

**Kei Tua o te Pae
Assessment for Learning:
Early Childhood Exemplars**

**The Strands of Te Whāriki:
Communication**

**Ngā Taumata Whakahirahira ki
Te Whāriki: Mana Reo**

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Introduction

He kupu whakataki

Indeed, it was in this [research] process that we came to recognize – in practice as well as in theory – the critically important role of dialogic knowledge building in fostering the dispositions of caring, collaboration and critical inquiry that are at the heart of our vision of education.¹

This book collects together early childhood exemplars that illustrate the assessment of learning that is valued within the curriculum strand of Communication/Mana Reo, keeping in mind that:

Exemplars are examples of assessments that make visible learning that is valued so that the learning community (children, families, whānau, teachers, and beyond) can foster ongoing and diverse learning pathways.²

Although these exemplars have been annotated with a Communication/Mana Reo lens, in many cases the lens of another strand could have been used. The principle of Holistic Development or Kotahitanga set out in *Te Whāriki* is a reminder that the curriculum “strands” are a construction, and in any episode of a child’s learning, these areas are inextricably intertwined and interconnected.

Assessment for Communication

Aromatawai mō te Mana Reo

The exemplars in this book illustrate possible ways in which assessing, documenting, and revisiting children’s learning will contribute to educational outcomes in the curriculum strand Communication/Mana Reo.

- Assessment portfolios provide teachers and children with something interesting to talk about together and with families and whānau.
- Children are able to “read” and respond to some of the documentation to do with their learning because photographs and other visual cues support the documentation.
- Assessment practices contribute to making the early childhood setting a place where children with English as an additional language feel comfortable communicating. Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Priscilla Clarke (2000) suggest that a supportive environment for such learners would have the following characteristics:
 - close relationships between teachers and family;
 - opportunities for pairs and small groups to work and play together;
 - a wide range of activities that encourage communication;
 - evidence of support and integration of the children’s own cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
 - language that the children can understand, that is meaningful to them, that is based on their concrete experiences, and that is supported by visual materials;
 - frequent interactions with adults and children;
 - support and feedback for children, encouraging their developing confidence in communicating;
 - focus on the meaning of the communication rather than the form of communication.³
- Assessments include transcripts of children’s comments (often written soon after the event) and indicate that teachers have listened carefully to children’s voices.
- Assessments indicate that adults have observed carefully and noticed, recognised, and responded to children’s non-verbal communication. Adults acknowledge any uncertainty about the meaning of non-verbal communications in the assessments, and documentation avoids speaking for the child.

- One of the indicative outcomes for this strand is that children develop the expectation that verbal communication can be a source of delight. Assessments include examples of mutually delightful comments, such as the following, from an assessment not included in *Kei Tua o te Pae*: “Max and Izrael and I were moving bark and Max told me ‘I cut my leg and there was lots of blood and Mum drove like the wind to get me to the doctor.’”
- Multiple ways of expressing ideas and feelings are represented in these assessments, including artwork, mathematics, music, drama, dance, and information communication technologies.
- Families will “bring their wisdom into the classroom”, and stories will be helpful modes of encouraging talk.⁴

The four domains of Communication

Ngā rohe e whā o te Mana Reo

Te Whāriki elaborates on the Communication/Mana Reo strand as follows:

Ko tēnei mea ko te reo he matapihi e whakaatu ana i ngā tikanga me ngā whakapono o te iwi ... [Ko te] tūmanako mō te mokopuna ... Kia mōhio te mokopuna ki tōna ao, ki te ao Māori, te ao o nāianeī, me te ao o āpōpō, mā te reo Māori.⁵

The languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected. Children experience an environment where: they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes; they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes; they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures; they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive.⁶

The four interwoven domains of Communication/Mana Reo are described (as goals) in the English text of *Te Whāriki*, and each domain includes indicative learning outcomes.

The exemplars presented in this book can each be allocated to one of these four domains.

Non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes



Non-verbal communication skills include expressing feelings, ideas, and questions in a wide range of ways. Teachers who know the children well learn to “read” the signs of infants and toddlers. Children learn to communicate using a wide range of media: the exemplar “Drawing and chanting together” gives examples. “Introducing the computer” is an exemplar about children being introduced to one type of information technology. More exemplars about information technology are included in Book 20, and further exemplars about non-verbal communication are included in books 16–19.

Verbal communication skills for a range of purposes

Assessments value the interactions between adults and children and with peers. They are specific about those aspects of verbal communication that the children are developing. The exemplar “Starting with photos” illustrates how powerful photographs are in initiating a network of other communication modes and in maintaining a connection with the home.



Working theories developed by teachers are relevant here; one teacher’s working theory relates to the value of te reo Māori.⁷ All early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand have the responsibility of recognising that te reo Māori is the poutokomanawa of mana Māori. This recognition and a range of responses to it should be evident in assessments. The exemplars “Leo and te reo Māori” and “Tapahia me ngā kutikuti – Cutting with scissors” (in Book 13) are two examples of different ways teachers recognise and respond to the importance of Māori language in the early childhood setting. “Rahmat and the snakes” is about communicating with a child for whom English is an additional language.

Lous Heshusius has commented on the difficulty that adults sometimes have in “truly” listening to children.⁸ She writes:

It became clear that when I thought I was listening, most of my attention was with myself: I wondered how the other person’s message applied to myself; I had vague images about what I would rather be doing than listening to this person; I wondered about what I should be saying, given my particular role (e.g., as teacher, mother); I thought about what I could say next to the person to steer the topic into another, more interesting, direction. Not that I did all this deliberately and consciously; these modes of listening (or rather, partial listening, or not listening) play themselves out as habits of which we are hardly aware.

The exemplar “Fuka, Colette and Fea” illustrates continuity in communication over time, especially in regard to the children’s developing facility with language as evidenced by their storytelling.⁹ Fuka’s learning story is also an example of personalising documentation, with the joint recording of the story “The Day Fuka’s Hen Came to Kindergarten” mediating the development of communication competence.

Stories and symbols of their own and other cultures

In *Te Whāriki*, one of the indicative outcomes for the domain of Communication/Mana Reo is described as follows:

Children develop an understanding that symbols can be “read” by others and that thoughts, experiences, and ideas can be represented through words, pictures, print, numbers, sounds, shapes, models, and photographs.

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Assessments where the “one hundred languages”¹⁰ of children are highlighted as domains of learning are covered in more detail in books 16–20 of this series.

Assessments note children’s dispositions, understandings, and skills in recognising symbol systems and using tools to make meaning and communicate. They also suggest further directions. Examples of documented assessments in books 11–15 support Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam’s research finding that promoting a culture of success is an effective formative assessment strategy (see Research findings in Book 10).

Russell Bishop, Mere Berryman, Sarah-Jane Tiakiwai, and Cath Richardson’s research with year 9 and year 10 Māori children concludes that teachers’ “deficit theorising” has contributed to low expectations for Māori children. Their research suggests that when teacher–student relationship and interaction patterns change as a result of supportive professional development, a number of changes can be seen to occur in student behaviour:

students’ on-task engagement increases, their absenteeism reduces, their work completion increases, the cognitive levels of the classroom lessons are able to increase, and their short-term achievements increase; in many cases, dramatically so.¹¹

Narrative assessments that resist “deficit theorising”, and are often dictated by children, can in the same way raise expectations for all children and contribute to successful learning outcomes.

The exemplar “Te marae” illustrates the children at one kindergarten revisiting some of the stories and symbols of Aotearoa New Zealand. “Sofia the reader” chronicles how Sofia is learning about books and reading, while in “Phoebe’s puzzling morning”, Phoebe and a teacher make meaning together from the symbols and text implicit in some jigsaw puzzles.

Different ways to be creative and expressive

This domain relates to the topics of music, art, drama, and dance. It links closely with the Exploration/ Mana Aotūroa strand, especially where it refers to pretend or dramatic play. The dramatic play in “Harriet’s mermaid” illustrates a number of ways to be creative and expressive, including making a movie, while “Jorjia’s imaginary turtle” documents a two-year-old’s imaginary play.



Exemplars in other books

Ngā tauaromahi kei pukapuka kē

The following exemplars in other books can also be viewed from a Communication/Mana Reo perspective.

- Book 1:** Blinking and clicking on the changing mat; Where's Kirsty?; Tēnā kupu, āe, tuhia!
- Book 2:** "Those are the exact words I said, Mum!"; Jet's mother contributes to the assessment; Zahra and the donkey; Assessments in two languages; Bella and Nina dancing; A shadow came creeping; Toddlers as teachers; Mana reo
- Book 3:** Pihikete's learning; Te Aranga responds to a photograph; Hatupatu and the birdwoman; Pierre's learning; Jace and the taiaha; A bilingual "parent's voice"
- Book 4:** "Oh, no! That's not right!"; "I know, you could write all this down!"; Alexandra corrects the record; Your brain is for thinking; Tayla and "what next?"; Jack's interest in puzzles; Ray learns to draw fish
- Book 5:** Nanny's story; Exploring local history; Sharing portfolios with the wider community; The flying fox
- Book 6:** Not happy with the wheel; Sahani's drawing; Readers, carers, and friends; Immy dancing; "Did they have alarms at your centre?"; Skye in a box
- Book 7:** Daniel's new grip; Greer's increasing confidence; George makes music; Fe'ao
- Book 8:** Ruby and the supermarket; Haere mai, Sam
- Book 9:** Elaine's stories; James and the puppets; Sherina sings hello; Reading the portfolio; Fred's stories.

These additional exemplars provide teachers who wish to reflect on the analysis and assessment of learning outcomes within the Communication/Mana Reo strand with a comprehensive collection of exemplars for discussion.