

# What do I need to know to implement Te Whāriki 2017?



ECE resources

Te Whāriki is the early childhood curriculum document for Aotearoa New Zealand, and provides a framework for early childhood settings to design their particular and local curriculum. Te Whāriki 2017 is an updated version of the 1996 original document.

## Why did Te Whāriki need updating?

Several reports published by the Education Review Office and Ministry of Education identify a lack of direct engagement with, and understanding of, Te Whāriki by teachers, which was felt to effect the overall quality of the early childhood education provision, particularly children's opportunities to experience a rich curriculum with equitable opportunities to learn across a full range of learning outcomes. It was suggested that Te Whāriki no longer stretched or challenged teachers and that the document's very familiarity led to its limited use, and to superficial references to principles and strands in documentation that were not evident in practice. Areas of poor implementation include supporting children's culture, language and identity, biculturalism, inclusion, partnership with families, and extending children's learning. Te Whāriki 2017 is intended to strengthen effective implementation of the curriculum.

## What are the key differences between Te Whāriki 1996 and Te Whāriki 2017?

The principles, strands and goals, aspiration statement and bicultural structure have been retained from the original document. The learning outcomes have been condensed to 20.

Key changes include stronger focus on:

- Bicultural practice
- **Language, culture and identity**
- Inclusion
- Children's **transition pathways** and learning continuity
- Principles of **Te Whāriki**.

Other key ideas in the document include intentional teaching, Kaupapa Māori theory to normalise Māori language, culture and knowledge and to support Māori aspirations and practices for learning so that Māori children succeed as Māori, and a stronger sociocultural positioning of the curriculum.

## What is the evidence for the changes made?

There is a lack of evidence about the impact of Te Whāriki on outcomes for children and families, and no literature that evaluates its effectiveness. However, there is ample evidence internationally for the influence of high quality early childhood education for raising academic outcomes for children.

The literature informing Te Whāriki 2017 identifies these areas as particularly important to "high quality" early childhood education:

**A focus on children's wellbeing and emotional development.** Research shows that teaching social-emotional behaviours has positive outcomes for children related to their wellbeing, as well as their engagement and learning. Longitudinal research shows that developing self-control in childhood is

related to adult outcomes and skills such as resilience (being flexible, having realistic expectations, seeing mistakes as challenges) which provide a strong foundation for later learning and relationships.

**Learn more about supporting wellbeing and emotional development [here](#)**

**The active engagement of children** as key participants in their own learning, and curricula focused on children's interests and motivations and responsive to children's individual differences. Some evidence suggests that curricula in which children think and investigate for themselves are linked to higher cognitive outcomes later in school.

**Learn more about principles for curriculum design [here](#)**

**Warm and responsive interactions** that occur 1:1 or in small groups. These are linked to children's later mathematical competency and literacy and language measures in school.

**Learn more about positive interactions [here](#)**

**A cognitively challenging curriculum** that encourages children's critical thinking, [theorising](#) and exploring and research skills through meaningful activities and experiences that enable children to make sense of knowledge, struggle with ideas and engage in original thinking. A mixture of teacher-initiated activity and free play is linked to better outcomes for children.

**Learn more about principles for curriculum design [here](#) and [here](#)**

**Intentional teaching** in which teachers are focused on learning goals, and draw on their subject and pedagogical knowledge to extend and scaffold children's learning in deliberate ways, joining children in play and guiding them through activities. Rich teacher-child interactions, such as those involving sustained shared thinking, have been associated with greater pre-reading skills among other learning gains as well as later school achievement in literacy and mathematics.

**Learn more about intentional teaching [here](#)**

**Culturally responsive pedagogies** which affirm children's languages, cultures and identities and include the use of children's home languages and culturally appropriate teaching to enhance children's achievement and engagement. Supporting children's first languages aids their development, as skills in a first language are usually transferred to spoken and written skills in English, as well as supporting children's wellbeing and promoting their cognitive development.

**Learn more about implementing culturally responsive pedagogies [here](#)**

**A focus on oral language, literacy and mathematics.** Oral language skills are related to later literacy learning. The development of an extensive vocabulary, including mathematical vocabulary, is an important foundation for later learning and related to greater academic performance and social and emotional competencies at age five and beyond. Good quality literacy teaching practices in early childhood are found to contribute to literacy success. A wider focus on communication through arts is also important as the arts are linked to many different academic and social learning outcomes, and are found to help children to master other subjects such as reading and mathematics.

**Learn more about supporting oral language [here](#), early literacy [here](#), and early mathematics [here](#), and expressive art [here](#).**

**Strong pedagogical leadership** for enhancing the quality of pedagogy and curriculum implementation and is found to be a key factor involved in effective practice.

Learn more about leadership [here](#)

**Strong partnerships with families focused on improving children's learning** and family engagement with the early childhood programme. Where parents are engaged in children's learning and develop a shared focus with teachers on educational aims, children have enhanced cognitive outcomes and learning dispositions.

Learn more about building relationships with families and whānau [here](#)

**A focus on supporting Māori to achieve as Māori** which means more than the use of te reo and waiata, but emphasises building strong relationships with whānau and responding to their aspirations for their children while also seeking to maintain Māori language and culture and develop culturally appropriate pedagogies and assessment practices.

Learn more about supporting partnership with Māori whānau [here](#) and pedagogies and assessment practices [here](#)

**Assessment practices** that identify children's capabilities and progress and how these might be supported.

Learn more about assessment [here](#)

## Where to start

- Spend time unpacking Te Whāriki 2017, broadening your understanding of the principles, interpreting the learning outcomes for your setting and prioritising those that matter to your place.
- Examine the Kaiako responsibilities (p.59) and their implications for practice. Determine what PLD you and your team might need. See this [webinar](#) for an example.
- Use the learning outcomes to deepen your planning, and to guide intentional teaching. Incorporate the language of Te Whāriki into planning, assessment and evaluation. Use Te Whāriki to review your expectations for children's learning and development, deepen your understanding of children's learning, and link children's interests to learning outcomes.
- Use the reflective questions as a basis for inquiry and evaluation, and assess how well your curriculum and practice align with Te Whāriki.
- Share Te Whāriki with families and make the learning outcomes relevant and meaningful for children and families in your setting.

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## Further reading

Education Review Office (2016). Early childhood curriculum: What's important and what works. Wellington, NZ: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/early-learningcurriculum/>

McLachlan, C. M. (2017). "Not business as usual": Reflections on the 2017 update of Te Whāriki. *Early Education*, 62, 8-14.

Ministry of Education. (2015). Report of the Advisory Group on early learning. Wellington, NZ: Author.

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PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY



### Dr Vicki Hargraves

Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.