

Name:



The Playcentre Introductory Award Course Booklet

Panga – Puzzles
Waiata – Singing
Haerenga – Going on trips
Ngā taonga puoro - Music
Pakiwaitara – Storytelling
Pūtaiao – Science
Tunu kai – Baking
Tākaro whakūāra – Sociodramatic play
Tākaro whakūāra – Junk construction
Peita – Painting
Toi piripiri – Collage
Panga – Puzzles
Tākaro, ngā ture-ā-tākaro – Games with rules
Toi ataata – Creative arts
Peita matimati – Finger painting
Tākaro hōpara – Exploratory play
Mahi-ā-tinana – Physically active
Tākaro-ā-papa – Board games
Ākaro raweke – Manipulative play
Tā – Drawing
Wai – Water
One – Sand
Panga – Puzzles
Uku – Clay
Baking

Uku – Clay
One – Sand
Kāmura – Carpentry
Mahi ia rā – Routines
Karetao – Puppets
Pukapuka – Books
Aotūroa – Nature
Kori – Adventure play
Hanga ranunga – Making potions
Taonga hanga – Construction toys
Toi ataata – Creative arts

*Welcome to
our Village*



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For more information and links to workshop bookings, visit the [Playcentre Education webpage](#)



Playcentre Introductory Award (PIA) Overview

Playcentre is founded on the belief that parents and whānau are the first and best educators for their tamariki *children*. The **Playcentre Introductory Award (PIA)** is designed to empower parents and whānau to support their tamariki children to learn through play—both at home and in Playcentre sessions.

This course will help you settle in at Playcentre and feel confident in your role as parents and kaiako *educators*. By completing the PIA, you will also support your centre to continue to be licensed and funded by the Ministry of Education as a parent-led early learning centre.

Through hands-on experience, you'll learn:

- ✂ **The Link Between Play and Learning.** Discover how play supports learning and why it's essential for child development.
- ✂ **The Role of Whānau as Kaiako.** Understand your role as an educator at home and in Playcentre. Practical, hands-on strategies for working with tamariki.
- ✂ **How to Contribute to Effective Playcentre Sessions.** Introduction to running successful Playcentre sessions. How whānau contribute to making Playcentre amazing for tamariki.
- ✂ **How to Empower Confident Learners.** Strategies to help tamariki become confident, capable learners.

What's Involved

Readings: Engaging content in this booklet.

Videos: Short, informative videos to watch (between 3 – 23 min).

Workshops/Webinars: Four facilitated workshops/webinars for interactive learning.

Practical Challenges: Ten wero *challenges* to complete during Playcentre sessions.

Participation on Session: Attend ten Playcentre sessions to put learning into practice.

Ready to Get Started?

[Watch this 4 minute video](#) that introduces you to the Playcentre Introductory Award.



Progressing through the PIA

The PIA is self-paced. Most whānau complete the PIA over **1–2 terms**. We've ordered the content in this booklet in a way that flows well. You are welcome to jump around the course booklet and cover content in a different order if it fits best with your other life commitments or if you are working with others at your Playcentre. Touch base with an Education Champion or Centre Advisor for your Playcentre to let them know what support you need.

Keeping Track of your Progress

The final page of this booklet records completed aspects of the course. Take a photo or scan the last page when you have completed all of the requirements, and email it to educationforms@playcentre.org.nz using the subject line: **PIA**.

Session Participation and Wero

There are ten session wero *challenges* in this booklet labelled Sessions A to J to complete over ten sessions. We recommend that you do **one wero per session**. Each wero has something for you to do while at Playcentre, and then it asks you to talanoa *have a conversation* with a tuakana *experienced person* at your centre. These are meant to be informal conversations, and you will usually be able to talanoa while keeping watch over your child/ren. You can talk with different tuakana across different sessions – it doesn't always have to be the same person. When you have completed the wero, ask a tuakana to sign your record sheet at the back of the booklet.

You must attend at least ten sessions to complete the *Playcentre Introductory Award*.

Workshops/Webinars

There are four workshops/webinars included this course:

- **Kia Tākaro** – Play & Learning
- **Whakamana** – Empowering Children
- Two **Learning Through Play workshops** on different topics

Each workshop/webinar is 2 hours of learning plus clean up (if relevant). You will have workshop options available at local Playcentres or interactive online webinars via Microsoft Teams. A few Learning Through Play topics are also available as a self-directed online format however we recommend attending a face-to-face workshop or online webinar if available near you – there is lots of learning from getting your hands stuck into play and having real-time conversations with other Playcentre whānau.

Learners Transitioning from the pre-2026 PIA

This version of the PIA has been rolled out from Term 1 2026. Existing *Playcentre Introductory Awards* are still valid. If you have already completed the PE1 module, you are welcome to carry on with the previous pathway through 2026.

If you started the previous version of the PIA but would prefer to swap into the current version, you can crossover some of the content you have already completed as below. Just make a note of what/when you completed on your booklet recordsheet.

Learning completed	Credited
PE1 Ūkaipōtanga – Let's Play (all sections 1-3 on iQualify or workshops/webinars 1-3)	Workshop: Kia Tākaro – Play & Learning Video: Kaiako in Playcentre Video: An Introduction to <i>Te Whāriki</i>
PE2 Kotahitanga – Learning Together in Playcentre (all sections 1-3 on iQualify or workshops/webinars 1-3)	Video: Whānau Tupu Ngātahi – Families Growing Together
PE3 Whanaungatanga – Positive Relationships (all sections 1-3 on iQualify or workshops/webinars 1-3)	Workshop: Whakamana – Empowering Children Video: Parenting – It's about Mana (Tūpuna Parenting)
Learning through Play workshops/webinars/iQualify units	Past attendance at Learning through Play workshops will be credited to the Learning through Play workshops required for the updated PIA.
Sessions attended, learner map, play experiences, learning story	Can be reused if completed from Term 4 2025 onwards. Reflection through "Talanoa with a Tuakana" for the relevant session still needs to be completed.

Primary Teachers Pathway

The updated PIA is the first step in the *Playcentre Primary Teacher Bridging Award*, available to primary teachers with a NZ primary teaching qualification or teachers with an overseas primary teachers who have been registered to teach in NZ.

Primary teachers only need to attend **five (5)** Playcentre sessions to meet the requirements of this course, however they still need to complete all ten wero so that means doubling up on tasks over the five sessions. Upon completion of this course booklet, primary teachers will be awarded the *Playcentre Educator Award* (a higher award recognised for licensing).

When finished with this course booklet, primary teachers should email a copy of the record sheet on the final page, along with a copy of your teaching qualification or academic transcript, photo ID and proof of name change (if relevant) to educationforms@playcentre.org.nz using the subject line: ‘PIA – Primary Teacher’.

To complete the *Playcentre Primary Teacher Bridging Award* and hold the role of Person Responsible on Playcentre sessions, primary teachers will also need to complete:

- PL3 Manaakitanga – Enriching Children’s Learning
- PL4 Kaitiakitanga – Playcentre & the Regulations

More information about continuing on with the bridging award will be sent to you on completion of this course booklet and full information is available on the Playcentre website.

Key Words and Terminology

Throughout this course we use the phrase “your child/ren” or “your tamariki”. We know that all sorts of families come to Playcentre, and this phrase is intended to include not only biological children but mokopuna *grandchildren* and any other children in your care that you bring to Playcentre.

In Playcentre, we encourage the use of te reo Māori as well as other home languages. Children’s brains soak up language in the early years and it is a key time to hear and speak multiple languages. Throughout this course and in Playcentre, we often use te reo Māori and English words interchangeably. A glossary of some common words is provided below.

Glossary

Kaiako	Educator, nurturer of learning
Mahi	Work
Tākaro	Play
Talanoa	A Pacific cultural practice of open, inclusive, and respectful dialogue that creates real connections between people.
Tamaiti	Child
Tamariki	Children
<i>Te Whāriki</i>	The early learning curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand
Vā, Vaa, Va’a	In many Pacific cultures—particularly Samoan, Tongan, and other Polynesian societies refer to the relational space between people, places, and even the spiritual world.
Whakamana	Empowerment
Whānau	Family

Session A – Find Key Equipment at your Playcentre



As soon as you walk in the door at Playcentre, you become an important part of the Playcentre village. All parents and whānau share a role in providing for the education and care of all tamariki at Playcentre. It is your centre now – so please take the time to explore all corners and cupboards to see what fun things are hidden! As a parent and kaiako, you will work alongside other kaiako to help run Playcentre sessions that are full of learning through play opportunities.



Watch the 3 minute [Kaiako at Playcentre video](#).

To help find your way around your Playcentre, work your way through this checklist of important things to know. You may be aware of some of them already. If not, ask a tuakana (experienced kaiako) to show you.

Things to find	✓		✓
Sign-in tablet		Fire exits and evacuation meeting point	
Bag storage		Spare clothes/hats	
Lunchbox/drink bottle storage Read: Food & Drink Procedure		Clean towels and dirty laundry Read: Laundering procedure	
Adult toilets		Paint and paper	
Children's toilets		Collage supplies	
First aid kit, Injury, Illness & Incident Register		Cooking/kitchen equipment and food clean up areas/cloths	
Nappy changing area Read: Nappy Changing & Disposal Procedure		Equipment for making messy/sensory play and play clean up areas/cloths	
Spillkit (for toileting or sickness accidents)		Storage cupboards (open them up to see what's inside)	
Sleep area Read: Sleeping Children Procedure		Keys to various equipment areas (carpentry, outside sheds)	
Hazard register (read and sign)		Sessional health & safety check form	

[Playcentre policies and procedures](#) help kaiako have a shared understanding of how we keep everyone safe and support learning. Find out more on the Playcentre website:



Talanoa with a Tuakana

Ask an experienced member how group supervision works in your centre. Things to discuss:

- ✘ How often will you be part of the “supervision team,” “duty team” or “parent help”? (These are called different names in different centres).
- ✘ What time should you arrive and expect to leave?
- ✘ What is your role in setting up play experiences at the start of and throughout the session? What about cleaning up during and at the end of the session?
- ✘ How do kaiako plan play and learning ideas and communicate these ideas with everyone?

Settling into Playcentre Sessions

Always dress in comfortable old clothes so everyone can join in without worrying about mess. Bring spare clothes, and for adults too!

Arrive on time. Both children and adults can feel excluded and take longer to settle into play, especially if the session is well established when they arrive.

Attend regularly and full sessions. This helps children and adults settle better, build connections and really feel part of the session and Playcentre.

Some children will need time to watch. Stand close and watch too. Playcentre can seem very busy and overwhelming.

Play somewhere familiar - sand, playdough, blocks, trains... What do they love at home?

Support children to choose where to play, be prepared to move around to begin with as children explore the environment.

Ensure your children are familiar with the physical environment - toilets, their belongings, water bottles, favourite play areas etc.

Encourage exploration. Be curious.

Some children will stay close when you are busy on session - relax - enjoy yourself and your child will too.

Where possible get down to children's level, sit alongside, so that you can communicate better & build children's trust.

Take time to greet other children and adults and over time learn everyone's names.

Ask if you are not sure. Everyone here was once new too. We want you to feel welcome and involved.

Children are all different and for some the settling in process is an important start to the day. It may take your child a while when you first join, after breaks away, holidays and when they are going through transitions. Find the things that work well for your family, relax and have some fun together.

Session B – Find Out Who’s Who at your Centre



Playcentre is a whānau cooperative where all parents and whānau work together. Parents and whānau are supported by regional and national Playcentre Aotearoa staff, who do much of the compliance and administration so that whānau can focus on being kaiako on session and supporting their Playcentre village.



Watch the 23 minute [Whānau Tupu Ngātahi – Families Growing Together video](#).

Some parents step into whānau team roles to support the different areas below. Once you are settled into Playcentre, you might like to contribute in this way too. You might do a little or a lot depending on your enthusiasm and these opportunities have been designed by your centre with busy parents and whānau in mind. Centre whānau contribution of some kind is essential for Playcentre’s success and the more you can contribute the more your tamariki and whānau will benefit.

Whānau Team Roles (volunteers)

Role	Name(s)
He Tangata - Community	
Community Leadership Leads the whānau cooperative.	
Community Building Coordinates initiatives to support and connect whānau.	
Whakaihuwaka Māori Advocates for te reo me ōna tikanga Māori in Playcentre.	
Ako – Children’s Learning	
Planning & Evaluation Leads planning for children’s learning.	
Equipment Coordinates equipment repair and purchase recommendations.	
Mātauranga – Adult Learning	
Education Champions. Advocates for adult learning, including support in the Playcentre Introductory Award, Level 4 Certificate and other learning opportunities.	

Playcentre Aotearoa Staff

Each Playcentre has a Kaimahi for administration, supported by a Centre Advisor and regional/national teams, such as Property Managers, Kaihononga Māori, Professional Learning & Development Facilitators (PLD) or Education Tutors.

Role	Name and contact details
Kaimahi. This person oversees the admin at your centre, including enrolment forms and attendance records. They also purchase equipment, manage the budget, and liaise with other Playcentre teams. Your Kaimahi will be at your centre at least once per week however they work across multiple days from other locations. Contact the Kaimahi if you have any queries about your enrolment or if you change contact details.	
Centre Advisor. This person supports your centre with curriculum (learning) opportunities for tamariki, leadership and growth. They run workshops as part of the Playcentre Introductory Award.	

Session Leaders/Coordinators

Many Playcentres have nominated leader(s) for each session day. Sometimes this is a paid Session Facilitator role and other times it is a whānau volunteer. Some centres might have both. The role of the session leader/coordinator isn't to "do it all" but rather to be a key point of contact for that session day.

If your centre has a Session Facilitator, their role is to support parents and whānau to be the best and first educators for their children.

Find out who holds the session leader/coordinator role(s) for each of the sessions at your centre.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Morning						
Afternoon						

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Things to discuss:

- ✂ What Playcentre Introductory Award workshops are coming up soon near you or webinars online? How do you book in?
- ✂ How do you let your session team know if you are going to be away?
- ✂ If you are interested in picking up additional session days, what days currently have spaces?
- ✂ What whānau teams might be a good fit for your skills and interests, when you are ready to step into a team role?

Notes:

Playcentre Whakamātau *Philosophy*



Te Whānau Tupu Ngātahi o Aotearoa - Playcentre Aotearoa

Whakamātau/Philosophy

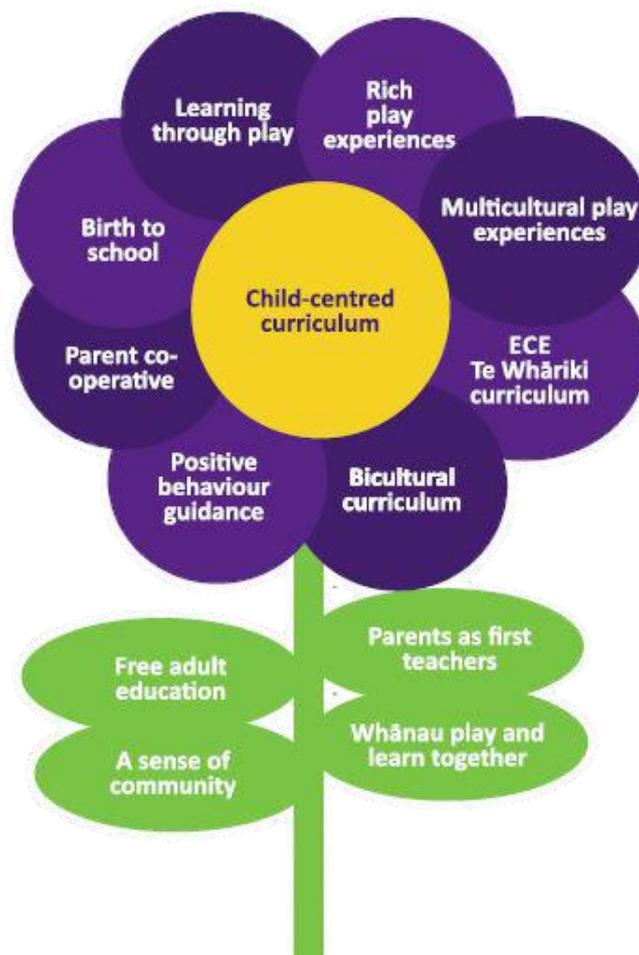
Playcentre Aotearoa is a whānau and predominantly volunteer-based organisation which:

- Empowers whānau and tamariki to work, play, learn and grow together;
- Honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi and celebrates people's uniqueness; and
- Values and affirms parents as the first and best educators for their tamariki

So that whānau are strengthened and communities enriched.

Playcentre 

“Whānau tupu ngātahi – families growing together”



Source: <http://www.playcentre.org.nz>

Playcentre Aotearoa's Code of Conduct Policy



Purpose

Our Playcentre Aotearoa Code of Conduct outlines how we expect each other to behave. Our Code of Conduct is to be upheld by all our Playcentre people – whānau Centre members, volunteers, employees and Trustee Board members. It requires us all to act responsibly, with consideration and discretion and respect for the rights, beliefs and values of others at Playcentre, and to provide a strong duty of care for our tamariki.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a set of standards and expectations of appropriate conduct in all Playcentre environments for all Playcentre people
- Form a link into all other Playcentre policy where expectations and undertakings of our Playcentre people are set out

We act in the best interests of Playcentre

- We pursue Playcentre's philosophy and commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- We act to protect and grow Playcentre's reputation
- We recognise and disclose potential conflicts of interest, and take steps to manage these ¹
- We treat Playcentre's money and assets with due diligence and transparency. We don't seek personal gain

We abide and follow our guiding imperatives

- Being our Constitution, philosophy, and policies as well as governing legislation, education regulations and licensing criteria
- We ensure the safety and wellbeing of all people at Playcentre

We strive to be the best we each can be

- We act and communicate professionally
- We take responsibility for our actions. We are honest
- We perform our roles and responsibilities to the best of our abilities. We engage in learning and development to assist us in fulfilling these. We are life-long learners

We work together as a team

- We act in good faith to maintain productive and positive working relationships
- We work openly and collaboratively across all roles, teams and Playcentre communities

We treat each other with respect

- In actions and words, we approach each other with courtesy and consideration and without offending
- We communicate thoughtfully by thinking about the best way to communicate and what to communicate in each situation particularly when using social media and in accordance with our agreed lines of communication
- We limit the use of confidential information to only for the purposes for which it was acquired and involve only those essentially necessary

We value each other

- We are inclusive, recognising diversity and behaving without discrimination or harassment ²
- We make decisions by consensus - where everyone is a valued team member and has the right to contribute to decisions which affect our team, Centre and/or our work



Playcentre 

P2 Code of Conduct
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Find the full Code of Conduct Policy in the member login section of the website: [Playcentre policies and procedures](#)

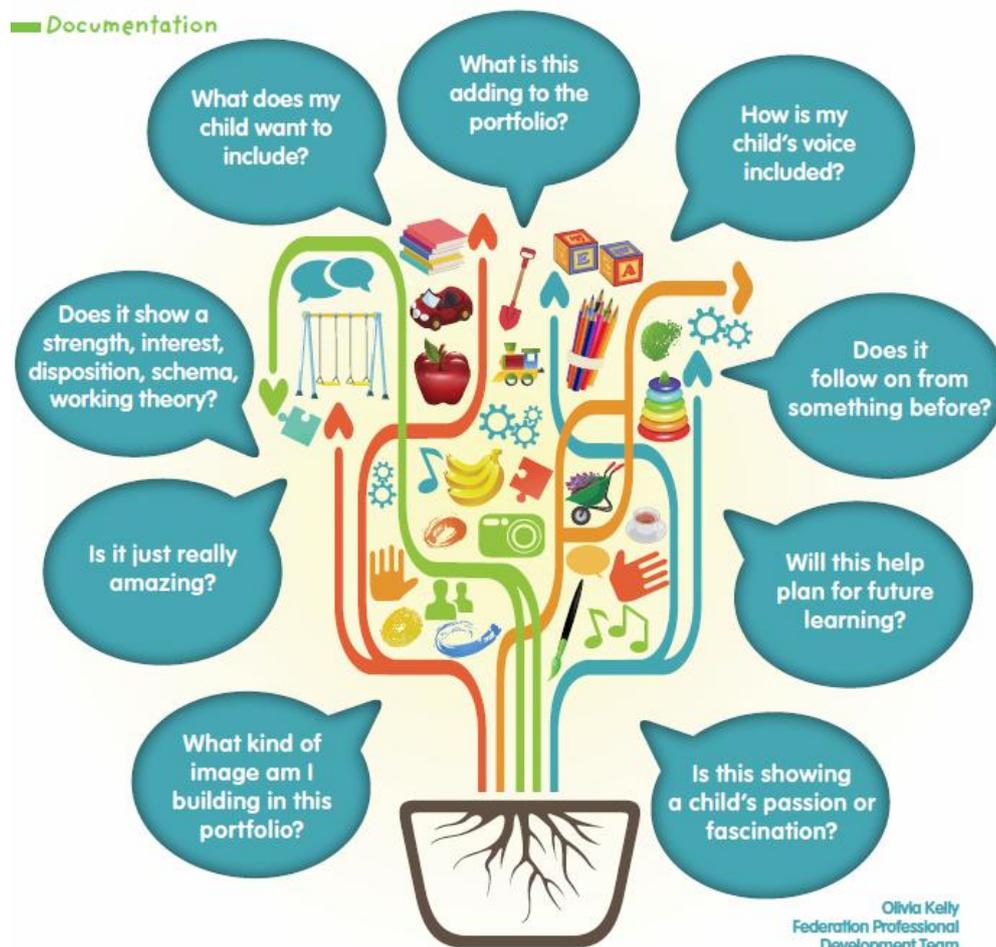


Session C – Set Up a Portfolio for your Child/ren



A portfolio or profile book is a collection of information about your child/ren. Other centres may keep this collection in a kete woven basket or similar. It is the main way we document children's learning at Playcentre. You can decide whether you'd like to set up a portfolio for each child or for your whānau. If you set one up for each child, they can keep it for themselves when they get older, whereas whānau kete or portfolio, show your child's learning and growing as part of their family.

Your centre will provide you with a blank clearfile, scrapbook or kete to get started. **Take the time to label it clearly with your child's name.** A photo on the cover makes it easily identifiable to your child. Add it to where they are stored at your centre. You can take it home to share with extended family, however bring it back when your tamariki are on session as this helps foster a sense of belonging at Playcentre. Some centres have e-portfolios – these are useful for sharing information with whānau and friends; however, they should be in addition to a physical portfolio.



What Can I Put in My Child's Portfolio?

- Child's pepeha
- Learning stories
- Wow moments
- Magic moments
- Child's writing
- Narratives
- Photos
- Photo stories
- Art work
- Art work with child's voice
- Photos of creations
- Drawings
- Collage
- End/Beginning of term assessments
- Child profile form
- Group stories
- Tickets, maps, Interesting items from play
- Parent's voice
- Other adult's voices
- Conversations
- Evaluation forms
- Individual Education Programme
- Time samples
- Running records
- First times

Source: *Playcentre Journal*

Session D – Create a Learner Map for your Child/ren



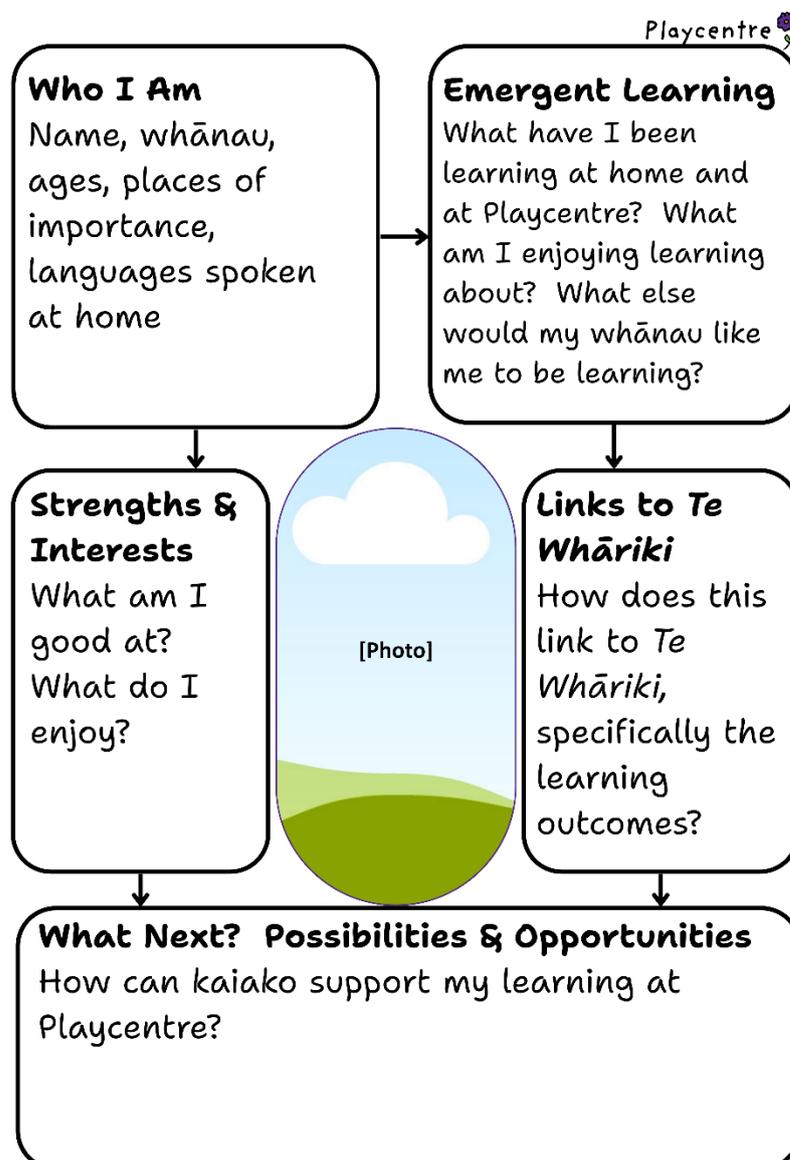
Create a learner map for your child/ren or another child at Playcentre. Read the following information, then use the template provided in the booklet, one at your Playcentre or you can create your own. Learner maps are meant to be creative so you can make additions once you know the basics. It can be handwritten or typed.

Place a copy in your child’s portfolio and share it with other kaiako at your Playcentre on the learning wall or however your centre shares learner maps.

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Things to discuss:

- ✘ Identify emergent learning – what is your child on the cusp of learning?
- ✘ Possibilities and opportunities for enriching your child’s learning at Playcentre
- ✘ Which other tamariki on your session(s) share similar interests to your child?



What is a Learner Map?

A learner map is a visual way of sharing information about a child's learning at a point in time. It helps us follow progress in children's learning and development over time and supports the sharing of ideas between parents and kaiako about how to extend learning and enrich play.

How to Start

The learner map puts the child at the heart of the assessment process. For tamariki who can talk, ask them what they like to do and what they think they are good at. Talk with others in your Playcentre to see if they have any ideas to add – sometimes other kaiako will notice things that you haven't. Multiple voices help build a well-rounded picture of your child as a learner.

Creating a map

Learner maps can be created from a template or free form. They can be hand-written or typed.

- Include their name, age, and whānau. It is also helpful to include the current date. A photo helps tamariki identify their own map but is not essential.
- Identify your child's strengths, interests and aspirations you have for your child. Also add interests from home to strengthen links between home and centre.
- Think about your child's emergent learning e.g. what have they learnt recently or are just on the cusp of learning?

Adding to the Learner Map

- Link to *Te Whāriki*. Consider linking the strands, goals and learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki*. You will learn more about *Te Whāriki* on future sessions in the PIA. If you don't currently know much about *Te Whāriki*, you can come back to add links to your map after you have completed the relevant sections.
- As you progress through the education programme, you will see more learning frameworks that you might want to use e.g. working theories, learning dispositions or schema.
- Add any other information that you'd like other parents and kaiako to know. For example, maybe they have new sibling about to arrive or are toilet training.

What Next?

The "what next" or "possibilities and opportunities" section is an important part of the learner map. Reflecting on all that you know about the child and their learning, how will you and other kaiako support and extend learning over the coming term? This might include:

- Resources to provide or play invitations to set up
- Ways to extend learning and engagement, e.g. trips, experiences or visitors.
- Strategies for supporting the child, e.g. encouraging opportunities for group play, helping a toddler develop a relationship with another kaiako.

The strands section of *Te Whāriki* (p.22 – 50) provides lots of ideas if you need some inspiration.

Share

Share your learner map with other kaiako – the more others know about your child, the better they can support them. Many centres have a termly children's planning hui *meeting* to share children's learning and plan next steps as a group.

Learner Map Template

A blank copy is available at the end of the course booklet on page 52.

Example of a Learner Map

Playcentre 

Who I Am

Name, whānau, ages, places of importance, languages spoken at home

KM - 18months

Lives with Mum, Dad, Nana and Uncle at home, where they speak English and Samoan, at Nan's house (mum's mum). Mum and Dad are waiting for baby brother to arrive.

Currently attends Playcentre with Nan.

Emergent Learning

What have I been learning at home and at Playcentre? What am I enjoying learning about? What else would my whānau like me to be learning?

K's language is growing quickly. She understands more than she can say and is learning new words every day.

Learning to use a balance bike.
Now takes a fork to eat and likes using the tools in play (paintbrush, spades etc)

Strengths & Interests

What am I good at? What do I enjoy?

K loves to move! On the go all the time from when she wakes up to when she sleeps.

Loves running, climbing, jumping.

Loves animals and being outside.

Enjoys books and music
Love water and digging



Links to Te Whāriki

How does this link to Te Whāriki, specifically the learning outcomes?

Mana Reo - Communication - he kōrero ā - waha | Understanding oral language and using it for a range of purposes

Mana Aotūroa - Exploration - te wero ā-tinana | Moving confidently and challenging herself physically

Schema - trajectory and deconstruction

What Next? Possibilities & Opportunities

How can kaiako support my learning at Playcentre?

Set up outdoor and physical play - ride on toys, obstacle courses, diggers in the sandpit and water play. Keep talking, reading and singing with K to help her learn more words in Samoan, English and te reo Māori. K loves watching and playing with others - she may need to support when 'over loving' babies.

K has a new brother arriving soon, help her learn to be a big sister (tuakana) baby care with real babies, baby play in family play.

Sessions E, F and G – Set Up Play Experiences and Join In with Play

Hopefully by now you are familiar with the various play and learning areas at Playcentre and feel comfortable to get involved.

Over three sessions, you will set up and join in with play:

1. For an inside play experience
2. For an outside play experience
3. For a messy play or sensory play experience.

When setting up the play, be sure to think about:

- ✂ The interests on session. The best play experiences often build on children's recent areas of interest.
- ✂ The ages and development stages of children on session. Is the play experience suited to their abilities?
- ✂ Health and safety. What do you need to consider to keep everyone safe and well during the play?
- ✂ Cultural inclusiveness. At Playcentre, we aim to provide play experiences that are respectful of te ao Māori *Māori worldviews* and the cultures of families present.



Before starting sessions E, F and G, attend the **Kia Tākaro – Play & Learning workshop/webinar** and complete the readings on the following pages.

Invitations to Play

The term ‘invitation to play’ is from the Reggio Emilia approach to education. This philosophy values and supports tamariki to learn through their own exploration by providing materials and resources that ‘invite children to play’ in an open-ended and creative way.

Kaiako start Playcentre sessions by setting up “invitations to play” or “play experiences.” To create engaging play environments, set up areas that are visually appealing and designed to spark curiosity. These spaces should encourage tamariki to use their imagination, explore, and be creative. When planning these play areas, kaiako should take into account the children's interests, ages, and developmental needs, as well as the resources available, weather conditions, and the level of supervision required.

When all kaiako at Playcentre actively participate in setting up invitations to play, it brings fresh perspectives and keeps activities exciting and relevant. Take advantage of the wide range of skills and backgrounds within your Playcentre community—builders, doctors, scientists, teachers, artists, and many other talented individuals. Their different viewpoints can inspire unique and stimulating ideas for play.

Also, involve tamariki in the process of setting up invitations to play. Encourage them to share their ideas and take part in decision-making. This empowers tamariki, helping to build their confidence, language skills, and leadership abilities, while also fostering a strong sense of belonging and positive relationships within the group.

Other things to remember

- + **Timing matters.** If an invitation doesn’t attract interest on a particular day, it may still be a great idea. Consider whether other activities were competing for attention, whether the location was right, and whether the tamariki it was designed for were present.
- + One of Playcentre’s strengths is having many **kaiako bringing their diverse knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.** We ensure safety and accessibility, then add our own touch to each setup. As new kaiako, you’ll naturally feel confident in some areas first and gradually expand into others.
- + **You know your tamariki best.** Use their interests and strengths to lift your invitations to play and support invitations to play at new levels and target their learning more richly.
- + **Share and discuss ideas with other kaiako and tamariki.** Collaborative brainstorming can spark excitement and lead to creative new possibilities.
- + **Think about the logistics of set up** and whether the preparation needs to be done before it is set out (such as with some baking or making playdough) or whether it can evolve over time. How many kaiako need to be involved to make it work so that other resources can be gathered and replenished while still maintaining supervision.
- + **Consider introducing an invitation to play later in the session,** such as after morning tea. Too much happening at once can overwhelm some tamariki, and parents may need to focus on settling children at the start of the session.

Child-Initiated Play

Play-based learning is something we talk about a lot at Playcentre. There are two main ways this can look. Sometimes **tamariki lead the play** by following their own ideas and interests. At other times, **adults lead the play** to help with things like safety, routines, or a specific learning purpose.

At Playcentre, we try to support children's play gently, giving them lots of freedom to explore, make choices, and learn in their own way. When adults step in, it's done with care—guiding rather than directing—so that tamariki can grow their confidence, independence, and joy in learning.

Child-Initiated Play	Adult-Led Play
Children choose, explore and direct the play.	Adults guide and structure the activity.
Builds independence, imagination, and problem-solving.	Focuses on specific skills or routines.
Tamariki make their own rules and decisions.	Adults set expectations and outcomes.
Adults observe, support, and follow the child's lead.	Adults introduce or lead the experience.

Playcentre advocates for child-initiated play and the right for children to have an agency in their learning. That's not to say that Playcentre is a free-for-all and kaiako sit back and do nothing. Parents and kaiako play an important role in bringing in new opportunities to spark children's learning and interacting with children during play.

The most effective adult-led learning is when we know our children well and choose opportunities that build on their current interests and abilities – this is called **emergent curriculum**. An emergent curriculum begins with an openness to what children are actually doing, thinking and saying... to bring us to a habit of noticing ... not just the obvious, but the underlying intentions, deep interests, challenges and successes that children demonstrate during play". (Susan Stacey <https://sustacey.ca>)

Kaiako are then able respond to this knowledge by setting up meaningful invitations to play.

Ako and Autonomy

Ako is a Māori concept that doesn't have an English equivalent. It is the concept that teaching and learning are interwoven, and learners are teachers and teachers are learners. They both learn together, from one another. Due to the reciprocity of this principle it naturally extends tamariki. It puts them into leadership roles, builds autonomy and helps to empower them, building communication skills, confidence and self esteem.

How Play Impacts Children's Developing Brains

Neuroscience research shows the importance of the first 3 years in laying the building blocks in the brain. It has also led to a greater focus on how to ensure tamariki can reach their full potential. For a time, the idea of stimulating tamariki led to some parents thinking they should provide extra activities e.g. baby Mozart tapes, reading flash cards etc. However, the consensus coming from neuroscience now is that providing normal opportunities for play and movement are what is best for infants.



Ages and Stages

When we set up and interact with children at Playcentre, it is good to be mindful of their current interests, skills and abilities. This means that we can choose appropriate strategies that keep them safe while also sparking their interest and providing opportunities to enrich their learning.

***Te Whāriki*, the early learning curriculum of Aotearoa NZ, defines three age groups:**

- **Infants.** Birth – 18 months
- **Toddlers.** 1 year – 3 years
- **Young Children.** 2.5 years – 6th birthday

You'll notice that these age groups overlap because each child develops at their own rate; a child doesn't go from being an infant to a toddler overnight – there is a transition period where they have some characteristics of each age group. Key pages from the *Te Whāriki* introduction are reproduced on the next three pages and are summarised in the table below.

Age Group	Developmental Characteristics	Play & Learning Opportunities
 <p>Infants 0–18 months</p>	<p>Strong, responsive relationships with key caregivers are essential.</p> <p>Learn through sensory exploration (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting).</p> <p>Bodies and brains grow rapidly during this stage.</p>	<p>Caregivers stay nearby, supporting trust and belonging. Opportunities to explore using all senses.</p> <p>Calm, predictable environments that help infants feel safe and secure.</p>
 <p>Toddlers 1–3 years</p>	<p>Learn through doing, repetition, and active exploration.</p> <p>Understand more language than they can communicate; rapid language development.</p> <p>Becoming increasingly aware of others during play.</p>	<p>Experiences that support whole-body movement and active exploration.</p> <p>Repetition to practise new skills and test ideas.</p> <p>Safe environments that support confident risk-taking.</p> <p>Opportunities for language-rich interactions.</p>
 <p>Young Children 2.5–6 years</p>	<p>Strong growth in language and expressive communication.</p> <p>Social play expands; early friendships develop.</p> <p>Fine motor and physical coordination continue strengthening.</p> <p>Increasing problem-solving, imagination, and independence.</p>	<p>Rich opportunities for cooperative and social play.</p> <p>Experiences that challenge thinking and deepen working theories.</p> <p>Activities building coordination and fine-motor control.</p> <p>Safe, stable environments with predictable routines and relationships.</p>

AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Te Whāriki is an inclusive curriculum – a curriculum for all children. Inclusion encompasses gender and ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion.

Te Whāriki holds the promise that all children will be empowered to learn with and alongside others by engaging in experiences that have meaning for them. This requires kaiako to actively respond to the strengths, interests, abilities and needs of each child and, at times, provide them with additional support in relation to learning, behaviour, development or communication.

Offering an inclusive curriculum also involves adapting environments and teaching approaches as necessary and removing any barriers to participation and learning. Barriers may be physical (for example, the design of the physical environment), social (for example, practices that constrain participation) or conceptual (beliefs that limit what is considered appropriate for certain children). Teaching inclusively means that kaiako will work together with families, whānau and community to identify and dismantle such barriers.

For Māori an inclusive curriculum is founded on Māori values and principles and is strengths-based. Kaiako seek to develop mutually positive relationships with mokopuna and to work with whānau to realise high expectations.

INFANTS, TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Each child learns in their own way, which means there can be wide variation in the rate and timing of learning and in developing the capacity to apply new knowledge and skills in different contexts. This is reflected in the saying 'ā tōna wā'.

Children's capabilities often fluctuate from day to day. Within minutes they can be both dependent and independent, influenced by temperament, health, the environment or people's expectations. A curriculum for the early years must be flexible enough to accommodate these fluctuations, providing familiar experiences alongside new opportunities for exploration and challenge.

Children's learning and development is also shaped by cultural expectations about what they should be capable of doing and when and where it is appropriate to demonstrate those capabilities.

While all children are different and their learning trajectories are influenced by the social and cultural context, there are nevertheless typical characteristics and patterns that can be observed in the years from birth to school entry.

Māori use a range of words to describe phases in the development of mokopuna. 'Piripoho' refers to the act of breastfeeding. While feeding, the pēpi is held close to the heart, where they are able to safely observe their surroundings and begin to become familiar with people. 'Kōnakunaku' are mokopuna who have progressed to eating solid foods. At this stage they are physically mobile and beginning to communicate verbally. 'Kōhungahunga' is another term used to describe the early years of a child's life.

It can be useful to think of child development in terms of three broad, overlapping age ranges: infants (birth to 18 months), toddlers (one to three years) and young children (two and a half years to school entry). Although learning and development generally follows a predictable sequence, for some children progress in some areas may require further assessment, planning, intervention and support.

The following sections set out some of the typical characteristics of infants, toddlers and young children and include some guidance for kaiako. More detailed guidance is included with each strand (see pages 22–50).

INFANTS

Physical, cognitive and socio-emotional growth and development are more rapid during infancy than in any other period of life. Neural pathways formed during this period are the foundations for all future learning.

Infants are learning rapidly and depend on sensitive adults to respond to their individual care needs. Through caregiving practices such as those for feeding and changing (sometimes referred to as 'caregiving rituals'), infants are learning to trust and that they are worthy of love. Recognising their rights as children, kaiako are respectful of infants and, where appropriate, enable their agency.

Many children first experience ECE settings as infants; this is a significant transition for them, their parents and whānau.

Infants' growing interests and capabilities

- » From birth, infants can communicate their needs and, increasingly over time, anticipate events. They rely on kaiako to sensitively observe their cues and gestures in order to meet their needs and provide opportunities for learning.
- » Infants are rapidly acquiring communication skills, which kaiako support through thoughtful interactions within a language-rich environment.
- » Infants are developing trust that their physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs will be met in predictable ways. They need the security of knowing that a familiar adult is nearby.
- » Infants learn through respectful, reciprocal interactions with people, places and things and require a peaceful environment where kaiako pay careful attention to the level of sensory stimulation.
- » Infants can be subject to rapid fluctuations of health and wellbeing. For this reason they require consistent and attentive care.

Providing for the care and education of infants requires specialised knowledge and practice. A curriculum for infants recognises the importance of individual care moments for learning. It is essential that kaiako work in close partnership with parents and whānau to support the transition of infants into the ECE setting and that they communicate regularly about the child's changing interests, needs and capabilities.

TODDLERS

Toddlers are developing their identities as autonomous learners. They may be starting ECE for the first time or transitioning between or within settings. They are discovering how to navigate the expectations they encounter in different contexts. Their desire to explore and know their world, to increase their independence and to have greater control can be supported by familiar, sensitive adults who know and understand them.

Toddlers are rapidly developing their physical, social, cognitive and language capabilities. They need many opportunities to engage in rich and rewarding experiences with people, places and things.

Toddlers' growing interests and capabilities

- » Toddlers are active, curious, and seeking to make sense of their world. They enjoy testing limits, causes and effects as they develop and refine their working theories. Kaiako support them by being attentive to their interests and providing opportunities for both new and repeat learning experiences.
- » Toddlers communicate both verbally and non-verbally and are developing both receptive and productive language skills. Their language learning is supported through conversations, stories and songs in which they play an increasing part.
- » Toddlers are learning to self-regulate, amidst feelings that are sometimes intense and unpredictable. Kaiako support self-regulation by staying calm and offering them choices. Toddlers participate and learn through observation, exploration and social interaction. They take increasing leadership in cultural practices and everyday routines and activities.

Curriculum for toddlers is responsive to their rapidly growing capabilities. It provides opportunities for individual exploration, as well as engagement with peers, in experiences that extend their learning and foster their creativity. Kaiako take care to build on toddlers' strengths and interests when they transition to a new setting. Toddlers can become bored or frustrated if learning expectations are set too low or too high. While providing clear and consistent boundaries, kaiako acknowledge and respect toddlers' rights to have increasing agency.

YOUNG CHILDREN

Young children have increasing capacity for language and inquiry and for understanding other points of view. They are becoming much more aware of cultural expectations, understanding that different cultures have different expectations and that what is appropriate in one context may not be appropriate in another.

Their capacity to cope with unpredictability and change is also increasing, especially when anchored by the emotional support, respect and acceptance of kaiako. They are learning to plan and monitor their own activities. They are developing a greater awareness of themselves as learners and increasingly prefer interactions with their peers.

A curriculum whāriki for young children provides a rich array of primarily play-based experiences. By engaging in these, children learn to make sense of their immediate and wider worlds through exploration, communication and representation. Young children are developing an interest in literacy, mathematics and other domain knowledge. They can exhibit highly imaginative thinking.

Young children's growing interests and capabilities

- » Young children recognise a wide range of patterns and regularities in the world around them and will question, explore and test things they find puzzling or unexpected.
- » They recognise and respond to 'nonsense' and humour.
- » They are increasingly able to see their family and whānau, home, marae or ECE setting in the context of the wider world.
- » They have new capacities for knowledge development, symbolising and representation, and growing confidence with language, recognition of letters, numbers and environmental print, and sounds in words, rhymes, songs and music.
- » Many are becoming competent bilingual or multilingual speakers.
- » They enjoy being creative, expressing themselves through art, music and dance.
- » Their developing literacy and mathematical abilities embrace new purposes, such as reasoning, verbal exploration, puzzling and finding out about the physical and social world.
- » Their greater working memory contributes to their capacity for telling stories, reciting waiata and karakia, developing more complex working theories and problem-solving strategies, sustaining attention and being more persistently curious.
- » They are developing social skills that enable them to establish and maintain friendships and participate reciprocally in whanaungatanga relationships.
- » They are beginning to be able to see another person's point of view.
- » They are establishing, consolidating and refining locomotor and other movement skills, and they are seeking greater physical challenges.

- » They are further developing their learner identities through the use of strategies such as planning, checking and questioning and by reflecting on experiences and tasks.
- » They use play opportunities, talking about and trying out ideas with others, and their imaginations to explore their own and others' cultures and identities.

Kaiako support the learning and development of young children by providing opportunities for them to experience new challenges, pursue self-selected learning goals and participate in longer-term projects. Such opportunities encourage them to expand their capabilities and extend their learning repertoires, and support them in making a smooth transition to school or kura.

The real strength of *Te Whāriki* is its capacity to establish strong and durable foundations for every culture in Aotearoa New Zealand, and in the world ... *Te Whāriki* rests on the theory that all children will succeed in education when the foundations to their learning are based on an understanding and a respect for their cultural roots.

Reedy & Reedy (2013)

Cultural Considerations

The 1990 Report to NZPF from the Working Party on Cultural Issues was published as *Whānau Tupu Ngātahi: Families Growing Together*. It includes information in sections, arranged by topic, to give advice on aspects of Māori culture and how to bring this awareness to Playcentre practices. The following pages on **Ngā Wāhi Tākaro Areas of Play**, are based on the valuable information in this book. Consult this book to build deeper understanding and awareness of tikanga Māori for setting up play activities. *Look for the little red A5 pukapuka book in your Playcentre library.*

Ngā Wāhi Tākaro

Areas of Play

Play materials and areas give a guide to what is valued by the people providing them. Awareness of and respect for people and cultures can be encouraged through what is provided for play.

Traditional games played by Māori have tremendous value for building skills of eye-hand co-ordination, physical agility, manual dexterity and group co-operation. These skills are of value to all children.

Pororākau | Blocks

People figures need to represent different cultures.

Pakiwaitara | Books and Storytelling

There needs to be a wide selection of Māori books – legends, simple readers, etc., as well as books which show aspects of Māori culture as being significant.

Consider how the books in your Centre are displayed. What books do you read? What books have you made and on what topics? Consider having pictures/posters on the walls showing Māori family groups as well as those showing Pākehā. Show Māori involved in all aspects of life – not only in ‘traditional’ roles or dress. Consider drawing Māori figures on brown paper.

Tārai Rākau | Carpentry

Do not use wood recycled from old houses/marae. The wood from these places holds memories of the lives of those who have lived and worked there. It is especially important not to use this sort of wood for cooking food.

Mahi Toi | Collage

Excursions to collect natural materials for this activity can be an enjoyable outing for all. When using flax, it is important to use the correct protocol for cutting, preparing, using and disposing of it (talk with tangata whenua about this). Flax can be used as an alternative to string.

[Do not use foodstuffs for collage but look instead for natural alternatives such as seeds and leaves (collected on your ‘foraging’ trips!). When collecting natural resources, be conservation-minded and never deplete natural supplies.]

Kēmu Māori | Develop Māori Games

Include: whai *string games*, kaimakamaka *knucklebones*, pōtaka *tops*, manu-aute *kites*, poi [and tī rākau] waiata *singing*, mahi-ā-ringa *action songs*.

Ngā Whakaari ā-whānau | Family and Dramatic Play

There needs to be a wide variety of dressups including piupiu, poi, etc. Dolls with different skin colours and flax dolls would be desirable. In dramatic play, re-enactment will reflect a child’s cultural background. It is important that we are sensitive and accepting of this.

In the family play area, have separate sinks/bowls for the children to use for washing items: one for washing food-related items, another for washing clothes, and another separate ‘bath’ for washing dolls. This will provide for modelling from the hygiene practices in adult areas.

Mahi ā-ringa | Manipulative

Again, natural materials can be used for dexterity, co-ordination, grading, seriating, sorting, threading, e.g. cones, shells, sticks, stones.

Pangahono *Puzzles* – many are available depicting Māori culture. Learn the correct language to use with them and, in particular, learn the correct pronunciation for Māori words. The heads of any figures in a puzzle (including headwear) need to be in one complete piece as this part of the body is considered to be tapu (sacred).

Waiata | Music

This needs to be able to be clearly heard and it is helpful to have charts so that people can read the words. Again, correct pronunciation is important. There are many excellent Māori songs available. Many natural materials may be used as percussion instruments, e.g., sticks and shells. Use music as a natural part of play.

Ngā rawa ā-Māori | Natural materials

We have spoken of these in several areas of play. Many Māori have strong ties to Papatūānuku (*Mother Earth*, the life force of the earth), a respect and a sense of awe toward all that is greater than us and toward that which connects all things in our universe. In our Centres we can encourage such respect through our attitude of valuing natural materials and resources and through a respectful use of them.

[Natural environments are respected and natural resources returned to Papatūānuku to decompose and give back to the earth when they are finished with such as harakeke *flax* & uku *clay*.]

Karetao | Puppets

Try making these out of natural materials such as flax (again, follow the correct protocol for cutting, etc). They can be used to act out Māori stories and legends but use them for all sorts of stories.

Kirikiri | Sand

Once again, use natural materials for ‘decorating’ items, digging, etc. Sticks, shells, feathers, and stones too large to swallow can all be used in the sandpit.

Whakapainga | Tidying up

Preparation of areas and tidying up with the children is a social learning experience. How you deal with this is important. Children can be encouraged to join in as part of the shared group responsibility.

Tākaro Kai | Using foodstuffs

Food of any kind should not be used in play. (See the section on ‘Food’ on page 29 [in the original report].) Although using foodstuffs in play is inappropriate, it is sometimes okay when made for the specific purpose of play, e.g., ‘playdough’ (this is quite different to the dough we use to bake bread). This also applies to ‘fingerpaint’ made with cornflour. However, do not use instant puddings or jellies or any other foodstuffs as fingerpaint. Playing with food is seen by Māori and many others as wasteful. In respect for our ancestors and for those who do not have sufficient food to eat, it is important not to waste food.

Wai | Water

Use the natural environment again. Streams and beaches are natural water play areas full of opportunities for discovery. Go for walks to streams or the seaside where it is possible. It is important to respect this environment and toilet well away from the water.

* The practices of iwi in your area may vary from those mentioned here.

All cultures in Playcentre

Being bicultural and being multi-cultural sit side-by-side. It is important that te ao Māori values, tikanga *customs* and reo *language* are seen and heard in all Playcentres. It is also important that the cultures of all whānau are visible too.

Playcentres are multicultural and diverse. Kaiako are encouraged to share home cultures, languages and celebrations. Strong communication and relationships of respect help to build a sense of community. This provides rich learning for tamariki and a sense of belonging for everyone.

Share and discuss ways to incorporate culture into Playcentre sessions. What better way to connect than through tākarō play!

Session E – Set Up an Inside Play Experience and Join in with Play



Hopefully by now you are familiar with the various play and learning areas at Playcentre and feel comfortable to get involved. On this session, choose an inside play experience to set up and then join in with play. This could be ngā whakaari ā-whānau *family play*, waiata *music*, pūtaiao *science*, mahi toi *collage*, aotūroa *loose parts play*, poro *rākau* blocks, pangahono *puzzles* or any other idea that you have. You can choose a play experience based on your own child's interests or set up something for another child or group of children.

Talanoa with a Tuakana

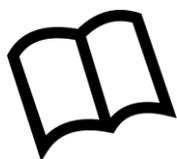
Before you set up your play experience, have a chat with a tuakana to share your ideas about what you are thinking of doing and why. They might have additional suggestions or points that you may not have considered.

Then set up the play experience and join in with play!

Afterwards, discuss with the tuakana:

- ✂ What might a tamaiti *child* have been learning from joining in with the play?
- ✂ What ages/stages was the experience most suited to? How could you adapt it to cater for other age groups?
- ✂ What health & safety considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What cultural considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What would you do the same or differently next time?
- ✂ Any final thoughts or reflections on the experience.

Notes:



Find a NZPF Playcentre Publications play book and browse through it for play inspirations. These books are A5-sized with lots of photos. Some of the options you might find in your centre include:

- *Look Who's Cooking* by Shelley Hancock
- *Recipes for Messy Play*
- *Earthen Treasures* by Shelley Hancock
- *Woodwork Wizardry* by Nic van Onselen
- *Dance upon a Time* by Tanya Batt
- *The World in your Sandpit* by Bernard Woodhams
- *Creative Collage* by Shelley Hancock
- *Making Music Together* by Maureen Woodhams

Session F – Set Up an Outside Play Experience and Join in with Play



On this session, choose an outside play experience to set up and then join in with play. This could be korikori *physically active play*, kirikiri *sand play*, or any other outside play experience.

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Before you set up your play experience, have a chat with a tuakana to share your ideas about what you are thinking of doing and why. They might have additional suggestions or points that you may not have considered.

Then set up the play experience and join in with play!

Afterwards, discuss with the tuakana:

- ✂ What might a tamaiti *child* have been learning from joining in with the play?
- ✂ What ages/stages was the experience most suited to? How could you adapt it to cater for other age groups?
- ✂ What health & safety considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What cultural considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What would you do the same or differently next time?
- ✂ Any final thoughts or reflections on the experience.

Notes:



Reminder to book in to a **Learning through Play workshop** if you haven't yet done so. Two play workshops with different topics are required before the end of the Playcentre Introductory Award.



Read the article on the following two pages, which can also be accessed online from: [Learning is Child's Play - Brainwave Trust Aotearoa](https://brainwave.org.nz/article/learning-is-childs-play/) <https://brainwave.org.nz/article/learning-is-childs-play/>



learning is child's play

Written by Keryn O'Neill MA, PGCertEdPsych, Knowledge Manager



The message that the first few years of life are extremely important for brain development has become more widely known. What may be less clear is how to put this knowledge into practise. Parents wanting to give their pēpi the best start are faced with a huge variety of choice and much commercially-driven pressure to ensure that their child makes the most of this developmental opportunity. The bewildering number of toys and activities currently available for our babies and young children is enough to send parents' stress levels sky-high. And that's before the credit card bill arrives!

Tamariki need stimulation but, as with many things, moderation is key. More is not necessarily better. Many tamariki today are at risk of being over-stimulated or over-scheduled and this can actually delay rather than encourage their brain development.¹

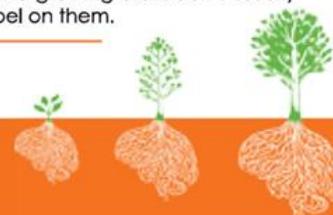
During the first years of a child's life it is play and 'ordinary life' that contributes the most to brain development.² We don't need to formally "teach" our young children in order for them to learn. Tamariki have their own interests and by being supported to follow these they are likely to be getting the stimulation that they need.

Play provides a wonderful opportunity for parent and tamaiti to have fun together, deepening their relationship. Tamariki also need opportunities for some play on their own, as this provides many opportunities to develop their imagination, learn to problem-solve and develop other skills which they may not practise in adult-directed play. Boredom is not all bad either. At times, boredom may provide the impetus for a child to make their own discoveries and create their own fun, fantastic life skills and great stimulation for a growing brain.

It's the simple things

Simple, maybe even 'old-fashioned' toys that allow tamariki to use their imagination and creativity have many benefits over the endless plastic creations currently available.³ Blocks, water, a sandpit, versatile dress-ups (maybe parents' old clothes as opposed to Disney inspired ones), crayons and paper provide endless options. Household objects such as boxes, blankets, pots and pans can also provide many hours of fun and learning. The things that offer the most stimulation for a growing brain don't usually have the "educational" label on them.

1. Fancourt, 2000
2. Frost, 1998
3. Ginsburg, 2007



Real world fun

Learning and brain development is not limited to toys and activities specifically created for children. Tamariki have been playing and learning long before the invention of modern toys! Following children's interests in the real world provides many play opportunities too. Household activities that we usually consider work are rich with opportunities for learning, and play. Hanging out the washing, baking, grocery shopping and weeding the garden provide many opportunities for exploration and learning - and while the task will take longer with children involved, it can be much more fun for the adult, too.

Everyday life is full of naturally occurring learning opportunities.⁴ Watching the rubbish truck, road works, rain going down the drain, or a rainbow, can capture the interest of a child when shared with a parent. Take time to stop, observe, and talk with your tamaiti about the things happening around them, and, when possible, move on only when your child's interest is waning. Be confident in the knowledge that you have just provided them with the stimulation they need, and it didn't cost a cent!

Using their senses

Nature is full of rich sensory experiences that are so vital for healthy brain development.⁵ Playing with the sand at the beach, feeling the bark on trees, smelling flowers, or listening to birds singing - enjoyed with loving whānau - all provide stimulation prompting brain connections to form. Sensory experiences can be messy and tamariki benefit from being able to enjoy such experiences fully, without anyone worrying about the washing!



Despite all the advertising claims, media use and electronic toys are no match for the benefits of hands-on play with real world objects.⁶ Tamariki use their senses; touching, tasting, smelling, listening and looking at the real world, and this is how their brain learns. Nothing can replace the value of whānau joining their tamariki in play, and viewing the world through their eyes. Where possible children really benefit from enjoying another person's full attention.⁷

Conclusion

Playful, creative tamariki who have had plenty of unscheduled, non-screen (TV, phone, tablet) time for play throughout their early years, are more likely to arrive at school with their natural curiosity intact, a strong desire to learn and healthy social-emotional skills.⁸ This will benefit them more than those whose infancy and pre-school years have been filled with scheduled activities and little time for play.

Playing, and having fun with adults and other children, is, quite literally, brain-building.⁹

Glossary of Māori terms:

Pēpi – baby, infant
Tamaiti – child
Tamariki – children
Whānau – extended family

If you enjoyed this article, you may also like to read these

Feeding your baby's brain

<https://brainwave.org.nz/article/feeding-your-babys-brain/>

Our Literature Search into Childcare. How are the Children Doing?

<https://brainwave.org.nz/article/our-literature-search-into-child-care-how-are-the-children-doing/>

Everyday opportunities: Lots of learning

<https://brainwave.org.nz/article/everyday-opportunities-lots-of-learning/>



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4. Yogman et al., 2018
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6. Healey & Mendelsohn, 2019
7. Milteer et al., 2012
8. Szalavitz & Perry, 2010
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Session G – Set Up Messy Play/Sensory Play Experience and Join in with Play



On this session, choose a korikori pōrohe *messy play* or sensory play experience to set up and then join in with play. There are some idea on the following page to inspire you.

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Before you set up your play experience, have a chat with a tuakana to share your ideas about what you are thinking of doing and why. They might have additional suggestions or points that you may not have considered.

If you are unsure where the centre keeps their equipment for messy play, ask an experienced member to show you. It will be stored separately from the kitchen and kai *food* equipment.

Then set up the play experience and join in with play!

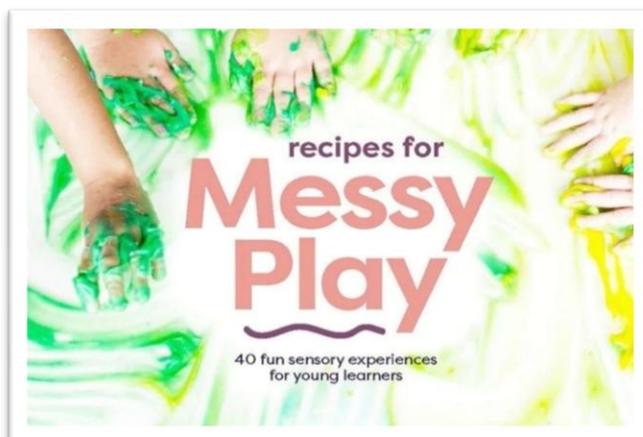
Afterwards, discuss with the tuakana:

- ✂ What might a tamaiti *child* have been learning from joining in with the play?
- ✂ What ages/stages was the experience most suited to? How could you adapt it to cater for other age groups?
- ✂ What health & safety considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What cultural considerations did you take into account?
- ✂ What would you do the same or differently next time?
- ✂ Any final thoughts or reflections on the experience.

Notes:

Tip: If you need inspiration, look for the *Recipes for Messy Play* book in your centre library or the messy play preparation area. (Previous versions had a natural brown cover with red font and a much older version had a yellow cover.)

Originally this book was produced by the *NZ Playcentre Federation* however it is currently owned by another publisher and targeted for an international market. The new version includes some recipes that use food in play – please do not use these recipes at Playcentre.



Session H – Find *Te Whāriki* in your Centre



Te Whāriki is the early learning curriculum used in all licensed ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand, including Playcentre.



Watch the 13 minute video [Introduction to *Te Whāriki*](#).

Your centre will have book copies of *Te Whāriki* as well a poster on the wall. You can also find an online version as a PDF and as

an interactive tool on the Ministry of Education Tāhurangi website.

Find out where copies of *Te Whāriki* are kept at your centre and leaf through the book to explore the different sections.

Browse through a couple of portfolio books for other tamariki. How do you see *Te Whāriki* included in their learning stories?

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Discuss with a tuakana:

- ✂ How does the centre use *Te Whāriki* on a day-to-day basis?
- ✂ Ask them to share examples of where *Te Whāriki* is used in session evaluation, planning and in learning stories.
- ✂ Ask about any planning hui the centre has – during the session or over the term.

Notes:

Strand	Meaning
Mana Atua – Wellbeing	Health, safety, emotional security
Mana Whenua – Belonging	Sense of place, connection, familiarity
Mana Tangata – Contribution	Social interaction, teamwork, participation
Mana Reo – Communication	Language, expression, communication
Mana Aotūroa – Exploration	Curiosity, exploration, problem-solving

We've reproduced key pages from the strands section of *Te Whāriki* (2017, p. 26-47) on the following pages of this booklet. Read through these pages. These are the pages you are likely to use time and time again when recognising and planning for children's learning.

Visit [Te Whāriki online](#).



STRAND 1

Wellbeing | Mana atua



The health and wellbeing of the child are protected and nurtured.

*Ko tēnei te whakatipuranga o te tamaiti i roto i tōna oranga nui,
i runga hoki i tōna mana motuhake, mana atuātanga.*

All children have the right to have their health and wellbeing promoted and to be protected from harm. They also have a right to experience affection, warmth and consistent care.

Kaiako should have an understanding of Māori approaches to health and wellbeing and how these are applied in practice. Models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā emphasise the importance of te taha wairua to holistic wellbeing.

Protecting and nurturing health and wellbeing includes paying attention to aspects of physical care, such as healthy eating and nutrition and opportunities for physical activity. Safe, stable and responsive environments support the development of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment, together with emotional regulation and self-control.

Children need consistency and continuity, especially at times of transition. A foundation of remembered and anticipated people, places, things and experiences will give them the confidence to engage successfully in new settings.

For Pasifika children, wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the child, parent, 'aiga and wider relationships. It is important that kaiako are sensitive to the different ways that the diverse families represented in their setting may understand and seek to promote wellbeing.

Wellbeing | Children have a sense of wellbeing and resilience

Mana atua | Children understand their own mana atuātanga - uniqueness and spiritual connectedness

GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Children experience an environment where:	Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:	These outcomes will be observed as learning in progress when, for example, children demonstrate:
Their health is promoted	Keeping themselves healthy and caring for themselves te oranga nui	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Understanding of their bodies and how they function and how to keep themselves healthy. » Respect for tapu as it relates to themselves and others. » Confidence, independence, and a positive attitude towards self-help and self-care skills relating to food preparation, healthy eating and drinking, hygiene, toileting, resting, sleeping, washing and dressing. » An awareness of hauora and healthy lifestyles.
Their emotional wellbeing is nurtured	Managing themselves and expressing their feelings and needs te whakahua whakaaro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A sense of personal worth and cultural identity and the ability to make choices, focus attention, maintain concentration and be involved.
They are kept safe from harm	Keeping themselves and others safe from harm te noho haumarū	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » An ability to express emotional needs and ask for attention and to trust that their needs will be met. » Capacity for self-regulation and resilience in the face of challenges. » Capacity for tolerating and enjoying a moderate degree of change, surprise, uncertainty and puzzlement. » Knowledge about how to keep themselves safe from harm and the ability to take risks. » A sense of responsibility for their own wellbeing and that of others. » Respect for tikanga and rules about not harming others and the environment and an understanding of the reasons for such rules.

STRAND 2

Belonging | Mana whenua



Children and their families feel a sense of belonging.

Ko te whakatipuranga tēnei o te mana ki te whenua, te mana tūrangawaewae, me te mana toi whenua o te tangata.

ECE settings are safe and secure places where each child is treated with respect and diversity is valued. All children need to know that they are accepted for who they are and that they can make a difference. Feeling that they belong contributes to their wellbeing and gives them the confidence to try new experiences. Children experience an accessible and inclusive curriculum that offers meaning and purpose.

Transitions into and across settings are thoughtfully planned and recognise what children bring with them; they need to know that their ECE setting is part of their wider world and inclusive of their parents and whānau. Children are more likely to feel at home if they regularly see their own culture, language and world views valued in the ECE setting. It is therefore important that whānau feel welcome and able to participate in the day-to-day curriculum and in curriculum decision making.

Respect is shown for Māori views of the world, the natural environment, and the child's connection through time to whenua, atua Māori and tīpuna.

The identities, languages and cultures of Pasifika children are strengthened by acknowledging the interconnectedness of people, place, time and things.

Belonging is nurtured through social interaction with kaiako and other children and by respecting the achievements and aspirations of each child's family and community.

Belonging | Children know they belong and have a sense of connection to others and the environment
Mana whenua | Children's relationship to Papatūānuku is based on whakapapa, respect and aroha

GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Children and their families experience an environment where:	Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:	These outcomes will be observed as learning in progress when, for example, children demonstrate:
Connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended	Making connections between people, places and things in their world te waihanga hononga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » An ability to connect their learning in the ECE setting with experiences at home and in familiar cultural communities and a sense of themselves as global citizens. » Interest and pleasure in learning about the wider, unfamiliar world.
They know that they have a place	Taking part in caring for this place te manaaki i te taiao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A feeling of belonging – and that they have a right to belong – in the ECE setting. » Knowledge about features of the local area, such as a river or mountain (this may include their spiritual significance). » Ability to play an active part in the running of the programme, take on different roles and take responsibility for their own actions.
They feel comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events	Understanding how things work here and adapting to change te mārama ki te āhua o ngā whakahaere me te mōhio ki te panoni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Skills in caring for the environment, such as cleaning, fixing and gardening. » Ability to help others with self-care skills. » Ability to anticipate routines, customs and regular events and to know what is acceptable and valued behaviour.
They know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour	Showing respect for kaupapa, rules and the rights of others te mahi whakaute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Predictability and consistency in their behaviour towards, and responding to, others. » Understanding of the reasons for rules about acceptable behaviour. » Understanding of the kaupapa of the ECE setting and the need to be fair to all children.

STRAND 3

Contribution | Mana tangata



Opportunities for learning are equitable, and each child's contribution is valued.

Ko te whakatipuranga tēnei o te kiritau tangata i roto i te mokopuna kia tū māia ai ia ki te manaaki, ki te tuku whakaaro ki te ao.

Children develop by participating actively in the opportunities that are available to them. These typically involve collaboration with adults and other children.

The whāriki woven by each service recognises and builds on each child's strengths, allowing them to make their own unique contribution. Every child has the right to equitable opportunities to participate actively in the learning community.

To make a contribution, children need to develop responsive and reciprocal relationships with kaiako and with other children. Kaiako play an important role in helping children initiate and maintain relationships with peers. It is through interacting with others that children learn to take another's point of view, empathise,

ask for help, see themselves as a help to others and discuss or explain their ideas. Children's contributions to their wider communities may occur through direct participation or virtually, through the use of digital and other technologies.

Kaiako are aware of the concepts of mana and whakapapa and the importance of these concepts in the development and maintenance of relationships. They understand the collaborative processes inherent within whānau.

Working together for the common good develops a spirit of sharing, togetherness and reciprocity, which is valued by Pasifika and many other cultures.

This strand draws on children's abilities to contribute their own strengths and interests.

Contribution | Children learn with and alongside others

Mana tangata | Children have a strong sense of themselves as a link between past, present and future

GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Children experience an environment where:	Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:	These outcomes will be observed as learning in progress when, for example, children demonstrate:
There are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background	Treating others fairly and including them in play te ngākau makuru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Respect for others, the ability to identify and accept another point of view, and acceptance of and ease of interaction with children of other genders, capabilities and ethnic groups. » Confidence that their family background is viewed positively in the ECE setting. » Confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behaviour. » A positive learner identity and a realistic perception of themselves as being able to acquire new interests and capabilities.
They are affirmed as individuals	Recognising and appreciating their own ability to learn te rangatiratanga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Awareness of the strategies they use to learn new skills and generate and refine working theories. » Ability to use memory, perspective taking, metacognition and other cognitive strategies for thinking, and ability to make links between past, present and future. » Awareness of their own special strengths and confidence that these are recognised and valued. » Social skills and the ability to take responsibility for fairness in their interactions with others.
They are encouraged to learn with and alongside others	Using a range of strategies and skills to play and learn with others te ngākau aroha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strategies and skills, including conversation skills, for initiating, maintaining and enjoying relationships with others. » Strategies for resolving conflicts in peaceful ways and an awareness of cultural values and expectations. » A sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and wellbeing of the group, including the ability to take responsibility for group decisions. » Awareness of the ways in which they can make contributions to groups and group wellbeing, including within digitally mediated contexts.

STRAND 4

Communication | Mana reo



The languages and symbols of children's own and other cultures are promoted and protected.

Ko te whakatipuranga tēnei o te reo. Mā roto i tēnei ka tipu te mana tangata me te oranga nui.

Languages are the means by which we think and communicate with each other. We typically think of languages as consisting of words, sentences and stories, but there are also languages of sign, mathematics, visual imagery, art, dance, drama, rhythm, music and movement.

One of the major cultural tasks for children in the early years is to develop competence in and understanding of language. At this time they are learning to communicate their experience in different ways; they are also learning to interpret the ways in which others communicate and represent experience. They are developing increasing competence in symbolic, abstract, imaginative and creative thinking.

Languages develop in meaningful contexts where children have a need to know and a reason to communicate. Kaiako should encourage the use of both the verbal and non-verbal communication approaches used by each child.

It is important that te reo Māori is valued and used in all ECE settings. This may involve, for example, using correct pronunciation, retelling stories, and using Māori symbols, arts and crafts.

The use of traditional storytelling, arts and legends and of humour, proverbs and metaphoric language can support children from some communities to navigate between familiar and less familiar contexts.

Communication | Children are strong and effective communicators

Mana reo | Through te reo Māori children's identity, belonging and wellbeing are enhanced

GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Children experience an environment where:	Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:	These outcomes will be observed as learning in progress when, for example, children demonstrate:
They develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	Using gesture and movement to express themselves he kōrero ā-tinana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ability to express their feelings and emotions in a range of appropriate non-verbal ways and to respond to the non-verbal requests of others. » Use of responsive and reciprocal skills such as turn taking. » Use of a large vocabulary and complex syntax, awareness of sounds in words, rhythm and rhyme, recognition of some letters and print concepts and interest in storytelling in one or more languages and in reading and writing.
They develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	Understanding oral language ³ and using it for a range of purposes he kōrero ā-waha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Confidence that their first language is valued and increasing ability in the use of at least one language. » An appreciation of te reo Māori as a living and relevant language.
They experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures	Enjoying hearing ⁴ stories and retelling and creating them he kōrero paki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » An understanding that symbols can be 'read' by others and that thoughts, experiences and ideas can be represented as words, pictures, numbers, sounds, shapes, models and photographs in print and digital formats.
	Recognising print symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose he kōrero tuhituhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Familiarity with and enjoyment of stories and literature valued by the cultures represented in the community. » Familiarity with numbers and their uses by exploring and observing their use in activities that have meaning and purpose.
	Recognising mathematical symbols and concepts and using them with enjoyment, meaning and purpose he kōrero pāngarau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ability to explore, enjoy and describe patterns and relationships related to quantity, number, measurement, shape and space. » Recognition that numbers can amuse, delight, comfort, illuminate, inform and excite.
They discover different ways to be creative and expressive	Expressing their feelings and ideas using a wide range of materials and modes he kōrero auaha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Use of language to express feelings and attitudes, negotiate, create and retell stories, communicate information and solve problems. » Skill and confidence with art and craft processes, such as cutting, drawing, collage, painting, printmaking, weaving, stitching, carving and constructing. » Skills with multiple media and tools, such as crayons, pencils, paint, blocks, wood, musical instruments, movement and educational technologies that can be used for expressing moods or feelings or representing information. » Ability to be creative and expressive through a variety of activities, such as visual arts activities, imaginative play, carpentry, storytelling, drama and making music. » Understanding and familiarity with music, song, dance, drama and art from a range of cultures and recognition that these media can amuse, delight, comfort, illuminate, inform and excite and that they may suit particular cultural occasions.

3 In this document, 'oral language' encompasses any method of communication the child uses as a first language; this includes New Zealand Sign Language and, for children who are non-verbal, alternative and augmentative communication (AAC).

4 For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, 'hearing' includes watching.

STRAND 5

Exploration | Mana aotūroa



The child learns through active exploration of the environment.

Ko te whakatipuranga tēnei o te mana rangahau, me ngā mātauranga katoa e pā ana ki te aotūroa me te taiao.

This strand is about supporting infants, toddlers and young children to explore, learn from, respect and make sense of the world. Their exploration involves all aspects of the environment: natural, social, physical, spiritual and human-made.

Children learn through play: by doing, asking questions, interacting with others, devising theories about how things work and then trying them out and by making purposeful use of resources. As they engage in exploration, they begin to develop attitudes and expectations that will continue to influence their learning throughout life.

Diverse ways of being and knowing frame the way respect for the environment is demonstrated. Kaiako develop understandings of how children and their whānau make sense of the world and respect and appreciate the natural environment. Children may express their respect for the natural world in terms of respect for Papatūānuku, Ranginui and atua Māori. Kaitiakitanga is integral to this.

For Pasifika children, the skills and knowledge that reside in elders, families and community provide the foundation for their independent explorations.

Exploration | Children are critical thinkers, problem solvers and explorers

Mana aotūroa | Children see themselves as explorers, able to connect with and care for their own and wider worlds

GOALS	LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVIDENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Children experience an environment where:	Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of:	These outcomes will be observed as learning in progress when, for example, children demonstrate:
Their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised	Playing, imagining, inventing and experimenting te whakaaro me te tūhurahura i te pūtaiao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ability and inclination to cope with uncertainty, imagine alternatives, make decisions, choose materials and devise their own problems. » An understanding that trying things out, exploring, playing with ideas and materials and collaborating with others are important and valued ways of learning. » Confidence in play and a repertoire of symbolic, imaginative or dramatic play routines. » Ability to pursue an interest or a project for a sustained period of time.
They gain confidence in and control of their bodies	Moving confidently and challenging themselves physically te wero ā-tinana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Curiosity about the world and the ability and inclination to share interests with others. » Confidence in exploring, puzzling over and making sense of the world, using such strategies as setting and solving problems, looking for patterns, classifying, guessing, using trial and error, observing, planning, comparing, explaining, engaging in reflective discussion and listening to stories.
They learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning	Using a range of strategies for reasoning and problem solving te hīraurau hopanga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Use of all the senses and physical abilities to make sense of the world. » Control over their bodies, including locomotor and movement skills, agility and balance, and the ability, coordination and confidence to use their bodies to take risks and physical challenges. » Recognition of different domains of knowledge and how they relate to understanding people, places and things.
They develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds	Making sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories te rangahau me te mātauranga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ability to represent discoveries using creative and expressive media, including digital media. » Curiosity and the ability to inquire into, research, explore, generate and modify working theories about the natural, social, physical, spiritual and human-made worlds. » A sense of responsibility for the living world and knowledge about how to care for it.

Session I – Write a Learning Story Using the Notice-Recognise-Respond Format



Write a learning story for a child at Playcentre (your child or another child.)

Use the **Notice-Recognise-Respond format** described on the following pages. You can use a template provided at the end of this booklet (p.53-53), or one available at your centre. Alternatively, create your own learning story or write one by hand. Learning stories can be handwritten or typed.

Ask around to see how kaiako at your centre prefer to create learning stories. Some may prefer to print photos and handwrite them, or use an app like Canva. Some centres have subscriptions to an ECE app like Storypark or Educa. Note that while these apps can help make story writing easier, sometimes the stories all come out looking similar, and using other tools helps add some creativity and artistic flair.

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Discuss your learning story ideas with an experienced member and then ask them to review it.

- ✂ When complete, share the story with other kaiako on your session.
- ✂ Discuss possible next steps for supporting the child's learning.
- ✂ Place a copy in your child's portfolio or give a copy to the child's whānau.

Notes:



Reminder to book in to a 2nd **Learning through Play workshop** if you haven't yet done so. Two play workshops with different topics are required before the end of the Playcentre Introductory Award.

Notice-Recognise-Respond

Notice-Recognise-Respond is the basis for how we interact with tamariki and how we document their learning through learning stories.

The Notice-Recognise-Respond of Interacting with Tamariki

NOTICE

What is the tamaiti saying and doing? What does their body language tell us? Who are they playing with? Are there kaiako involved? What is the context of the situation? What are their patterns of behaviour?

RECOGNISE

What learning do we think might be happening? What are tamariki curious about? We can't see into children's heads to see what they are thinking, but we can make a best guess about their learning based on what they are doing and saying, and what we know about them already. If they are taking part in a group experience, learning may look different for each child.

RESPOND

Responding includes the response that happened straight away but also the "what next" for the future. How can we support learning that builds on what we noticed and recognised? Are there further resources needed? Do we offer specific support or guidance? Can we link this to other activities, excursions or enhance the play? What can we do to support, enrich and extend the learning?

You are already noticing, recognising and responding all the time. But once we know about the cycle, we can be more intentional with each step. Rather than jumping ahead to respond, really take the time to observe children at play. We don't always have to be involved in play. Sometimes it is beneficial to quietly observe and take the time to notice little details we might otherwise overlook.

The stronger our relationships are with tamariki, the better we will be able to recognise what learning might be happening. Is this new learning for the child? Is it part of a pattern or trend? Is it learning that only happens in a particular context, like when they are with a sibling or friend? By taking the time to build relationships with multiple children at Playcentre, you will be better able to recognise and respond to their learning.

Some of what we notice we will recognise as learning. Some of what we recognise we will respond to. We don't have enough time in the day to respond to everything, and it is good for children to have some opportunities to develop their own learning without adult influence. Part of responding is deciding when it is beneficial to respond and when it is beneficial to just keep observing.

Magic Moments and Learning Stories

Early learning in Aotearoa NZ tends to use a narrative-based approach to assessing children's learning. Rather than tick lists and check boxes, we usually use a story-based format.

Stories are fun, engaging and interactive – what child doesn't love to hear a positive story about themselves? Stories help reinforce a positive image of the child as a learner and celebrate their efforts and achievements. The stories we write are taonga *a treasure*, written to the child and whānau. Take the time to read them with tamariki. How does it make them feel? Sharing our stories with tamariki is an important step in involving them in their own learning and celebrating their learning journey.

Magic Moments

Short snippets that tell the story of what we noticed and/or recognised are called **anecdotes** or **magic moments**. Magic moments often include a photo(s) and record a special moment – maybe the first time a child tried or did something, a funny or noteworthy quote or anything else that we think is worth recording. They are fast and fun to write; and don't have the same depth or context as learning stories.

A magic moment might be about:

- your child saying, "Look, I did it!" as they climb the ladder for the very first time
- a toddler proudly mixing colours at the paint table and declaring, "It turned purple!"
- two children giggling together as they invent a game in the sandpit
- your pēpi reaching out to explore bubbles drifting past

These short notes help us remember joyful, surprising, or meaningful moments.

Example of a magic moment

You'll see how the magic moment 'Making Sushi Together at Playcentre' captures what the author noticed but does not go into the recognise or respond steps of a learning story.



Making Sushi Together at Playcentre

Today we made sushi together! Some of the tamariki had tried sushi from the shop but it was their first time making it from scratch together at Playcentre. It was even more special because we harvested the cucumbers from the gardens – the tamariki have been watching them grow and waiting for the chance to get to eat them.

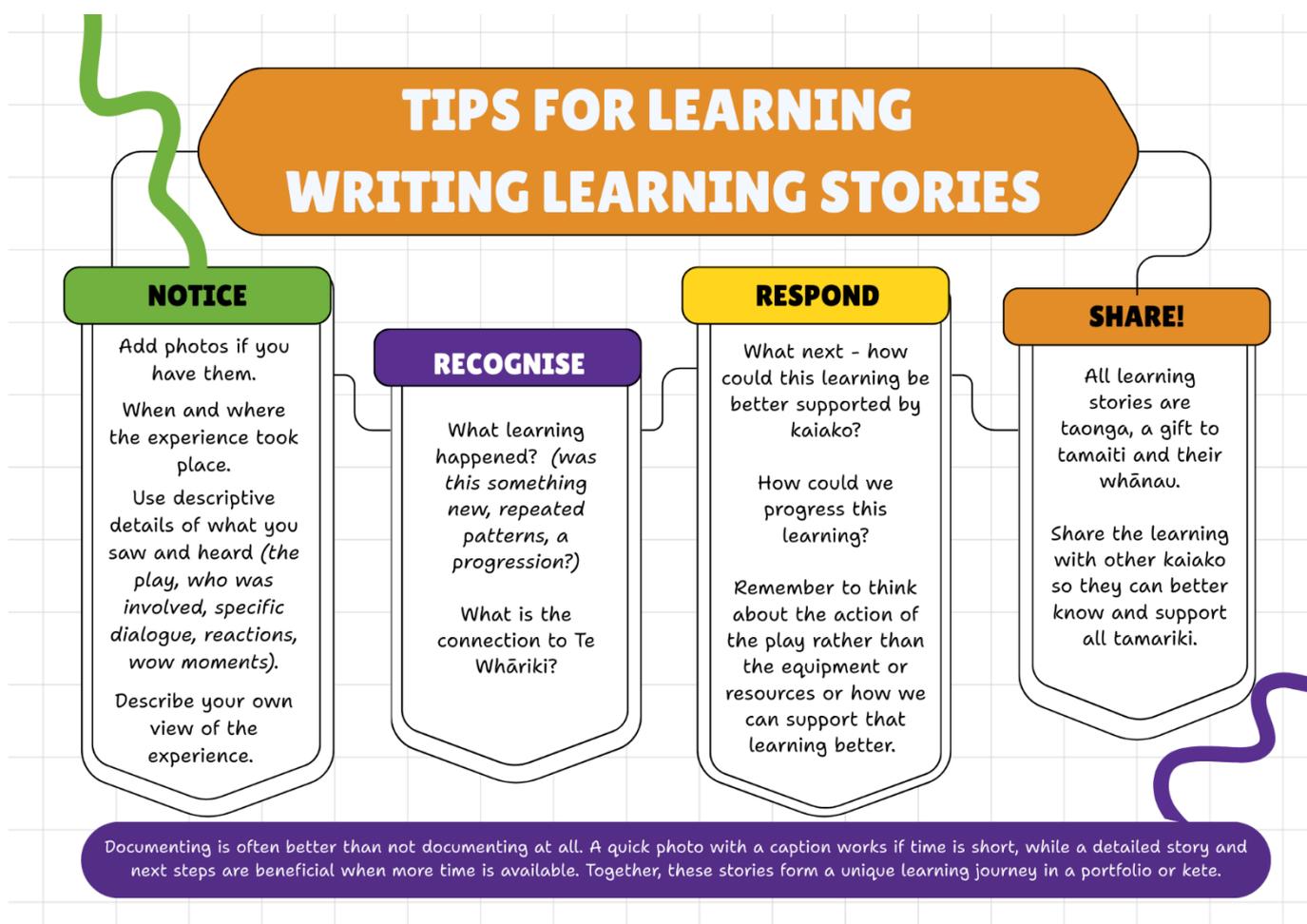
Adelina commented how Liam usually turns his nose up at sushi from the shop however he went back for seconds and thirds when he got to make it himself! Delicious! Mōwaiwai!

Learning Stories

Learning stories are a more in-depth account that gives a richer picture of learning and follows the **Notice-Recognise-Respond** format. While they are used internationally, they have a special link to Aotearoa NZ as they originate from the work of Professor Margaret Carr at the University of Waikato. Over time, the learning story format has evolved, however it still has the basic **Notice-Recognise-Respond** format as its base. If you stick to this format, you can't go wrong.

1. **Notice** what your child is doing,
2. **Recognise** the learning that might be happening,
3. **Respond** with ideas for supporting their learning next.

This approach helps us focus on your child's strengths, interests, and unique ways of learning. When we write learning stories, we are celebrating who your child is and helping them see themselves as confident, capable learners.



Date: EXAMPLE LEARNING STORY

Kaiako:

Steps Forward Easier with a Friend!



Notice: I kite koutou i te aha? What happened?

Sky I know how much you love helping others and you have strong relationships with everyone at Playcentre. Today you were watching Noah practice standing, and trying to take wobbly steps. You went over and offered your hands, slowly walking backward to help Noah walk! He did it! You were both so excited and proud - big smiles on your faces!



Recognise: He aha ngā akoranga kua tautuhia. Recognize & reflect on Te Whāriki, schema, strengths & interests.

Sky is growing in maia *confidence* and stepping naturally into leadership roles. She has good communication skills and is able to empathize with others, seeing their perspectives and wanting to help. Tino pai Sky - we love your support and aroha towards others!

Te Whāriki: Mana Atua/ Wellbeing

Keeping themselves and others safe from harm / te noho haumarū.

Respond: What next? How could we nurture learning/ Kaupapa Māori?

Continue to support tuakana teina relationships, empowering Sky to take on leadership roles and help guide younger tamariki. Perhaps Sky can help set up invitations to play or demonstrate skills and equipment! More aroha at our Playcentre and in our play!



Session J – Uphold Mana and Respect Children



At Playcentre, we support tamariki in kind and respectful ways that uphold their mana. *Mana* doesn't have one simple translation, but you can think of it as each child's unique dignity, strength, and sense of who they are. Whakamana is one of the four principles that underpin *Te Whāriki* – read more on page 49 of this booklet.

Before starting this session:

1. Attend the **Whakamana – Empowering Children** workshop/webinar
2. Watch the video below
3. Complete the readings on the following pages.



Watch the 4 minute video [Parenting – It's About Mana](#)

Featuring Dr Elizabeth Emere Harte, a founder of *Tūpuna Parenting*, an initiative centred around raising pēpi and tamariki with traditional Māori parenting.



Read [Helping Our Tamariki Get the Best Start in Life](#) by The Brainwave Trust (2024)



On session, practise:

- Getting down to children's level
- Listening and responding with care
- Building trust and connection
- Using the basic positive guidance strategies described in this booklet and in the Whakamana workshop

Talanoa with a Tuakana

Discuss with a tuakana:

- ✂ How did tamariki respond when you were interacting at their level?
- ✂ What did you notice that you might have otherwise overlooked?
- ✂ What were some of the things you said and did that upheld children's mana?
- ✂ Share a positive guidance strategy you used and how effective it was.

Notes:

Upholding Mana

Te Whāriki defines mana as “the power of being” (2017, p.18, reproduced on page 49). [Tūpuna Parenting](#), the organisation that created the video that you watched in this section, shares this information about mana on their website:

WHAT IS MANA?

Mana is often translated as prestige, authority, status, spiritual power and charisma. It goes hand in hand with tapu. If something is more tapu, it has more mana. But there are layers to mana. It’s not just something you earn with age and contributions to your community. You inherit mana, from the atua (spirit world) and from your tūpuna.

HOW DID OUR TŪPUNA RESPECT THEIR WHĀNAU?

Our tūpuna showed pēpi and tamariki respect in many ways. Tamariki were guided rather than punished.

Acknowledging mana

Our tūpuna respected pēpi and tamariki from birth, acknowledging their mana by respecting them like we would any adult.

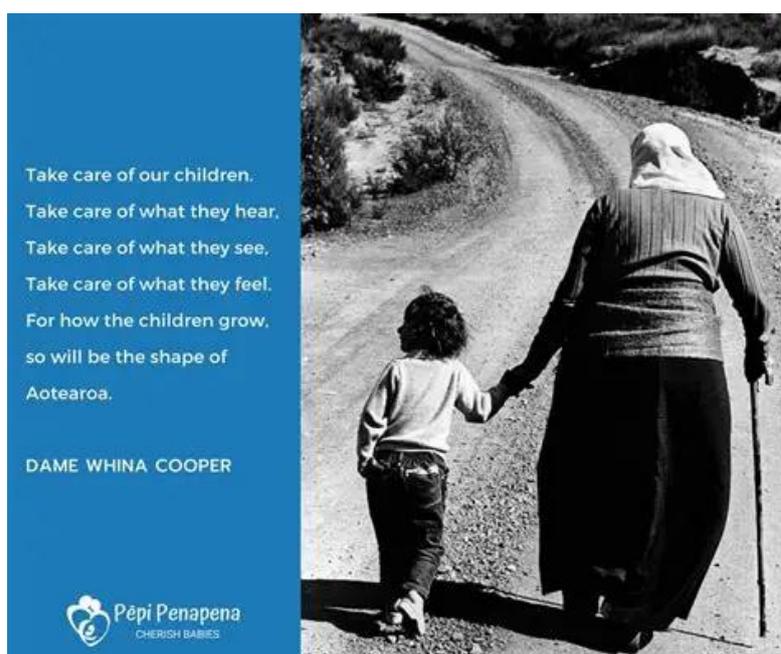
Respecting our Pēpi

Meeting their needs and helping them to stop crying - their cries are their voice, and it was embarrassing for tūpuna if pēpi cried unnecessarily because whānau were not meeting their needs.

Respecting Tamariki

Means listening to them, responding to them, never dismissing them. Our tūpuna gave tamariki a voice in the whānau, and so should we.

Our tūpuna knew our pēpi were born ready to learn. They are born with mana - the mana from the atua (gods) and the mana from their tūpuna (ancestors). This means they are born with the potential to learn from birth. So kōrero to your pēpi right from birth, and listen to their kōrero when they babble, because they’re learning from you and their brain is growing. Ātaahua.



<p style="text-align: center;">Enhancing Your Child's Mana at Playcentre</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Some simple, everyday things you can do on session that make a big difference.</p>	
Strategy and description	Example
<p>Get down to their level When you crouch or sit beside your child, they feel seen and supported.</p>	<p>“Kia ora e hoa — can you show me what you’re building?”</p>
<p>Listen and respond with care Let your child know their feelings and ideas matter.</p>	<p>“You’re not ready to join in yet? That’s okay — we can take our time.”</p>
<p>Offer simple, real choices Choices help children build confidence and independence.</p>	<p>“Would you like to help with the playdough or read a book first?”</p>
<p>Notice what they’re good at Pointing out strengths helps children see themselves as capable learners.</p>	<p>“You concentrated for so long on that puzzle — ka rawe!”</p>
<p>Use warm, encouraging words Your tone tells a child they belong.</p>	<p>“I love having you here today.”</p>
<p>Gently support them through tricky moments Instead of correcting or criticising, guide with kindness</p>	<p>“Let’s take the digger to the sandpit — that’s where we can dig safely.”</p>
<p>Invite them to take part in real roles Children feel important when they contribute to the group.</p>	<p>“Can you help me put the cups out for morning tea?”</p>
<p>Respect their pace Some tamariki warm up slowly — that’s okay.</p>	<p>“You can stay close to me until you’re ready to play.”</p>
<p>Celebrate their culture and identity Use their home language, include their interests, and welcome their whānau stories.</p>	<p>Saying their name correctly, displaying family photos, or incorporating cultural items into play.</p>
<p>Build trusting, connected relationships A child’s mana grows when they feel safe, loved, and understood.</p>	<p>Spending a few minutes every session simply being present with your child</p>

Tips for Supporting Tamariki to Regulate their Emotions

Emotions underpin behaviour. Before children can think clearly and make good decisions about their actions, they need to feel in control. Some ways that we can help:

- Provide calm, neutral spaces. Move away from noise and busyness.
- While emotions are high do not ‘unpack’ feelings. Wait for a calmer time.
- Check in. “*Ok now? Would you like to talk?*” Acknowledge that the situation was upsetting, make positive forecast for the future.
- Balance reassurance with attention and encouragement.
- Waiata *singing* / kanikani *dancing* can help reset
- Calming breathing exercises
- A story and a cuddle with someone special
- Calm and connect before moving forward
- Make sure you are calm as well before you step in to support



Basic Positive Guidance Strategies	
Strategy and description	Example
<p>Redirect Offer your child a different activity that still lets them do what they're trying to do — it shows you get what they're after and gives them a better option.</p>	<p>Escorting the child who is practicing pouring in the toilet to the water trough, or buckets with water.</p> <p>Your child starts practicing their pouring in the toilet. You might say, <i>"I love your enthusiasm... how about we try that brilliant idea outside in the water trough?"</i></p>
<p>Give Acceptable Choices Providing tamariki with two clear, acceptable choices helps reduce frustration and supports their independence. It allows them to make decisions within safe and appropriate boundaries.</p>	<p>Pre-empting a child wanting to wear their new best item of clothing to Playcentre: <i>"Would you like to wear your blue trousers or your green ones with the flowers instead?"</i></p>
<p>Allow (Safe) Natural Consequences Sometimes it helps to let tamariki experience the natural consequences of their choices. This can support their learning, as long as the outcome is safe and there's no risk of harm.</p>	<p><i>"It's pretty wet today. If your boots stay outside, they might fill up with rain and your feet could get soggy later."</i> The boots are left outside, they fill with water, and your child ends up with wet socks — not fun, but totally safe, and a great little learning moment.</p>
<p>Encourage Cooperation Talk about 'taking turns' rather than sharing. Sharing food is not the same as sharing a bike and children cannot always understand the difference. Suggest concrete ways tamariki are able to take turns. Encourage the child with the toy to choose when to part with it. This usually works and is building social skills in the asking child.</p>	<p><i>"It looks like Nikau would like to join you. Do you have a job he can do/role he play?"</i></p> <p><i>"Noah, can Brody have a turn when you're finished?"</i></p>
<p>State Expectations Positively Sometimes just stating clear ideas about what is expected will work well. Especially in new situations, we shouldn't assume tamariki know what is expected of them. It can be useful to talk about the expectations for what's happening soon.</p>	<p>Morning tea: <i>"E noho. Let's all sit down while we eat."</i></p> <p><i>"We will keep the beads up on the table so that our babies don't put them in their mouths."</i></p>
<p>Heads up! Knowing its nearly clean up time or time to go can help the transition process.</p>	<p><i>"We will need to clean up soon, is there anything you want to finish before we do?"</i></p>

PRINCIPLE 1

Empowerment | Whakamana

Early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow.



Mā te whāriki e whakatō te kaha ki roto i te mokopuna, ki te ako, kia pakari ai tana tīpu.

This principle means that every child will experience an empowering curriculum that recognises and enhances their mana and supports them to enhance the mana of others. Viewed from a Māori perspective, all children are born with mana inherited from their tīpuna. Mana is the power of being and must be upheld and enhanced.

To learn and develop to their potential, children must be respected and valued. This means recognising their rights to have their wellbeing promoted and be protected from harm and to experience equitable opportunities for participation and learning and for rest and play.

Kaiako have an important role in encouraging and supporting all children to participate in and contribute to a wide range of enriching experiences. These expand the children's competence and confidence and, over time, enable them to direct their own lives.

In an empowering environment, children have agency to create and act on their own ideas, develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them and, increasingly, to make decisions and judgments on matters that relate to them. Play and playfulness are valued and kaiako-initiated experiences are inviting and enjoyable.

Perspectives on empowerment are culturally located, hence kaiako need to seek the input of children and their parents and whānau when designing the local curriculum.

The EMPOWERMENT principle is reflected in the HIGH EXPECTATIONS, TREATY OF WAITANGI, INCLUSION and LEARNING TO LEARN principles found in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Additional Resources

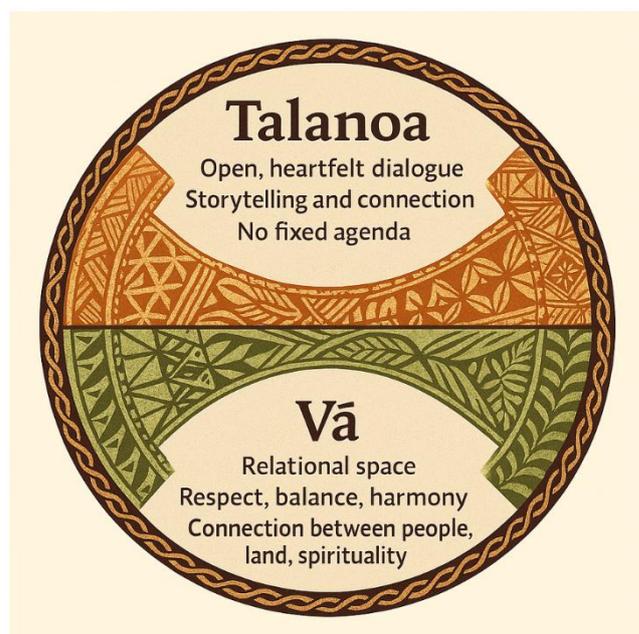
Talanoa and Vā

Talanoa: A Pacific Approach to Deep, Relational Dialogue

Talanoa is more than conversation. It is a foundational Pacific practice grounded in relationships, openness, trust, and collective understanding. Through Talanoa, people share stories, experiences, and perspectives in a way that strengthens connection and builds mutual respect. It is used widely in families, communities, workplaces, and leadership spaces across the Pacific.

Key Elements of Talanoa

- **Open and heartfelt dialogue** Talanoa invites honesty and authenticity. People speak from the heart (faka'apa'apa, alofa), sharing lived experiences rather than debating or defending positions.
- **Storytelling as connection** Stories carry genealogy, identity, wisdom, and cultural knowledge. Through storytelling, participants build emotional bonds and deepen understanding.
- **No fixed agenda** Talanoa unfolds naturally. Rather than following a rigid structure, it allows themes to emerge collaboratively. The emphasis is on the process, not predetermined outcomes.
- **Reciprocity in sharing and listening** Speaking and listening hold equal value. This balance builds trust, empathy, and shared vulnerability.
- **Creating safety** By softening hierarchy and formality, Talanoa invites everyone—elders, youth, leaders—to contribute meaningfully and with dignity.



Talanoa and Vā are deeply interwoven:
Talanoa strengthens the Vā: Open, respectful dialogue nurtures trust, repairs misunderstandings, and builds unity.
The Vā shapes Talanoa: When relational space is honoured and protected; Talanoa becomes deeper, safer, and more meaningful.

Vā: The Sacred Relational Space

Vā (or Wā in some cultures) refers to the relational space between people, groups, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. The Vā is not empty; it is alive, sacred, and requires active care.

Key Elements of Vā

- **Relational space** The Vā holds the relationships that shape identity, cultural obligation, and social harmony.
- **Respect, balance, and harmony** Caring for the Vā means acting with dignity and compassion—expressed through concepts such as fa'aaloalo, alofa, lototau, manaakitanga, and whanaungatanga.
- **Human relationships** Pacific worldviews place relationships at the centre. The Vā reminds us that every interaction affects collective wellbeing.
- **Connection to land and place** Relationships extend beyond people. One's identity is tied to ancestral lands, oceans, mountains, and the environment; these are part of the Vā.
- **Connection to spirituality** The Vā includes ancestors, faith, and the unseen spiritual world. It is often understood as tapu, guiding behaviour and responsibility.
- **Continuous maintenance** Relationships require ongoing care through language, actions, rituals, and compassion. When the Vā is harmed, it must be restored through practices such as ifoga, muru, reconciliation, or Talanoa.





Talanoa and Vā together form a holistic Pacific approach to communication and relationships that centres on relationship, dignity, cultural grounding, and collective wellbeing. Talanoa fosters trust and understanding through storytelling and heartfelt dialogue. The Vā emphasises the sacred relational spaces that connect people, land, and spirituality. When practiced together, they deepen meaningful connections and strengthen the wellbeing of our families and communities.

Glossary of Key Pacific Terms

Pan-Pacific Concepts

- Talanoa: A Pacific method of open, heartfelt, relational dialogue focused on storytelling and trust-building.
- Vā (or Wā): The sacred relational space between people, groups, the environment, and the spiritual world.
- Collective Wellbeing: Wellbeing held in relationships among family, community, land, and spirituality.

Māori Concepts

- Manaakitanga: Hospitality, generosity, and responsibility to care for the wellbeing of others.
- Whanaungatanga: Relationships, kinship, and building connection through shared experiences.
- Muru: A process of restoring balance following wrongdoing, often involving acknowledgement and reconciliation.
- Tapu: Sacredness, spiritual significance, or restricted nature of people or places.
- Whakapapa: Ancestry and lineage—central to identity, cultural knowledge, and relational connections.

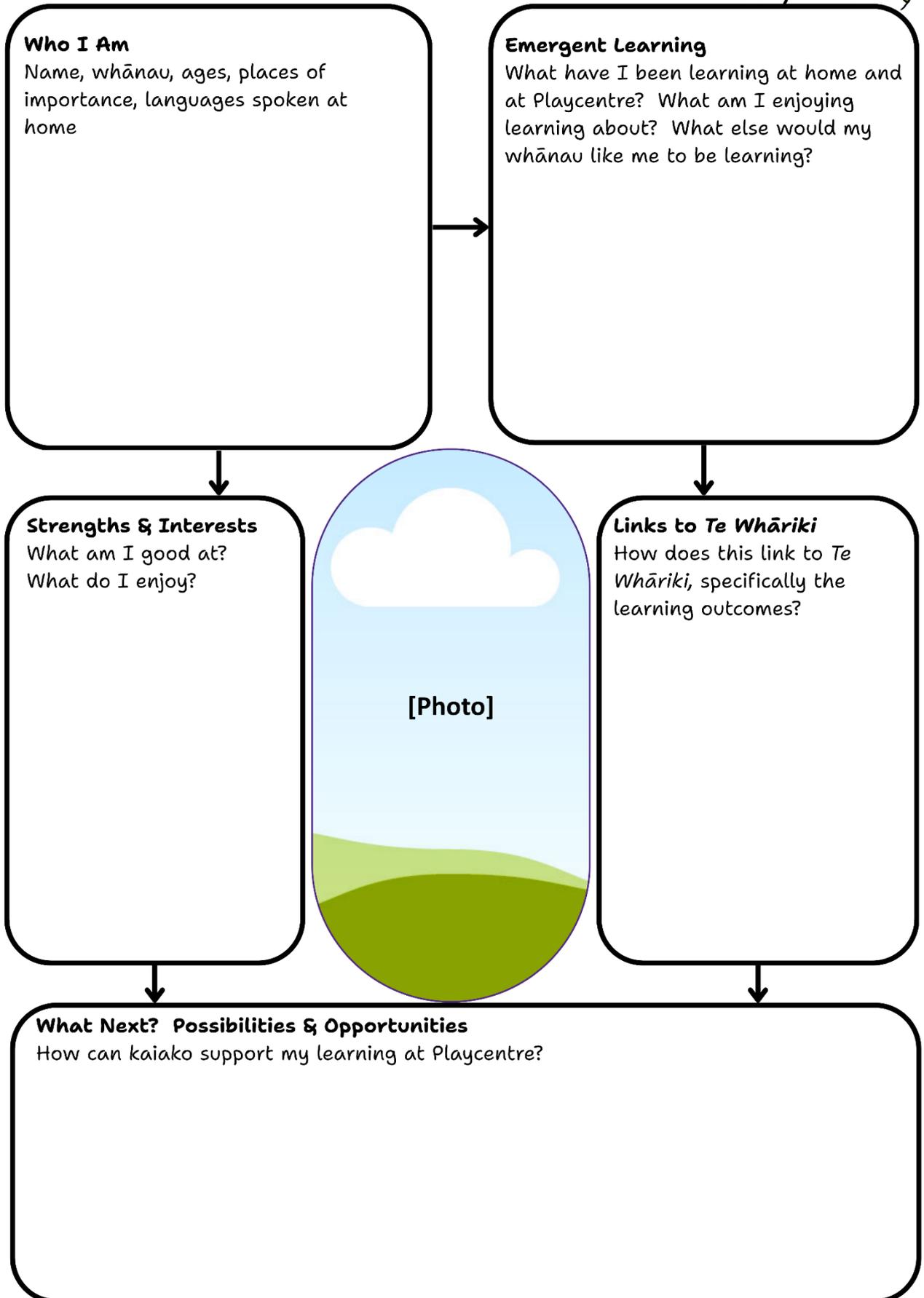
Samoan Concepts

- Alofa: Love, compassion, and care expressed through action and relationship.
- Fa'aaloalo: Respect, dignity, and proper conduct towards others.
- Ifoga: A ritual of reconciliation and forgiveness involving humility and restoration of relationships.

Tongan Concepts

- Faka'apa'apa: Deep respect, humility, and honour shown toward others.
- Lototau: Patience, calmness, and a peaceful disposition, especially in maintaining relationships.





Name:

Date:

Written by:

Photos:

I noticed...

I recognised that you ...

Next time we could...



Name:

Date:

Written by:

Notice

Recognise

Respond



Congratulations!

You are nearly at the end of the PIA – what an achievement! The *Playcentre Introductory Award* is the first step in your adult learning journey with Playcentre. You are welcome to continue to attend Learning through Play workshops in your local area. The regional and national teams also regularly offer short courses and one-off training on a variety of topics.

Continuing on with the Level 4 Certificate

If you are interested in pursuing a formal qualification, consider carrying on with the *NZ Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care (Level 4)* through Playcentre Education. All the learning that you have already completed in the PIA credits into the Level 4 Certificate, so you are already a step ahead. Playcentre Education is a Zero Fees provider – there is no cost to enrol and all resources are provided.

What will I learn?

Through the Level 4 certificate, you will:

- ✦ **Discover How Children Learn.** Gain deep insights into child development and learning. Understand how children explore the world through play and how you can support their growth meaningfully.
- ✦ **Connect With Others.** Join a vibrant learning community. Build friendships, share experiences, and grow alongside other parents and caregivers.
- ✦ **Support Children’s Behaviour.** Learn about schemas, children’s natural learning urges, and how to respond constructively. Shift your perspective from discipline to understanding.
- ✦ **Build Confidence.** Become a confident educator and team member. Develop the skills to interact positively with children and contribute meaningfully to Playcentre sessions.
- ✦ **Embrace Te Reo Māori.** Grow your confidence in using te reo me ōna tikanga Māori. Learn pronunciation and cultural understanding that enriches your interactions and supports inclusive learning.
- ✦ **Learn New Skills.** Even experienced learners find value here. Gain practical, parenting-focused knowledge that complements academic qualifications and enhances your everyday life.

The Certificate will give you a solid foundation to support children’s learning and wellbeing as parent or caregiver. By holding the Level 4 Certificate, you can contribute to Playcentre’s licensing as a whānau-led ECE. It may also open new career pathways in Playcentre and beyond.

[Watch this 9 minute video](#) to find out more about next steps with Playcentre Education.



How do I sign up?

The Education Team will award your *Playcentre Introductory Award* when they receive your Record of Learning on the following page. Your confirmation email will include a link to enrol in the Level 4 programme. Alternatively, you can access information via the [Playcentre Education](#) section of the website. Find out more about eligibility requirements in [Education FAQ](#).

Playcentre Introductory Award Record of Learning

When completed, scan or take a photo of this page & send to educationforms@playcentre.org.nz using the email subject line: **PIA**.

Legal Name			
Preferred Name			
Playcentre			
Phone		DOB	
Email			

On Session Wero		Date Completed	Tuakana Signature
A	Find out key equipment and processes at your centre		
B	Find out who's who in your centre		
C	Set up a portfolio/kete for your child/ren		
D	Create a learner map for your child/ren		
E	Set up an inside play experience and join in with play		
F	Set up an outside play experience and join in with play		
G	Set up a messy play or sensory play experience and join in with play		
H	Find the book and posters of <i>Te Whāriki</i> in your centre		
I	Write a learning story using the notice-recognise-respond format for a child		
J	Use positive guidance strategies to support a child		

*Tuakana is the experienced person who supported you/can confirm that you completed the task.

Workshops/Webinars	Date Completed	Facilitator Name
Kia Tākaro – Play & Learning		
Whakamana – Empowering Children		
Learning through Play (list topic):		
Learning through Play (list topic):		

Videos	Date Completed
Kaiako in Playcentre	
Whānau Tupu Ngātahi – Families Growing Together	
An Introduction to <i>Te Whāriki</i>	
Upholding Mana – Tūpuna Parenting	
Continuing with Playcentre Education	

I confirm that I have completed all components of the Playcentre Introductory Award , including the reading, workshops/webinars, videos, on session tasks and attendance on at least ten Playcentre sessions.		
Signature		Date