moments' when they thought deliberately about individual children and what they could observe and hear (assess) about those children's oral language capabilities. Reflection and discussion about this helped teachers to understand their key role in noticing where children are, recognising their strengths and needs, and the importance of responding with intentional teaching.

> "[During professional learning] there were some groundbreaking things she said to us like, 'think about the particular child you're working with and really take the time to analyse their current language level'."
>
> **LEADER**

a) Teachers understand how children's language develops

When teachers understand how children's language develops, they can be more mindful about the strategies they use. This can include taking a structured approach to teaching oral language skills and supporting children's use of their home languages.

> **Real-life example from a new entrant classroom: Noticing the children that aren't speaking**
>
> In one new entrant classroom, we heard how teachers have started to deliberately make an effort to watch out for the children that aren't using words. This requires teachers to investigate with gentle curiosity, to check their assumptions about whether a child is shy or quiet, or is not speaking more generally.
>
> > "We've made a real push to make sure that we notice the ones that aren't speaking."
> >
> > **TEACHER**

b) Teachers know the indicators of progress

When teachers have a good awareness of what typically expected development is, it means that children are less likely to 'fall through the gaps' and go unnoticed when it comes to oral language concerns. Leaders can support teachers by facilitating discussion around resources that include progress indicators – such as *Talking Together, Te Kōrerorero* stepping stones in oral language, or the *Much More Than Words* or *Learning Through Talk* resources. When teachers are familiar with indicators of progress, they are better equipped to notice when children's oral language development might need extra support.

This area of support might include service leaders working to weave together the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* with the *New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), to support smooth pathways of teaching and learning between early childhood education services and schools and kura.[48]

c) Teachers assess children's progress

It's important that teachers are confident to use assessment to understand children's learning progress and inform their teaching.[49] Progress assessment not only helps teachers gain a better picture of where individual children are with their oral language skills, but it can also give a useful picture of children's progress as a group – both of which can inform specific teaching activities and strategies.

Assessment

With any assessment tools, it is crucial for teachers to be trained in how and when to use them – to avoid inappropriate use of tools or inaccurate data analysis. Leaders can also consider providing dedicated time for teachers to analyse and discuss assessment data as a team.

> "We track carefully how the children are going and so we can reflect on what are we doing that's working and what are we doing that's not working, what can we tweak?... We're given the freedom to do that by our management."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "(Assessment) should be embedded within authentic interactions between adults and children."
>
> **CLONEY & PICKER, 2021, PG. 250**

Real-life example: Assessment as a tool for teaching and learning

In one early childhood service, a teacher shared with us that they initially had a negative reaction to the idea of progress indicator-focused assessment in the early learning context. Team discussions clarified that assessments 'aren't about labelling children', but about teachers knowing how to tailor their own teaching for children based on real evidence. It was eye-opening for this teacher to see things 'from a data perspective'. For example, considering whether there is clear *evidence* of oral language progress, like whether a child uses rhymes.

> "My first reaction was, because I came from primary, 'Oh no, you're going to do a testing regime for early childhood'... Because early childhood is so encompassing, and you don't just look at one thing, you look at everything and everything is together... But then when we sat down with our other teachers... We didn't realise how each child actually was, because sometimes you think you know a child and then when you're sitting down and you think, 'Do they actually ever rhyme? Do they actually ever have deep conversations about anything?'... That was actually eye-opening."
>
> **TEACHER**

d) Teachers know how to identify and address language difficulties

Like all areas of child development, children develop their oral language at their own pace. However, there are established progress indicators that apply to broad age ranges that can help parents and whānau, teachers, and speech and language experts to recognise progress and know what to look for next. Oral language progress indicators are flexible, evidence-based progress markers which help teachers to understand children's skills and development, tailor their teaching to support their ongoing progress, as well as to notice and respond to any areas of possible difficulty.

When teachers know how to identify, seek support, and work collaboratively with experts to address difficulties in oral language development, this means less waiting time for children's specific oral language needs to be met. It can be useful to have a clear process for when to talk to a specialist, and clear actions such as a flowchart that shows what teachers should do when they notice oral language difficulties (e.g., how and when to involve experts). Teachers should consider markers of both receptive (listening skills) and expressive (speaking skills) difficulties.

It helps to create a culture where teachers feel free to share and discuss what they notice with their team. It is not useful for teachers to be overly hesitant about bringing up concerns, particularly with colleagues. Leaders can play a key role in encouraging and affirming open discussions.

> **Real-life example: Collaboration between service, specialist, and parents and whānau**
>
> At one service serving a Pacific community, staff work collaboratively with specialists and parents and whānau. The service has established relationships with speed language therapists which helps them to ensure that children's oral language difficulties are identified. Staff also take part in PLD with specialists and invite parents and whānau to join in on the PLD.
>
> Staff acknowledge that while they have some understanding and knowledge, speech and language is a specialist area. They often discuss, learn, and work together with speech-language therapists to maintain positive working relationships that benefit children.

e) Teachers know strategies for supporting children's oral language

Teachers need support to be confident and comfortable using evidence-based strategies (like those outlined in Chapter 3 of this report) in a flexible way with children. Leaders can provide tailored and specific professional learning, discussion opportunities, and dedicated resources about oral language that include the evidence behind strategies, as well as practical examples of how to enact strategies with children.

Assessment

> "We got [provider] to come in and talk to us about the science, and the brain, and the neuroscience behind basically play-based learning."
>
> **TEACHER**

Real-life example: Professional learning boosts use of teaching strategies

At one service, the staff share a good relationship with a speech-language therapist who introduced them to a number of programmes and resources, including *Te Kōrerorero.* They received training to use these resources and accessed PLD from the Ministry of Education. As a result of this, the full teaching team is now actively using the teaching strategies they learnt. The team maintains shared practices as a 'priority' that is actively encouraged by the service's leadership.

> "We primarily use descriptive commenting, talking about our feelings, expanding vocabularies with the help of word maps… We use these key words to help expand their speech. We also talk a lot about emotions."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "Sometimes we [use] time sampling, sometimes we do event sampling. Then we create an intentional teaching plan [which includes] 'what will I teach? When will I teach it? How will I teach it?'"
>
> **TEACHER**

4) Reflective questions for service leaders and teachers

These questions about the elements of good support may be useful for service leaders to reflect on individually or to discuss as a team.

→ How do we track and monitor oral language development across our early childhood service? Do our teachers need support to understand how and why targeted assessment matters?

→ Do our processes encourage teaching staff to critically reflect on how their teaching practice is impacting on children's oral language development?

→ Are we clear about what indicators of progress look like – and what it looks like when oral language is not progressing well?

→ Do our teachers feel safe and confident to raise concerns about children's oral language progress? Can we think of examples of times where teachers have discussed this openly?

Support 3: Partnership with parents and whānau

This support is about the partnerships that need to be in place with parents and whānau, to best support children's oral language development across both the early childhood service and at home.

To be well set up, teachers need established connections with parents and whānau. This includes conversations about progress and ways to share understandings, resources, and strategies that empower parents and whānau and draw on their knowledge.

In this section, we set out why partnership with parents and whānau is an important foundation for oral language teaching, and provide real-life examples of what this looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand services.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about why and how partnership with parents and whānau supports oral language. It includes:

1) what this support is

2) why this support is important

3) what this support looks like in real life

4) reflective questions for service leaders and teachers.

1) What is this support?

This support is about how teachers can partner with parents and whānau to foster the best learning outcomes for children's oral language – at the early childhood service and at home. This includes teachers talking with parents and whānau about children's progress, and sharing resources, observations, and knowledge.

Is this section, 'talking' with parents and whānau refers to findings ways to share information – while it's ideal to speak with them directly, emails, texts, notebooks etc. can be useful as well. Service leaders and teachers can explore multiple ways to communicate with parents and whānau in ways that work for their community.

Parents and whānau

2) Why is this support important?

Good practices to foster early language and communication development in early childhood services include encouraging parents and whānau to be involved in their child's oral language learning, and sharing information about the importance of quality of oral interactions between parents and whānau and their children.[51]

Partnering closely with parents and whānau promotes consistent support for children, between home and the service. Teachers can partner with whānau by regularly sharing information about children's changing interests, needs, and learning outcomes.[52] Family knowledge can be incorporated into teaching and learning practices.

Partnership with parents and whānau also allows teachers to teach inclusively – by working together with families, whānau, and community, barriers to children's oral language development can be identified and overcome, and opportunities identified and maximised.[53]

3) What does this support look like in real life?

The elements of good support that we focus on are:

> **a) Teachers talk with parents and whānau about children's progress – at home and early childhood service**

> **a) Teachers share resources, so parents and whānau can support children's learning at home**

As part of this study, we asked teachers and service leaders about what these elements of good support look like at their service. Their stories are reflected in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

a) Teachers talk with parents and whānau about children's progress – at home and at the early childhood service

Talking to parents and whānau about their children's oral language progress helps boost their engagement by collaborating to celebrate success and make decisions about areas for more support. Teachers and parents and whānau can share ideas and discuss how they use key, simple strategies, like open questions and descriptive language.

Some services find it useful to invest in an app or communication platform that is accessible for their community. This can allow for an informal way of reporting and keeping parents and whānau up to date, and vice versa, to complement in-person discussions and more formalised documentation. Other services use portfolio files or notebooks.

> "There's a wee blurb on the front about how this is a celebration book and some prompts to talk to your child about what they're learning."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "They get two different kinds of reports. They get an interview with it so it doesn't just go out… And it's not rushed. Half an hour minimum where you get to hear their queries and questions too. That is a safe place for them. And that becomes a real partnership then, doesn't it?"
>
> **LEADER**

> "Earlier this year, I had some concerns about a stutter developing, but thanks to the teachers at the kindergarten [my child] attends I was better able to understand this developmental stage and how to support my child. The stutter stage was short-lived, and we are in a good place now."
>
> **PARENT**

Sharing information about oral language is particularly important for children with multiple languages – to support teachers to understand the fuller picture of children's oral language development journey.

> "The other thing we check is whether that speech problem is there in their first language, or whether it's only just there in the second language."
>
> **LEADER**

Real-life example: Sharing assessment between teachers and parents and whānau

In one early childhood service, we heard how parents and whānau of children who speak English as an additional language receive a 'scale' to fill out in their home language. Teachers use the scale to reflect on the child's proficiency in English at the service, and reflect on how this compares to what their family reports on their scale, about home language proficiency. This informs teachers' understandings, assessments, and planned strategies to support that child's oral language journey.

Parents and whānau

b) Teachers share resources, so parents and whānau can support children's learning at home

When teachers share resources, parents and whānau are equipped to reinforce current focuses for teaching and learning at home. This consistency helps children's oral language learning. It is useful for teachers to go through resources together with parents and whānau, to help them understand the reasoning behind strategies.

This might include digital communication or a book that goes between home and the early childhood service, where teachers record progress, and let parents and whānau know what activities and topics have been covered at the early childhood service. This gives parents and whānau with the information they need to ask questions and follow up with their child about their learning.

Sharing resources that are guided towards parent and whānau education is also useful, such as articles that explain why it is valuable for multilingual children to speak their home language with their parents and whānau at home.

> "The learning stories about my child on [app] always refer to an aspect of my child's oral language development. We were asked early in the year about our aspirations as parents, for our child, and I had expressed that her ability to communicate and express herself was an area we wanted to see her continuing to develop in. In a recent learning story, her early childhood centre had set up a library play provocation where she was exploring different books and using words to communicate the pictures she could identify."
>
> **PARENT**

Real-life example: Parents and whānau bring stories of their culture

In one early childhood service, parents and whānau are invited to bring stories of their culture to the service.

> "I have Jewish [parents and whānau], so they told the Hanukkah story when we had our celebration day for all the parents to listen to."
>
> **LEADER**

We heard that sharing stories helps children to hear and share new vocabulary and prompt rich discussion.

Tips from the sector: Talking to parents and whānau about oral language

> "Talk to your children. Find that five minutes a day to have a two-way conversation around a picture book, and it's… A conversation – it's a back and forth."
>
> **LEADER**

> "The importance of speaking in your first language, that's huge as well… You can have these conversations, but you don't need to have them in English. It's still building skills no matter what language they're speaking."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "Our service is currently working with Talking Matters [an organisation that provides oral language resources and PLD for parents and whānau and ECE teachers], and we have learnt a number of talking tips and shared these with whānau. I believe children are using screens far too much and do not have interactions with adults in the home as much, in this day and age. Talking to our tamariki makes them feel important and respected – listening and giving them time to respond is very important too."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "When a parent can reinforce what happened at the daycare, [and] when we can reinforce what happened at home straight away, that's the most effective way."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "We would talk to the parents about what things look like at home and grow the areas that we believe need a bit of support, but it's all very gentle because parents are always very worried."
>
> **TEACHER**

Parents and whānau

4) Reflective questions for service leaders and teachers

These questions about the elements of good support may be useful for service leaders to reflect on individually or to discuss as a team.

→ Do we know what oral language goals and aspirations parents and whānau have for their child? How could teachers work with parents and whānau together on these aspirations?

→ How can we share oral language development information, so parents and whānau can understand and use strategies with their child at home?

→ How can we gather important information about the oral language context and learning happening at home, so that teaching practice is based on information about the full picture?

→ Are parents and whānau of multilingual children actively involved in the planning and assessment of their children's oral language development? Do they need reassurance and evidence that speaking their home language is beneficial to that development? (see the 'Useful Resources' at the end of this report for some helpful information on this)

Support 4: Working with specialists

This support is about teachers having a good understanding of when and how to work with specialists, such as speech-language therapists, to enhance teaching and learning.

To be well set up, teachers need clear guidance about when to seek specialist support, including having information about timelines and pathways. They also need good working relationships with local specialists.

In this section, we set out why working with specialists is important in supporting oral language and provide real-life examples of what this looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand services.

Overview of this section

This part of the report sets out useful information about why and how working with specialists supports oral language. It includes:

1) what this support is

2) why this support is important

3) what this support looks like in real life

4) reflective questions for service leaders.

1) What is this support?

This support is about teachers being equipped to work with specialists, particularly speech-language therapists, in a way that best supports children's oral language. This includes teachers knowing when and how to seek advice from specialists, how to arrange more targeted and intensive support from specialists where needed, and how to work effectively with specialists. To support teachers, service leaders might follow a model of support that involves a speech-language therapist providing professional learning for teachers.

2) Why is this support important?

Working with specialists gives children the best chance at improving their oral language skills, by having the expertise and knowledge of their teachers supplemented with expert advice and guidance. For the best support, teachers need to know who their local specialists are, know when to talk to a specialist, and be committed and confident to adapt their practice according to specialist advice. Timely support prevents further oral language difficulties that will have ongoing impacts on children's learning.

3) What does this support look like in real life?

The elements of good support that we focus on are:

> **a) Teachers know when to request support from specialists**

> **b) Teachers work effectively with specialists**

As part of this study, we asked teachers and service leaders about what these elements of good support look like at their service. Their stories are reflected in the 'real-life examples' boxes throughout this chapter of the report.

a) Teachers know when to request support from specialists

Service leadership has a key role in supporting teachers to know the difference between the expected range of progress against progress indicators, and oral language development that requires extra help and expertise. This should include ensuring that teachers understand how multilingual children's rates of progress can differ from monolingual children.

Oral language development is a key foundation for ongoing learning success, so timely support is essential. This practice can include having a list of local specialists that the early childhood service has a relationship with, and clear guidance for when teachers should contact a specialist. There are different levels of support that specialists can provide, from one-off advice and guidance to intensive and ongoing support.

> "That's the teacher saying, 'Hey... We've got a child here who we find has got some type of speech delay. Let's try and get a speech therapist straight away.'... I find the teachers here very supportive."
>
> **TEACHER AIDE**

> "Many are attending ECE, but not being referred early enough once the delay in oral language is noticed."
>
> **NEW ENTRANT TEACHER**

Real-life example: Clear process for staff to follow

At one service, staff follow a clear process for seeking specialist advice. This includes staff discussions, engaging in targeted observations, and gathering evidence, to make decisions about when and whether to seek support.

> "With children we feel have speech delays or behavioural/learning delays, we usually start off by doing the ABC charts. We do that over a course of a week... We have to do the groundwork ourselves to provide [the Ministry] with the evidence that it's really concerning."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "With [children's] speech delays, it was a lot of observations at first ... We had some formal partnerships, so we immediately communicated our concerns and our observations of speech delays and other behavioural delays from these children."
>
> **TEACHER**

b) Teachers work effectively with specialists

Working closely and effectively with specialists means teachers can tailor their teaching according to expert advice to have the best impact for children. Teachers first need access to specialists with whom they can collaborate to meet children's learning needs.[54] This can include having a strong working relationship with speech-language therapists and other early childhood services in the area, so teachers can draw on their expertise as needed. It is useful to involve parents and whānau in specialist conversations where possible.

> "[We had a] really good relationship with the Ministry speech-language therapist. I had asked her to come in and do some PLD on Te Kōrerorero."
>
> **TEACHER**

> "The specialists will work with the families on site, and then the families will share with us what strategies we should use in the classroom. So, the families are kind of holding the knowledge – the power."
>
> **LEADER**

Specialists

Real-life example: Guidance and access to resources helps upskill teachers

At one home-based service, the staff work together with Talking Matters [an oral language support programme] on resources specifically for their context. These resources include data from an outcome measurement survey, and information on the key takeaways and what visiting teachers are doing differently.

"Educators' aspirations [included] 'Some new tricks and tips for rich language environments' and 'Better understanding and more aware of my responses'."

TALKING MATTERS RESOURCE DEVELOPED FOR THIS SERVICE

4) Reflective questions for service leaders

These questions about the elements of good support may be useful for service leaders to reflect on individually or to discuss as a team.

→ Do staff know enough about indicators of progress and expected progress markers to be able to recognise when children have possible language difficulties?

→ Do staff know who to go to, and how to access external supports? Would they feel hesitant about raising concerns – and if so, how can we make sure they know this is important?

→ Are staff provided with relevant, targeted professional learning about how to support children? How is specialist advice communicated across the teaching team, to promote shared and consistent practice?

→ How do we know that specialist advice and strategies are understood and enacted by the teaching team? As leaders, how can we set clear expectations and provide the support that is needed so that teaching doesn't drift back to familiar practices?

Conclusion

Oral language is foundational for children's ongoing literacy learning and has a big impact on their future outcomes.

This good practice report describes the five most powerful areas of practice and four foundational supports that evidence shows make a real difference for children's oral language development. We use robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' for supporting oral language, and how good practices can be implemented and supported in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood services.

ERO's companion evaluation report shares findings from our evaluation on oral language in early childhood services, showing that oral language is a significant challenge throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood services.

ERO also reviewed international and local evidence to find the most powerful practices and supports for oral language learning and development in early childhood services.

ERO identified five key areas of practice and four supports

Below are the five evidence-based areas of teacher practice and four evidence-based supports for those practices.

Good teaching practice areas	Practice area 1	**Teaching new words and how to use them** This practice area includes intentionally using words to build a child's understanding of words (their receptive vocabulary) and encouraging them to use and apply words in the right context (expressive vocabulary).
	Practice area 2	**Modelling how words make sentences** This practice area includes intentionally using language to show how words are put together to make sentences (grammar) and providing opportunities for children to use this in their own speech.
	Practice area 3	**Reading interactively with children** This practice area includes encouraging children to be active participants during book-reading. Teachers use prompts to encourage interactions between children and the person reading the book.

Good teaching practice areas	**Practice area 4**	**Using conversations to extend language** This practice area includes intentionally using language to engage children in activities that are challenging for them. It encourages them to hear and use language to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.
	Practice area 5	**Developing positive social communication** This practice area includes providing opportunities for children to learn social norms and rules of communication – both verbal and non-verbal – so they can change the words they use, how quietly/loudly they speak, and how they position themselves when they listen and communicate with others. to understand and share ideas, as well as reason with others.
Supports for good teaching practice	**Support 1**	**Early childhood service leadership and priorities** This support is about early childhood service leaders providing teachers with the conditions and resources required for quality oral language support.
	Support 2	**Teacher knowledge and assessment** This support is about teachers' professional knowledge about how children's oral language is developed, taught, assessed, and supported.
	Support 3	**Partnership with parents and whānau** This support is about the partnerships that need to be in place with parents and whānau, to support oral language development at the early childhood service and at home.
	Support 4	**Working with specialists** This support is about teachers having a good understanding of when and how to work with specialists around oral language support.

Leaders' and teachers' practice can make a difference to children's oral language development

Supporting oral language is a challenge, but service leaders and teachers have the power to make meaningful change. The evidence shows that clear and consistent service-wide practices make a real difference for children. This report is focused on good practice for teachers and service leaders, using robust evidence to clarify 'what good looks like' for teaching in this key area of children's learning and development. It is intended to help inform positive shifts to practice – setting children up for better oral language and literacy outcomes going forward.

Useful resources

There are a range of useful resources available for leaders and teachers around supporting oral language in the early years. Some key resources are linked below.

What is it?	Link
Let's keep talking: Oral language development in the early years – ERO's companion evaluation report and summary, which link to this good practice report with findings about how oral language is going in ECE settings and new entrant classes.	[links to Let's keep talking: Oral language development in the early years, and summary]
Short and practical guides for ECE teachers, ECE leaders, new entrant teachers, and parents and whānau.	links x4 to be inserted
Kōwhiti whakapae – The Ministry of Education's new online resource to support ECE teachers to notice, recognise, and respond to children's oral language and literacy progress within the framework of *Te Whāriki*.	Kōwhiti Whakapae (education.govt.nz)
Te kōrerorero: Talking together – This suite of resources from the Ministry of Education is designed to promote effective teaching practices around oral language.	Te Kōrerorero – Talking together (education.govt.nz)
Much more than words – This short booklet provides information about the course of typical communication development in young children, and provides ideas for supporting children's growing capability as communicators.	Much More Than Words | Learning from home
Speech, language, and communication – A Ministry of Education resource designed for school teachers, with information about speech, language, and communication needs across curriculum levels. This will be of interest to ECE teachers interested in oral language development beyond the ECE years.	Speech, Language and Communication | Inclusive Education (tki.org.nz)

What is it?	Link
Preparing for literacy – The Education Endowment Foundation in the United Kingdom has compiled a guidance report and resources to offer early years professionals seven practical recommendations to provide children grounding in early literacy, language, and communication.	[Preparing for Literacy	EEF (educationendowment foundation.org.uk)](#)
A great start? Education for disabled children in early childhood – ERO's 2022 report on the experiences of disabled learners in early childhood services. This includes information about New Zealand Sign Language and assistive technologies.	[A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood (ero.govt.nz)](#)
Understanding bilingual and multilingual language pathways – This section of the *Te Korerorero* website unpacks the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism and how it can impact teacher practice.	[Understanding bilingual and multilingual language pathways (education.govt.nz)](#)
Responding to diverse cultures: Good practice in home-based early childhood services – This 2021 ERO report includes practical guidance around working with children with diverse languages. Examples are drawn from home-based services but will be useful for centre-based teachers too.	[Responding to diverse cultures Good practice – in home based early childhood services (ero.govt.nz)](#)
Supporting children to become bilingual in Aotearoa New Zealand – A webinar from Associate Professor Mere Skerrett and the Education Hub. This sets out some key issues and opportunities around te reo Māori-English bilingualism and offers clear and useful explanations of the benefits of bilingualism in general.	[Supporting children to become bilingual in Aotearoa New Zealand – The Education Hub](#)
Poutama reo – ERO's self-review framework for supporting improvement in te reo Māori provision. These resources are designed for schools, but aspects will have value for ECE teachers.	[Poutama Reo	Education Review Office (ero.govt.nz)](#)

What is it?	Link
'Afa framework – ERO's bilingual and immersion indicator framework, will be a useful tool for reflection and improvement in Pacific bilingual ECE services, as well as services that serve Pacific children.	Soon to be published online – check our website www.evidence.ero.govt.nz
Pasifika early literacy project resources – are a collection of downloadable dual-language story books in a range of Pacific languages and English.	PELP Resources (education.govt.nz)
Some favourite bilingual books in te reo Māori and English – is a blog post from the National Library that lists a selection of engaging dual-language story books in te reo Māori and English.	Some favourite bilingual books in te reo Māori and English	National Library of New Zealand (natlib.govt.nz)
Āhuru mōwai – ERO's 2021 evaluation report for Te Kōhanga Reo examines how the Kōhanga Reo language approach supports the learning aspirations of children and their whānau	Āhuru mōwai, Evaluation report for Te Kōhanga Reo (ero.govt.nz)
Tuia te here tangata: Making Meaningful Connections – ERO's 2016 report explores Puna Reo practice, including language learning strategies and their impacts.	Tuia te here tangata: Making meaningful connections (ero.govt.nz)
The early years evidence store – This is where the UK's Education Endowment Foundation stores useful and practical evidence around early learning teaching and learning, on a range of topics.	Early Years Evidence Store	EEF (educationendowment foundation.org.uk)

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