

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

***What difference does assessment
make to children's learning? Continuity***

***He aha ngā hua o te aromatawai mō
te ako tamariki? Motukore***

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Introduction

He kupu whakataki

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* [emphasis added].

Early Childhood Learning and Assessment Exemplar Project
Advisory Committee and Co-ordinators, 2002

This book is about one of the purposes and consequences of documented assessment in early childhood education. We know that feedback to children makes a difference to their learning. What difference does documented assessment make? The exemplars collected for the exemplar project suggest that documented assessments can make a difference to:

- community: inviting the participation of children, families, whānau, teachers, and beyond;
- competence: making visible the learning that is valued;
- continuity: fostering ongoing and diverse pathways.

This book is about the third of these: continuity. Early childhood learning communities support and construct continuity by:

- documenting “work in progress”;
- revisiting portfolios, folders, and files;
- building on prior knowledge, past experience, and current ability;
- suggesting what the next step might be;
- telling stories about the past;
- passing on knowledge and skills to others;
- developing, over time, some characteristics of “what we do here”;
- commenting on connections across time and place;
- looking back in order to look forward.

Continuity and fostering ongoing and diverse pathways

Te motukore me te para i ngā huarahi ki mua

Views of continuity can go far back in time.

The child was, and still is, the incarnation of the ancestors: te kanohi ora, “the living face”. The child was, and still is, the living link with yesterday and the bridge to tomorrow: te taura here tangata, “the binding rope that ties people together over time”. The child is the kawai tangata, the “genealogical link” that strengthens whanaungatanga, “family relationships”, of that time and place.

Reedy, 2003, page 58

The higher up the mountain we stand, the wider the horizon will be. Looking far forward, beyond the horizon (“kei tua o te pae”), we cannot be certain of our destination. A child’s learning develops in multiple directions at the same time, and their concept of what makes a competent learner also changes.

Writing about assessment, Patricia Broadfoot (2000) says:

Increasingly now there is a need to harness the dynamic power of educational assessment to motivate and empower learners ... Central to such a project is the preparation of students with the necessary skills and attitudes that they will need to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. These include self-awareness as the basis for individual target setting; the capacity to choose ... and creativity ...

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Perhaps we could say that the more understanding participants have of each other (teachers, children, families, and the community) and of the curriculum, the higher up they can stand and the more they see.

In early childhood education, assessments can be “work in progress”. They inform decisions about “what next” (or “PLODs” – Possible Lines of Direction – see Whalley, 1994) as teachers, children, and families look back in order to look forward in the process of considering potential pathways of learning.

In early childhood education, teachers develop pathways with reference to children’s developing identities as competent and confident learners and to curriculum strands (well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration) that are closely linked to local circumstances and communities. Therefore, children’s learning pathways can develop in any number of directions. Often, too, the pathways will be emergent and therefore cannot be determined with any confidence beforehand or compared with universally or nationally prescribed reference levels and standards.

Katherine Nelson (1997) comments that “Development is an elusive underground process usually hidden from view” (page 101). Much of the time, a teacher cannot be sure what is going on. Effective teachers bring their intuition, experience, and education to the task of deciding “what next”. They consult with children and families. Their judgments are tentative, and they are prepared to change their minds.

The following excerpt from a child's assessment portfolio provides a good example of continuity between looking back and developing forward. The teacher calls on previous assessment documentation while the child himself devises a new way of using one of his drawings.

Jo and I were admiring three small pastel drawings that Harry has done. "Perhaps you could frame them," I suggest to Harry, thinking about his previous learning story. "Yeah!" says Harry. I find some cardboard, and Harry makes a frame. He discovers that only two of the drawings will fit in the frame, so he decides to make a frame and a gardening book as well. The third drawing is incorporated into the gardening book. He asks me to write the word "gardening" on his book.

Harry initiated this new pathway, which integrates art and literacy. Frequently, children will decide on where they want to go in areas that interest them (see Book 4).

Parents also support continuity. For example, here is a parent's contribution to her child's portfolio:

Tane has had an ongoing enthusiasm for sewing projects following a session at kindergarten where he used a needle and thread for the first time. With his mummum (grandmother), he made a bag with button decorations. Pictured above is the apron he made last week. The biggest challenge was coming to grips with having to finish each seam with some kind of knot to keep it all together.

Tane's parent made connections with home and the past, thereby enriching the record of Tane's learning progress. His folder records the development of this enthusiasm and these skills at the early childhood centre over time, together with his involvement with other children. It describes him mastering the use of a sewing machine, drawing patterns, discussing the best fabric for the job, and sewing an outfit, which included a motorcycle helmet and a decorated jacket that he made with two other children.

In Book 5 (pages 16–17), Andrew's mother contributed to continuity when she provided a story about Andrew's play on a flying fox and added: "So, I would like to see Andrew sharing his stories with his friends at the kindergarten mat time." She negotiated about competence and suggested the next step. The teachers followed up on her suggestion and continued the written and illustrated story of Andrew's ongoing learning.

Continuity and change in the learning community

Te motukore me ngā nekeneke i roto i te hapori akoranga

One way of looking at the assessment of continuity is as a record of the ongoing development of the *learning community*. Sometimes records of continuity will be from the viewpoint of the teacher, sometimes the child, and sometimes whānau and the wider community. It is not always possible to see the full picture of continuity because frequently only one perspective is documented.

In the exemplar “Like something real”, the assessments include a widening of the “real” community to include visiting experts: a truck driver and roadworks team. Ezra clearly found asking questions of the experts to be of great interest. Likewise, the developing documentation in Fe’ao’s portfolio (pages 27–37) illustrates the involvement of the family in adding to the continuity story. In “Te rakiraki”, Atawhai becomes a member of the learning community. His visit is documented along with a record of the difference he made to the children’s lives and learning. Exemplars in Books 2 and 3 show families and whānau becoming participants in an early childhood centre’s learning community.

Other examples of continuity and change in the learning community are found in the records of what happens in gardening projects. Often, the lens shifts from the project to the individual or small group and back again. In Book 5, the exemplar “Growing trees” records a centre’s first birthday celebration and the community planting and caring for trees over time. The exemplar “The mosaic project” in Book 2 describes what happens over two years as the children make mosaic pavers and pots for the centre’s environment.

Continuity and community are closely interconnected with identity. Mere Skerrett-White (2003) makes this clear, referring to Mason Durie’s aims for Māori: to live as Māori, participate as citizens of the world, and enjoy good health and a high standard of living. Of the first aim (writing about her research in Te Amokura Kōhanga Reo), she says:

Kia marae, to live as Māori, is as much about language and identity as it is about culture and tradition. This study argues that intergenerational Māori language transmission raises self-assured young people who self-identify as Māori. Te Amokura Kōhanga Reo centralises the role of language to identity formation and ensures access to oracy and literacy in te reo Māori with increasing complexity.

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Barbara Rogoff (2003) defines human development as “*a process of people’s changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities* [emphasis added]. People contribute to the processes involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others” (page 52). In line with this sociocultural stance, she comments that “Often developmental phases are identified in terms of the person’s developing relationships and community roles” (page 150).

Continuity and change in competence

Te motukore me ngā nekeneke i roto i te kaiaka

Another way of looking at the assessment of continuity is as an ongoing record of continuity and change in *competence*. Over time, a child's competence in a range of areas becomes more *secure*, more widely *applicable*, and more *complex*. As competence becomes more *secure*, the child teaches others and increasingly relies on invoking competence to follow through tasks, make sense of the world, take on roles, solve problems, and engage in further learning. When competence becomes more widely *applicable*, the child makes use of it in their reciprocal and responsive relationships with a range of people, places, and things. When competence becomes more *complex*, it becomes more interconnected, flexible, and creative.

In the exemplar "George makes music", George's mother describes him as a "lovely mix of bookworm, musician, artist, friend". The assessment illustrates George's pathway as a musician as his competence becomes:

- more secure: he moves from exploring on his own to also playing a role in interactive, small-group music activities;
- more widely applicable: he explores the sounds he can make with an increasing range of objects;
- more complex:
 - he incorporates sound making and singing into his social play;
 - he develops a sense of rhythm and beat.

Greer's increasing competence (and resulting confidence; pages 14–17) becomes:

- more secure: she takes on the role of supporter for the younger children;
- more widely applicable: her dispositions for participating in the life of the centre grow, and she develops her communication skills in an increasingly diverse range of media;
- more complex:
 - her engagement in reading and exploration of O-Huiarangi and volcanoes are integrated into the development of a new friendship;
 - communicating and initiating contribute to another developing friendship as Greer and another child collaborate in dramatic play and building.

Well-being, belonging, communication, contribution, and exploration have become interconnected in complex ways in George's and Greer's records of increasing competence.

Links to *Te Whāriki*

Ngā hononga ki *Te Whāriki*

Te Whāriki situates competence and continuity in place and community:

Although the patterns of learning and development are sometimes seen as a progressive continuum linked to age, such patterns vary for individual children in ways that are not always predictable.

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What does continuity lead towards? What is beyond the horizon? *Te Whāriki* states:

This curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children: to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.

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Book 3 draws on these aspirations in calling on early childhood learning communities to work towards the following outcome:

The children actively participate, competently and confidently, in both the Māori world and the Pākehā world and are able to move comfortably between the two.

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Many of the children in early childhood settings in the twenty-first century will develop the ability to actively participate in a number of worlds, to speak several different languages, and to participate as citizens of the global community.