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**Supporting Early Childhood Educators' Oral Language Teaching Practices Through  
Coaching: An Investigation Utilising Te Kōrerorero**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Speech and Language Therapy**

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## Abstract

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whāriki (the early childhood curriculum) (Ministry of Education, 2017), weaves the learning and development needs of the child with the cultural context of the country. It is described as a highly flexible curriculum, one which early childhood educators can tailor to fit the learning needs of the children in their care. Recently, the Ministry of Education created Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a), a document supporting Te Whāriki, to facilitate the language and communication skills of Aotearoa New Zealand's youngest learners. Speech-language therapists (SLTs) work in collaboration with early childhood educators to support the development of language and communication skills within the context of early childhood centres. Coaching, as a method of professional learning and development (PLD) is nationally and internationally recognised as an effective way for SLTs and early childhood educators to build skills focusing on promoting language and communication skills. However, coaching early childhood educators utilising a tool developed in and for Aotearoa New Zealand, has not previously been investigated. The aim, therefore, of this research was to investigate the impact coaching had on early childhood educators' perceptions of daily practices, their confidence and their awareness and use of Te Kōrerorero, and the strategies associated with it. Three sub-questions were generated to capture: 1) early childhood educators' knowledge of coaching and speech and language strategies prior to receiving coaching from the researcher, 2) their perception of coaching in the application of Te Kōreroreo and 3) their perception of the impact coaching had on their daily practice and utility of the strategies discussed.

In this qualitative case study, early childhood educators participated in weekly coaching sessions, lasting one hour, with the researcher in her role as SLT coach. The sessions focused on strategies for enhancing language and communication that the educators selected to support their daily practice. A focus group was run before the coaching sessions and at the conclusion of the sessions, to gather personal perspectives of the impact of the coaching. Transcripts from both focus groups, reflective logs, field notes and artefacts were analysed through a rigorous inductive thematic analysis, which captured the voice of the early childhood educators and their experiences. The analysis generated a number of global themes relating to each sub-question. Broadly, the findings indicated that prior to coaching, early childhood educators had little experience of coaching and reported having limited knowledge

of language and communication strategies. Post coaching, early childhood educators reported that they felt more confident and were aware of the way they interacted with children in their centre. They reported that they had started considering how activities could be set-up to support language and communication development. Recommendations for further research and clinical practice are presented.

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## Glossary of Terms

The following clinical terms are used throughout the research, and definitions are provided below:

**Expressive Language:** What and how a child communicates. This might be through crying, single sounds, single words, combining 2-3 words or complete sentences. They may communicate through spoken words or they may use AAC.

**Receptive Language:** What a child understands. This includes following instructions from others, understanding question words, understanding linguistic components such as prepositions (in/on/under) and tenses e.g. jumping vs jumped.

**Social Interaction:** How a child interacts with others in their environment. This can be as small as noticing someone smiling and smiling back, pointing to something of interest and looking at your communication partner; through to taking turns, resolving conflicts and building friendships.

**NZSL:** New Zealand Sign Language is a combination of hand shapes, facial expressions and body shapes used to communicate predominantly by individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing but is also utilised by non-speaking disabled people to support face-to-face communication. NZSL has its own grammar structure and word order and has signs and gestures which reflect the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand (Deaf Aotearoa, 2024).

**AAC:** Augmentative and Alternative Communication is any means of supporting communication for non-speaking people. AAC can be the use of sign or gesture, pictures printed out on sheets of paper or in communication books, battery operated devices or high-tech devices which speak each word as it is pressed or typed.

**Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN):** SLCN is a term used to capture the broad range of communication needs children may have, from using the correct speech sounds when talking, to having difficulties following instructions or learning new words, through to difficulties making friends and engaging with others. This term has been used when talking specifically about children who have been identified as having speech, language or communication needs.

**Language and communication strategies:** The term language and communication strategies has been used throughout to identify strategies or techniques which provide a communication rich environment which will support all children to develop language and communication skills that set them up for success.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

“Talk is the central tool of [teachers’] trade. With it they mediate children’s activity and experience, and help them make sense of learning, literacy, life and themselves”

(Johnston, 2004, p. 4)

This chapter aims to provide the context and rationale for this research, discussing communication development in the early years, the role of early childhood education and the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The development of adequate language and social interaction skills, underpins a child’s success, both in the long and short term. The impact of a language rich environment on long-term outcomes for children is evident in the literature, with high-quality early childhood education playing an important role in facilitating language and communication development (Gambaro et al., 2014). Early identification and intervention for speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) is recognised to have the biggest long-term impact on a student’s educational achievement (Education Review Office [ERO], 2022).

This study used a case study design to investigate how coaching would influence early childhood educators’ understanding and use of language and communication strategies from Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Te Kōrerorero is a resource created by the Ministry of Education to strengthen and support oral language development across early childhood education. The study utilised a universal approach to speech and language therapy service delivery to support early childhood educators to embed language and communication strategies into their daily practice. The case study included three early childhood educators in a centre that follows the Reggio Emilia approach.

### **Communication Development in the Early Years**

The first five years of a child’s life are recognised as the most critical stage in their development, with a particular emphasis on the first 1000 days (Ministry of Social Development, 2019; Pem, 2015; Poulter-Jewson & Skinner, 2022). During the first five years, children learn and grow at rapid rates with the people around them playing a significant role (ERO, 2017; Poulter-Jewson & Skinner, 2022; West et al., 2021). A child’s language and

communication skills at two years old are an excellent predictor of their literacy success, and their ability to achieve at school and beyond (Lowe et al., 2019).

When children do not develop language and communication skills at the same rate as their peers, they are at risk for a range of outcomes including poor academic achievement, social and emotional difficulties, and in the long term, risk of poor employment opportunities and an increased risk of criminal behaviour (Bercow, 2008; Finders, 2023; Le et al., 2020).

### **The Role of Early Childhood Education**

Active participation in early childhood education has a positive impact on children's language and learning (ERO, 2022). In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a steady increase in access to early childhood education particularly in children under the age of one (Te Mahu, 2022). It is recognised that early childhood educators play a critical role in supporting the development of children's language and communication skills (Brebner et al., 2016; Chaitow et al., 2023; ERO, 2022; Gambaro et al., 2014; Phillips & Boyd, 2023). Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Bioecological Systems Theory highlights the critical role of the environment in a child's success. When early childhood education is of a high-quality, children stand to gain more from their early childhood education setting (Gambaro et al., 2014). High quality early childhood education is defined in broad ways internationally, but there is a consensus in the literature that it can be described as settings whereby adults interact with children in a responsive, sensitive, and stimulating way; where services place the family at the centre, focus on developmentally appropriate strategies and supports, and are ecological in nature (Aspden et al., 2019; Gambaro et al., 2014).

### ***Philosophies Underpinning Early Childhood Education***

Early childhood education is underpinned by key educational philosophies which are rooted in a subset of themes or theories (David et al., 2016). Based broadly on 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of language, play and cognitive development; philosophies of early childhood education often incorporate themes of relationships and attachment between the child and educator. Early childhood educators see the child as an active learner and take a holistic view of the child. Furthermore, the philosophy of early childhood education is to promote autonomy and agency in the child. The aim of teaching practice is to be child-centred with a

strong emphasis on the development of play – independent and social – as well as participation in nature or at a minimum, outdoor play (David et al., 2016; Giardiello, 2023).

One early childhood education approach is Reggio Emilia, which arose in the mid-19th century from the Reggio Emilia region of Northern Italy. This approach focuses on the role of the community, family, space and time in the child’s life, and has a strong emphasis on the ideas of collaborative and co-operative relationships between educators and the children in their care (Emerson & Linder, 2019; Giardiello, 2023). Reggio Emilia early childhood centres are child-centred and project based. Children and early childhood educators alike work on projects of inquiry to develop depth and breadth of interest and learning. Early childhood educators use provocation to extend the child’s own self-directed learning (Emerson and Linder, 2019). These core values or principles mirror the features of what the literature describes as high-quality early childhood education.

### ***Te Whāriki and the Aotearoa New Zealand Context***

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) is the early childhood curriculum. The vision underpinning Te Whāriki is “that children are 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” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 6). Te Whāriki is highly regarded in the domestic and international context, with its foundations incorporating “kaupapa Māori, bioecological theory, Pasifika approaches and critical theories” (Fleer, 2019, p. 319). Te Whāriki is comprised of four principles and five strands. These are woven together by early childhood educators through engagement and collaboration with children, whānau and communities (Ministry of Education, 2017). Language and communication skills are woven throughout the principals and strands of Te Whāriki. An entire strand is dedicated to communication, but it is also woven into the Wellbeing strand with learning outcomes which include “expressing their feelings and needs”, in the Belonging strand “making connections between people, places and things”, in the Contribution strand “using a range of strategies and skills to play and learn with others” and finally in the Exploration strand “playing, imagining, inventing and experimenting”. Language and communication skills are required to achieve all of these learning outcomes. In the Education Review Office (ERO) report “Extending their Language,



Expanding their World” (2017), oral language development is highlighted as a critical component of early childhood education stating:

To succeed in school and society, young learners need to be able to use the spoken and written languages of the curriculum to become proficient thinkers and communicators. Their ability to communicate using oral language helps them learn more effectively, apply their learning through problem solving, and address intellectual challenges using abstract symbols, analysis and synthesis. (p. 8).

Therefore, it is imperative that early childhood educators feel confident in their ability to foster and support oral language development within their contexts, to ensure children can be successful within Te Whāriki.

**He Pikorua and Tiered Service Provision in Aotearoa New Zealand.** As Te Whāriki draws attention to the critical role of adults around children to facilitate their language and learning, Te Tūāpapa o He Pikorua (herein referred to as He Pikorua) (Ministry of Education, 2022) aims to guide practitioners to work together to ensure that the needs of children, whānau and educators are met. He Pikorua outlines three dynamic layers of support which aim to “support practitioners to work effectively and collaboratively within the Learning Support Delivery Model” (Ministry of Education, 2024). The sharing of knowledge and skills between professionals is facilitated across flexible layers of service provision called Te Tūāpapa. The three tiers are described as Te Matua (universal), Te Kāhui (targeted) and Te Arotahi (tailored). Speech and language therapy provision sits within this tiered model. Services focused on Te Matua involve partnering with educators to optimise the classroom communication environment to support all children to develop speech, language and communication skills. He Pikorua continues to draw on the underlying principles and strands of Te Whāriki, of a curriculum woven together by the knowledge, skills and collaboration between early childhood educators, child, whānau and learning support professionals.

**Te Kōrerorero.** Te Kōrerorero takes the principles and strands of Te Whāriki and weaves language learning strategies throughout to ensure “all children...become increasingly competent and confident communicators, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of

**Table 1***Strategies from Te Kōrerorero*

Strategy	Definition
Serve and return	The back and forth interactions that take place between adults and children in conversations...the first step in learning to converse with others. (p. 9)
Commenting	Adding language that describes what is happening during a play activity. (p. 14)
Modelling	Repeating sounds or words with correct pronunciation [or grammar] directly after the child has spoken so they can hear your model...no expectation that they have to repeat the sound or words. (p. 14)
Word webs	Placing a topic in the centre [of a web] and identifying a range of related ideas, can develop your intentional practice of vocabulary expansion. Add a variety of words such as names, actions, descriptors, feelings and locations. (p. 23)
Conversations and questions	Questions are valuable for encouraging tamariki to put their thoughts into words and to give voice to their experiences...too many questions or the wrong kind of question....can quickly close down a conversation. (p. 30)
Talking about feelings	Supporting [children] to name and describe feelings helps them to understand, express and regulate their emotions. (p. 37)
Tuakana-teina relationships	The terms tuakana-teina are given to the more experienced and the less experienced [person]. The relationship is based on skills and experience rather than age or whakapapa. It promotes cooperation and collaboration. (p. 45)
Word play and phonological awareness	Recognising and working with the sounds of a spoken language. (p. 41)
Expanding vocabulary	Building a “word bank” through shared activities and play. For example instead of saying “bird” when reading a story using the specific vocabulary item “tui” or “fantail”. (p. 22)

Education, 2024). Te Kōrerorero includes 12 strategies that facilitate language and communication development in the context of conversations, social engagement, bilingual or multilingual learning pathways, literacy, digital technologies and music (see Table 1 for strategy definitions). The resource is structured to provide brief information about each strategy, followed by examples of the strategies from early childhood educators in their

contexts and then suggestions of how the strategies can be applied. Finally, each strategy concludes with a “useful resources” box which contains links to articles and references to research. As well as access to information about language and communication strategies, Te Kōrerorero includes a self-assessment tool which early childhood educators can use to consider which strategies are already embedded in their practice and which are emerging. It is a freely available resource which can be downloaded from the Ministry of Education website which also links to videos of the strategies in use.

### **Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators**

Over the last two decades, speech and language therapy has increasingly moved to a collaborative universal model of intervention support (Ebbels et al., 2019; Mercow et al., 2010, Stephenson, 2008). In the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, it can be seen through the structure of Te Whāriki that early childhood educators are at the centre of implementing a curriculum that fits their context and the children within it, and which facilitates language and communication development. Chaitow et al. (2023), emphasise the critical importance of verbal interaction between early childhood educators and the children they teach. They add that the instruction of language and literacy skills is required to be intentional, suggesting learning in these domains cannot be left to chance. Early childhood educators therefore play a critical part in facilitating language, communication and literacy learning, and it is essential that strategies are woven through Te Whāriki. To do this effectively, confidently, and successfully, early childhood educators may benefit from working collaboratively with speech-language therapists (SLTs). The role of the SLT within Te Matua is a relatively new one with limited research in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

When considering the essential role of the early childhood educator in universal service delivery (such as Te Matua), the research evidence describes educators reporting low confidence in their ability to use strategies that would facilitate language and communication development and a need for more professional learning and development (PLD) (Hadley et al., 2022; Langeloo et al. 2019; Ministry of Education, 2015; Smith, 2018). Effective PLD for early childhood educators has been highlighted as a key component in supporting children’s speech, language and communication development (Aspden et al., 2019; Law et al., 2019).

Ebbels et al., (2019) identified the PLD needs of early childhood educators in relation to intervention for language disorders, and found that standalone training is ineffective at successfully changing communication behaviours in the classroom. There is, however, strong evidence for the use of coaching to support early childhood educators' understanding and use of communication strategies within the classroom (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2021; Elek & Page, 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011). The evidence supporting the utility of coaching in early childhood settings, highlights the importance of partnership and trust for coaching to be successful (Brebner et al., 2017, Elek & Page, 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011). SLTs therefore, need to consider when working at the universal level, what types of PLD for early childhood educators are supported by the literature and what features result in functional change within the early childhood setting.

### **Researcher and SLT**

I have worked as an SLT for 16 years, primarily in the field of complex communication needs for a charitable trust. In this role, I have worked in a range of contexts supporting whānau and professionals in the use of communication strategies to support children's communication development. I am passionate about speech, language and communication across the education spectrum, and its importance for successful learning and social interaction. Through working in a range of early childhood settings and then having my own children attend early childhood education, I frequently heard early childhood educators sharing that they are under confident with implementing strategies that would support or promote speech, language and communication development. Furthermore, they reported limited access to SLTs in their centres or were challenged by long waiting lists which impacted their receptiveness to referring for SLT support. This prompted my interest in evidence-based service delivery in the early years, and the most effective means of promoting speech, language and communication skills with Te Matua in mind.

In addition to this, in my role as an SLT, I co-designed and implemented a range of training resources and courses for educators (across both early childhood and school contexts) to support communication strategy use in classrooms. This combination of my own experience developing training resources and early childhood educators sharing their lack of understanding or confidence with implementing strategies led me to investigate

research evidence related to speech and language therapy service delivery in early childhood, and effective ways of supporting the adults around the child. I wanted to better understand what the evidence states regarding best practice for service delivery and how SLTs can make the most impact in these early years.

### **Focus of Present Study**

This research aimed to investigate how on-site coaching could influence early childhood educators' confidence and use of language and communication strategies within Te Matua and aimed to answer the following overarching research question:

“How does coaching influence early childhood educators' perceptions of daily practice, their confidence and their awareness and use of Te Kōrerorero and the strategies associated with it?”

There were three sub-questions as follows:

1. What current principles, tools or strategies are early childhood educators using to notice and respond to children's skills and support needs?
2. What are early childhood educators' perceptions of coaching in the application of Te Kōrerorero?
3. How does coaching in the application of Te Kōreroreo, influence early childhood educators' daily practice, confidence and awareness when interacting with colleagues and children?

The purpose of the research was to co-construct coaching with early childhood educators, focusing on strategies that they identified as important in their day-to-day work at a universal level, supporting all children at the centre. The researcher in her role as SLT coach aimed to facilitate reflection on the application of strategies to promote confidence in the application of strategies from Te Kōrerorero. It is hoped that this research will add to the current body of evidence with regards to on-site coaching and expanding on this within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

This chapter, as discussed, has provided the context and rationale for the current study. Chapter two provides a review of the existing literature focusing on communication development in the early years and the critical role early childhood education plays, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, in facilitating language and communication

development. It then considers the confidence and knowledge of early childhood educators when applying language and communication strategies in the classroom. Finally, it considers the role of the SLT in early childhood education and the impact of coaching as a PLD and service delivery approach. It aims to consider critical components of coaching and the effect of these within early childhood education. Chapter three outlines the methodology used, including the rationale for utilising case study design with details of the coaching intervention. It also considers the ethics of the research. Chapter four provides the results of the research and Chapter five discusses the results of the research in the context of current literature. Chapter six concludes the research, presenting considerations for the future, limitations, and clinical implications.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews literature related to language and communication development in the early years, the role of the speech-language therapist (SLT), and the role of the early childhood educator. The role of an SLT in universal service delivery, and the partnership that is required between SLTs and early childhood educators are then considered. Finally, the impact of coaching as an intervention strategy in the early childhood setting and factors that influence success are discussed.

### **Difficulties Comparing to International Literature and Data – Aotearoa New Zealand**

#### **Context**

When looking to international research to inform research, policy and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is critical to acknowledge the unique cultural make-up of the country. Literature that is gathered from international research, conducts its inquiry through a different lens, and with different cultural perspectives to those living, working and researching in Aotearoa New Zealand (Smith, 2018). There are challenges when utilising data from international research in Aotearoa New Zealand. Aotearoa New Zealand has been described as world-leading in its approach to early childhood education, particularly in relation to Te Whāriki and the bicultural, holistic nature of the curriculum (Gambaro et al., 2014). MacFarlane and MacFarlane (2013) identify that Māori success in the education system is proportional to the degree to which their culture is acknowledged and supported.

From the perspective of te ao Māori (a Māori world view), language is recognised as a taonga or treasure. Language connects Māori to their tūpuna or ancestors, and is reflective of the whole environment around the child (Sivertsen, 2022). As such, it is essential to be mindful of utilising international research without considering the context in which it has been conducted, and how this may vary from the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

In addition, there is significant variability in SLT service provision and the position of SLTs in early childhood centres internationally (Law et al., 2019). In places such as the UK, SLTs are employed by the National Health Service, and services are bought in by the local education authorities. In contrast, in Aotearoa New Zealand, most (but not all) SLTs working

in the early childhood context are employed by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2024). MacFarlane and MacFarlane (2013) call on practitioners to be “critical consumers of research” (p. 65) in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and consider the unique needs of its population.

### **Communication Development in the Early Years**

The first five years of a child’s life are when most speech, language and communication development occur (West et al., 2021). During this time, brain development is rapid and as such, children are more receptive and open to learning new experiences than they are later in life (The Hanen Centre, 2016). Whilst there are several theories regarding language development, it is widely accepted that language learning is an active process. That is, the child and the adults around them must be actively engaged with one another in order for language acquisition to occur (Poulter-Jewson & Skinner, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). More recently, Levickis et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis of parent-child interaction in Australia, and found a positive correlation between parent interaction in infancy and toddlerhood and language outcomes at age seven. Children whose parents reported high reciprocity behaviours in the first three years, achieved higher results on a clinical language assessment at seven, than children whose parents reported fewer reciprocity behaviours. This study shows that the acquisition of oral language is reliant on meaningful reciprocal and responsive interaction between a child and an adult.

The environment around the child plays a critical role in their ability to access and develop language and communication skills (Levickis et al., 2023; The Hanen Centre, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) describe young children’s experience of the world as an “environment of relationships” (p. 1). The report highlights the critical role of relationships on child development, particularly in the early years. When children experience stable, responsive, high-quality relationships and interactions with the adults around them, this has a significantly positive and long-lasting impact on their lives. The earliest interactions between babies and their primary caregivers influence the child’s understanding of reciprocal communication, their attention and engagement (Levickis et al., 2023; National Scientific Council, 2004).



## **Importance of Communication Development**

The acquisition of language and communication skills in the early years lays the foundation for continued development and educational success later in life. This critical stage of development not only affects the individual child's successes and outcomes but has a broader impact on society in general (Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018). When speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) persist beyond age five, not only does this influence the child's literacy, social and emotional skills, and overall wellbeing and success at school, but it has a wider impact as the child ages. In a report by the Ministry of Education (2022) evaluating the Oral Language and Literacy Initiative (OLLI), strong oral language skills in the early years are highlighted as supporting self-regulation skills in toddlers, as well as better outcomes in literacy, vocabulary and maths.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it is estimated that around 15% of children may present with SLCN, with this figure dramatically increasing to 50% in areas of low social economic status (New Zealand Treasury, 2017). In the Growing up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study (Morton et al., 2018), 26% of four-year-olds were reported by parents to never or rarely communicate in a clear and logical way. In a more recent analysis of GUINZ data, Mulderry et al. (2023) suggests that up to a third of parents report their child never, rarely or sometimes tries new words. Mulderry et al. (2023) highlighted the contrast between parents reporting little concern about possible SLCN and the reported skills of their children; indicating that up to a third may not be using language and communication skills the way they might be expected for their age. These findings reflect international evidence regarding the prevalence of SLCN. International evidence suggests that children who grow up in poverty are twice as likely to experience challenges with speech, language and communication development (Langbecker et al., 2020). Early intervention is therefore critical in areas of low social economic status, to provide children with the best opportunity to succeed (Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018; Langbecker et al., 2020; Lowe et al., 2019). Bercow (2008) described early intervention as "recognising a child's difficulty quickly, both as early as possible in his or her life and as soon as possible after the difficulty becomes apparent" (p. 24). When children in lower social-economic areas can access services, such as

early childhood education and SLT, particularly before three years of age, there is a significant improvement in readiness for school and academic success (Brown et al., 2016).

When addressing the evidence around early intervention to promote language and communication development, active participation in early childhood education has a positive impact, not only on learning, but also long-term impacts on health, wellbeing and earning potential. Early childhood education has the potential to provide a solid foundation from which all future learning and engagement will grow (ERO, 2022; Finders et al., 2023). High-quality early childhood education can have a significant and long-lasting impact for all children, but specifically disadvantaged children (Chaitow, et al., 2023; ERO, 2022; Gambaro et al., 2014; Phillips & Boyd, 2023).

High-quality early childhood education is defined in broad ways internationally and can be described across the following four domains: educator characteristics; relationships; teamwork; and leadership (Phillips & Boyd, 2023). Phillips & Boyd (2023) found in Australian early childhood settings where there was evidence of high-quality education, educators were ethical, honest, flexible, and respectful; educators prioritised relationships with the children they cared for, the families they worked with, as well as their colleagues. In addition to this, governance was strong in centres that were identified as being of high-quality and where financial investment was made into the staff and centre. This echoes ERO's 2022 report, "A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education" which identified four critical areas for high-quality early childhood education: effective leadership with strong expectations from management regarding inclusion; quality teaching supported by high numbers of qualified early childhood educators; inclusive and accessible environments; and strong learning focused partnerships with whānau that focused on children's learning and achievement. When early childhood education is of high-quality, it can be described as settings whereby adults interact with children in a responsive, sensitive, and stimulating way and the curriculum is developmentally appropriate and child centred (Aspden, 2019; Gambaro et al., 2014).

## Communication and Te Whāriki

Te Whāriki has been highlighted as world-leading in its inclusion and bicultural practices (Ritchie, 2018; Williamson & Hedges, 2017). It is recognised as an inclusive, holistic, early childhood curriculum that is formed from the weaving of the four principles of whakamana/ empowerment; kotahitanga/ holistic development; whānau tangata/ family and community; and ngā hononga/ relationships with the five strands (Ministry of Education, 2017). These principles and strands are woven together through the early childhood educator's relationship with whānau, the child and other professionals (e.g., SLTs), with the holistic view that the whāriki or mat of the curriculum is a place where all people may stand (Ministry of Education 2017). The ERO report, “Extending their Language, Expanding their World” (2017) describes how Te Whāriki provides a framework to strengthen and grow oral language skills in children. The framework of Te Whāriki becomes even more critical when considering children who do not come from a language rich environment, or who have identified risk factors for SLCN. Early childhood educators have an important role in “responding to and supporting their early oral language development” (ERO, 2017, p. 9.). Te Whāriki encourages early childhood educators to take a wider socio-cultural view of oral language development and fostering oral language through all principles and strands of the curriculum (ERO, 2017). For children to be successful, Te Whāriki states “kaiako need to have a sound understanding of child development, including oral language development, and the part that social interaction and kaiako guidance plays in learning” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 61).

Prior to the current government, the target for qualified early childhood educators sat at 80% (New Zealand Treasury, 2022), the number of qualified early childhood educators dropped to 69% in the most recent annual ECE Census Report (Te Mahu, 2022). At its core, Te Whāriki is a framework that guides teaching rather than telling the early childhood educator what to teach. This means early childhood educators must have the skills and understanding regarding how to structure the curriculum to meet the needs of children in their centre in order to realise Te Whāriki to its absolute potential. If Te Whāriki is perceived as complex for unqualified early childhood educators (who currently make up 31% of the

workforce) to implement, there is a risk that the quality of its application may be inconsistent across contexts.

### **Educator Role in Communication Development in the ECE context**

Te Whāriki positions early childhood educators as a critical resource within the early childhood centre. It is the skills of early childhood educators that facilitate the growth and development of children in their classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2017). Langeloo et al. (2019) considered closely the role of early childhood educators within the bioecological model of development. In the context of the classroom, they found early childhood educators can significantly affect the development of children. An early childhood educator's ability to adjust the environment and their teaching style to the child is critical to promoting academic, cognitive and social skills (Hadley et al., 2022; Langeloo et al., 2019). When considering the facilitation of language and communication skills, international research points to the importance of the skills of early childhood educators (Brebner et al., 2017; ERO, 2017; Finders et al., 2023).

### ***Educators' Understanding, Confidence and Use of Strategies to Support Communication Development***

When looking more specifically at the early childhood educator's role in facilitating language and communication development, it is important to consider early childhood educators' understanding and confidence using support strategies. International literature has described early childhood educators as underconfident in their ability to implement strategies to support language and communication development (Brebner et al., 2017). McDonald et al. (2015) highlighted that many early childhood educators reported that they had little to no training in using language and communication strategies, and therefore found it challenging to implement them.

In Aotearoa New Zealand there is clear evidence of a PLD gap, with many early childhood educators reporting that they have received insufficient training in the area of speech, language and communication development, and the implementation of strategies to facilitate language and communication skills (ERO, 2017; ERO, 2022; Ministry of

Education, 2015). In 2015, the Ministry of Education requested feedback from key stakeholders regarding special education provision in Aotearoa New Zealand. Whānau, early childhood educators, therapists and specialists, representatives from iwi, disability groups and the community, voluntarily participated in engagement forums. In addition, those who were unable to attend a forum could complete an online survey. Data from these were then analysed and compiled into the Engagement Forums Feedback Report (2015). Early childhood educators clearly communicated their desire for increased PLD opportunities to support identification of additional learning needs and with a focus on inclusion. This theme was recently echoed in the 2022 ERO report “A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood”. Through this report, ERO gathered the opinions of whānau, early childhood educators and service leaders across Aotearoa New Zealand through surveys and site visits. They also conducted in-depth interviews with a small number of services ( $n=22$ ) as well as interviews with key experts and practitioners who support inclusive education. ERO found early childhood educators reported they were not confident to modify and adapt Te Whāriki to meet the needs of all children and targeted PLD focusing on building capacity for early childhood educators was required. However, this is not a challenge unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. Research conducted in Australia and the UK also reflect a lack of PLD for early childhood educators, specifically in the area of speech, language and communication development (Brebner et al. 2017; Kent & McDonald, 2021; McDonald et al., 2015).

**What Strategies are Being Used?** Language and communication strategies are those which support children’s acquisition of language and communication skills<sup>1</sup>. Hadley et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of early childhood educators’ language practices and oral language outcomes for children in early childhood classrooms. The review excluded articles that were written in a language other than English, and articles that used universal measures of early childhood educators’ practices as the authors wished to capture the finer aspects. They identified that oral language strategies often had to be adapted to the purpose, place and participant of the activity to be effective. Early childhood educators must be responsive to the child in front of them, the task they are participating in, and the

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<sup>1</sup> See Table 1 for definitions

purpose of the interaction, and then utilise language strategies with these concepts in mind. They concluded that it is not enough to encourage early childhood educators to talk more, but instead they must understand the function of the language strategy at their disposal, and carefully consider how it might facilitate language and communication development.

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Smith (2018) found early childhood educators described a range of strategies that they utilised in their daily practice, such as following the child's lead and noticing what the child was interested in. However, when looking specifically at promoting oral language skills in the classroom, the results indicated that there was limited explicit knowledge of how to teach communication skills. Instead, Smith describes one participant's confidence that they were able to facilitate language and communication skills but unable to explain how. These are similar findings to the ERO report "Extending their Language – Expanding their World" (2017) which conducted a review of oral language support across 167 early learning services, utilising a framework with four focus areas: How do the teachers know the learners? How do teachers respond? How do leaders ensure teachers have the capacity to respond? And how do teachers monitor outcomes and review practices? Through this investigation, they found that only 19% of the investigated early childhood centres were well equipped to support oral language development; giving examples of collaborative work with SLTs, providing a language-rich curriculum, information gathering and recording, and shared expectations of oral language learning and development. It is from this report that Te Kōrerorero was born, with the Ministry of Education identifying the crucial need in addressing oral language learning and development in the early years (Education Gazette, 2020).

### **Speech-Language Therapist Role in Communication Development in the ECE Context**

As previously mentioned, SLT service provision has been moving towards collaborative service delivery over the last 30 years. As far back as 2002, Law et al. described collaborative SLT as an ecological service where the intervention for the child takes place in the most critical context, and is delivered through other adults who regularly support the child. Ebbels et al. (2019) considered SLTs to be "an integral part of the children's workforce" (p. 4). Gallagher et al. (2019) noted that when inter-professional collaboration is

successful, therapists and teachers alike are able to achieve goals greater than those they would have achieved on their own.

In addition to an increased focus on collaborative and ecological service delivery, there has been increased focus on the SLTs' role in supporting at the universal level. Instead of a focus on assessing and providing targeted supports for children with SCLN, there has been a shift to also optimising the communication environment for *all* children. Ebbels et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis focusing on the role of the SLT at the universal level in early childhood settings. They suggest that the role of the SLT has typically been twofold: (1) to support parents and professionals to identify SLCN, and (2) to enhance interaction between children and the adults around them to maximise the opportunities of all children to acquire speech, language, and communication skills.

Not surprisingly, universal level supports rely on high levels of collaboration to be successful (Gallagher et al., 2023; McKean & Reilly, 2023). A recent meta-analysis (Gallagher et al., 2023) found that SLTs and OTs engaged in providing universal support in school settings reported spending most of their contact time building relationships and facilitating a shared understanding between teachers and themselves. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, ERO (2022) in their report "A Great Start? Education for Disabled Children in Early Childhood Education" highlighted inter-agency collaboration as a key indicator of better outcomes. The report states that sharing of information and knowledge improves how services are delivered and optimises the resources available. Unfortunately, it was clear that effective, inter-service collaboration was not consistently happening across Aotearoa New Zealand and was particularly poor in urban areas. Thirty seven percent of parents reported being dissatisfied with the collaborative efforts of early childhood leaders, early childhood educators and support services.

Universal supports form the foundational tier of broader frameworks of support such as Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). RTI is an intervention model that is designed to support educators to make adjustments to teaching to ensure that all students can succeed (Ministry of Education, 2020b). The aim of RTI is to provide flexible support for children across different levels or tiers of support across their areas of need. There are universal, targeted, and individualised levels which children may

move across depending on their learning needs and progress (Department of Education, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2020b). The universal level of intervention is intended to support all students and act as a preventative measure, intervening before children require the level two or three interventions.

### ***He Pikorua***

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Ministry of Education introduced the He Pikorua practice framework (Ministry of Education, 2024) for inclusive education which was mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis. The framework is underpinned by a set of principles to guide the Ministry of Education's Learning Support staff in their practice.

He Pikorua is children and whānau centred and collaborative. It is strengths based, which aligns with the educational philosophies of early childhood education. It sets out to be culturally affirming, inclusive, ecological and evidence informed. It aims to foster collaborative work and partnership between whānau, early childhood educators, children, and specialist professionals to ensure that all children can meet their social, emotional, communication and educational potential (Moffat, 2022).

Within He Pikorua, there is a three-tiered framework for support called Te Tūāpapa. The levels within Te Tūāpapa are Te Matua - universal, Te Kāhui – targeted and Te Arotahi - tailored. These tiers are designed to be flexible and dynamic depending on the needs of the child or centre.

**Universal supports – Te Matua.** The first tier of He Pikorua, Te Matua, is the focus of this thesis. It is the universal tier and draws on the concepts of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by strengthening teaching practices across whole educational settings to ensure that children access the support they need. The Ministry of Education (2024) emphasise that for most children, universal level of support will be sufficient in ensuring that everyone meets their educational potential.

Moffat (2022) describes how the principles of He Pikorua and in particular, Te Matua, incorporate the specific needs of Māori including the provision of a mokopuna and whānau centred approach to intervention and support. Moffat (2022) highlights how UDL principles can be effectively woven through Te Matua by adapting the environment, and



ensuring that adults around children consider individual interests, strengths and needs; ensuring that all children are included and have the opportunity to succeed. For UDL principles to be effectively utilised, Brillante (2022) highlights the critical need for early childhood educators to understand language and communication development, best practices for scaffolding early language and facilitating language development, as well as understanding the role culture plays in learning.

### **Professional Learning and Development (PLD) in the Early Years**

Brebner et al. (2017) described PLD in the early years as an opportunity to extend the knowledge, skills and practices of early childhood educators. PLD is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of upskilling opportunities for early childhood educators. PLD can include individual workshops through to university level qualifications (Egert et al., 2018). Access to good quality, tailored and practical PLD has a positive impact on early childhood educators' confidence and competence in applying strategies to support speech, language and communication development (Brebner et al., 2019; Elek & Page, 2019; Shannon et al., 2015). It is critical to consider what the literature indicates to be effective PLD for early childhood educators, with a particular focus on PLD in speech, language and communication strategies.

### ***Different PLD Models and their Effectiveness***

Clarke et al. (2021) describe PLD as "learning processes intended to support teachers' practice" (p. 67). Many PLD models are based on the concept that when early childhood educators have access to more knowledge, that in turn positively impacts their practice and therefore outcomes for children improve (Bleses et al., 2018).

Providers of PLD must consider what processes support practice change for early childhood educators. Timperley et al. (2007) investigated the PLD context within schools and identified elements of PLD that supported teachers to learn and implement new practices that positively impacted children in the classroom. Their findings signalled that teachers' engagement in learning was a more important factor than if participation in the PLD was voluntary or required by their employer. Support and encouragement from leadership

teams in schools had a positive impact on PLD outcomes, as well as a focus on current trends in policy and research. Clarke et al. (2021) warns providers of PLD in the early childhood setting to be mindful of the intended outcome. They note that standalone workshops are more likely to increase early childhood educators' awareness and knowledge of the topic without necessarily impacting day-to-day practices; compared with job-embedded, more intensive PLD such as coaching, which supports the successful application of that knowledge into the classroom.

Bleses et al. (2018) investigated the effectiveness of large-scale language and literacy intervention in Denmark through a randomised control trial (RCT) consisting of 6483 children across 143 childcare centres. The benefit of conducting this RCT in Denmark is the availability of universal publicly funded childcare, meaning the range of children involved was diverse and captured families from low socio-economic status areas, not simply families who could afford childcare. Participants were split into three groups: SPELL (Structured Preschool Efforts in Language and Literacy) training, SPELL training with additional 14 hours of PLD for teachers throughout the intervention, and SPELL training for home. The SPELL with PLD involved two days of intensive training where educators engaged in role play, observation of others and video feedback. High intensity coaching was not feasible in this study due to the number of cases, however the results indicated that the children in the SPELL with an additional PLD group made the most significant shift in their phonological awareness skills. The researchers suggested that PLD can be successful with limited training but when comparing the three groups, the group with the least amount of PLD, SPELL at home, made the fewest gains. This study indicates that the more PLD early childhood educators have access to, the larger the impact on the child's skills. Of the PLD models available to early childhood educators, a large body of literature finds coaching to be the most effective tool, not only for supporting the educator's skills and knowledge, but also when considering the impact on the children in the classroom (Bleses et al., 2017; Ebbels et al., 2019; Elek & Page, 2019; Elek et al., 2022).

### **Coaching**

There is a growing body of evidence supporting the use of coaching as a PLD tool in early childhood education (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015, Elek & Page, 2019, Rush & Shelden,

2011). Before examining what factors facilitate successful coaching, it is first critical to consider how coaching is defined, with a particular focus on coaching in the education sector.

### ***Defining and Describing Coaching.***

Coaching is becoming increasingly utilised in supporting professional development in early childhood settings. The literature has found coaching to vary widely in what it entails, who carries it out and what the goal of coaching is (Elek & Page, 2019). It is therefore critical to define coaching in the context of this research and how it is applied in the early childhood education setting. Rush and Shelden (2011) state coaching is:

An adult learning strategy in which the coach promotes the learner's (coachee's) ability to reflect on his or her actions as a means to determine the effectiveness of an action or practice and develop a plan for refinement and use of the action in immediate and future situations (p. 8).

Clarke (2021) highlights the complexity of learning a new skill and then applying that within a busy classroom. In this context, coaching supports early childhood educators to apply new learning and skills to the day-to-day practice within the classroom.

**Different Forms of Coaching.** Rush and Shelden (2011) talk exclusively about two types of coaching: expert model coaching and peer-to-peer coaching. *Expert model* coaching is described as coaching where the coach is identified as an expert in their field. This may be a specialist professional such as an SLT or physiotherapist, or it may be an expert or highly experienced early childhood educator. Critically, when Rush and Shelden (2011) describe the role of the expert in these circumstances, they highlight the coming together and sharing of knowledge. They acknowledge that the coach would typically have specialist knowledge in a particular area but that the coachee brings their own skills and knowledge to the sessions, enabling coaching to be a dynamic interaction whereby both participants are active in problem solving together. They describe "the...coach and teacher jointly generate alternatives to identify the most effective options and research-based strategies" (Rush & Shelden, 2011, p. 6). The proposed procedure for coaching suggests, the

*expert* gathers knowledge from the coachee and invites them to reflect on their current practice and provides guidance to support development and application of skills in relation to a shared goal. In contrast, peer-to-peer coaching is described as two or more colleagues with similar levels of experience who support and coach one another to further their skills within the context of their education setting (Rush & Shelden, 2011; Ward et. al, 2020).

### ***Characteristics of Successful Coaching Interventions***

The literature is consistent in its description of the characteristics of successful coaching models. Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) highlighted that whilst coaching is now widely accepted as a useful tool to promote learning in early childhood education, there is not a specific model or models that provide clear definitions or guidance on what coaching is in this context. However, Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) and Lofthouse (2019) identified five key components which contribute to successful coaching in an education setting: planning, observations, action (through modelling or role-play), reflection and feedback. Similarly, Ward et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of characteristics of coaching and identified that coaching consists of joint goal planning, observation, modelling, reflection and feedback. Elek and Page (2019) identified in their systematic review that the most frequently utilised characteristics of coaching were feedback, observation and goal setting, with modelling and reflection occurring in approximately half of the studies. These characteristics align closely with adult learning models of active participation, whereby practical goals are co-constructed between the coach and coachee. There are several factors which influence the success of coaching which will now be unpacked.

**Relationships.** When reflecting on what factors influence the success of coaching, the evidence clearly highlights the importance of positive relationships between coach and coachee (Brebner et al., 2017, Lofthouse, 2019). Brebner et al. (2017) found when a positive relationship is formed, PLD providers gain a greater insight into early childhood educators' philosophy of practice, and as such can provide a tailored approach to meet the unique needs of the educator. This is particularly the case in expert model coaching, where often the coach is not an integrated member of the team (Barrett, 2022; Rush & Shelden, 2011). With strong relationships and high levels of trust, coaching is found to be the most effective tool to the practice of teachers and early childhood educators both in the short, medium and long-term (Barrett, 2022; Lofthouse, 2018; Rush & Shelden, 2011).

**Capacity Building.** Elek et al. (2022) identified that successful coaching is often characterised by a structured conversation, where the coachee is encouraged to be reflective; own their thoughts, ideas and decisions; and be supported to identify goals and create plans that are relevant to their context. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of autonomy in a coaching relationship. The role of the coach is to build capacity to ensure that growth and development can continue beyond the need for ongoing coaching (Rush & Shelden, 2011).

### ***Coaching in Speech and Language Therapy in the Early Childhood Context***

The features of coaching and its application in the early childhood context have been discussed. It is also critical to examine how coaching lends itself to support early childhood educators PLD in oral language and communication development. First, the international evidence will be explored before examining how coaching fits into an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

### **Coaching in Language and Communication Development – International Contexts.**

Interest and development in coaching related to language and communication development has been growing over the past three decades. Looking first to the USA, Neuman and Cunningham (2009) measured the impact of coaching versus independent coursework on early childhood educators' language and literacy knowledge. Over a year of coaching, there was significant improvement in the coaching group with regards to their language and literacy practices in the early childhood context, with coursework on its own having a negligible impact on service improvements. Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) found group coaching in early childhood settings made significant changes for children at a universal service level, but noted that for children with more persistent or complex communication needs, tier two or more individualised input was required. It was hypothesised, however, that the impact of coaching at a universal level may have prevented some children from having more complex or persistent SLCN.

In Australia, Brebner et al. (2017) investigated the use of embedded coaching with SLT students in early childhood centres. The use of an embedded coaching model enabled learning to take place for both the SLT students and the early childhood educators. Relationships were found to be central to the impact of the coaching model. In centres where SLT students had built strong rapport and relationships with the early childhood

educators, the impact of coaching was observed across the domains of communication, relationships, environment, and translating knowledge into practice. However, in one centre where positive relationships were not established between the SLT student and the early childhood educators, little to no effect was found across these four domains, which further supports the critical aspect of relationship building when implementing a coaching model.

When considering factors that influence successful coaching, a number of international studies also highlighted the intensity or dosage of coaching sessions as impacting the success of coaching interventions. Bleses et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of preschool PLD and the impact on children's language and literacy skills. The review indicated that coaching which had a longer duration (more sessions or more hours of coaching) yielded better outcomes, with average coaching sessions lasting between 50-60 hours.

#### **Coaching in Language and Communication Development – Aotearoa New Zealand**

**Context.** When looking at coaching in early childhood settings in Aotearoa New Zealand, most early childhood educators report PLD continues to be individual, off-site workshops with limited access to coaching or mentoring (Clarke et al., 2021). Clarke et al. (2021) surveyed early childhood educators to better understand what types of PLD they were engaging in. Participants largely described PLD as a single, off-site professional development opportunity (86%), with a small minority engaging in relationship-led, mentoring or coaching alongside any trainings or workshops that were attended. As few as 30% of participants reported getting to know their facilitator at a training and only 24% reported being provided with an opportunity to be observed or videoed in their practice (Clarke et al., 2021). The researchers cautioned that the study captured only 1% of early childhood educators and as such, this may not be the whole picture when it comes to PLD in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2022, the Ministry of Education evaluated the Oral Language and Literacy Initiative (OLLi) that had been piloted in early childhood centres. OLLi was an initiative which started in 2018 aiming to increase the oral language and literacy skills of pre-school children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dedicated SLTs were trained to deliver an approach based on Te Tuapapa o He Pikorua and modifying The Hanen Centre's ABC and Beyond programme. A universal approach aimed to support oral language learning as part of early literacy development for all children by promoting all staff to engage in whole-service practice on oral language, and targeted and specialised support was also provided for children who

required it. The OLLi outcome report released by Ministry of Education (2022) discussed the outcomes of this initiative. When early childhood educators were provided access to coaching, there was a perceived impact on the interactions between early childhood educators and children. Early childhood educators reported 15% increase in their confidence in implementing strategies and supports. OLLi was limited in its application as, whilst there was no cost to the course itself, early childhood educator release was not funded and as such, only centres who could afford to release staff for on-going PLD could participate. In addition to this, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted OLLi as early childhood educators and whānau turned their attention to more urgent, critical matters (Ministry of Education, 2022).

### **Justification for the Current Study**

The evidence is clear that oral language and communication development is woven through Te Whāriki and that early childhood educators value oral language and communication development and wish to actively promote oral language learning in the context of their classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2015). Despite this, several reports from ERO (2017; 2022) highlight challenges with supporting oral language and communication development in the early childhood context. In response, the Ministry of Education developed Te Kōrerorero for educators to use to facilitate oral language and communication development. In the development of Te Kōrerorero, the Ministry of Education have identified language and communication strategies that facilitate successful learning and relationships for all children, not only children with identified SLCN. Te Kōrerorero utilises local and international research to weave together strategies and supports that promote language and communication skills.

However, in order to implement strategies like those highlighted in Te Kōrerorero, early childhood educators have identified the need for PLD focusing on oral language and communication development. According to Clarke et al. (2021) most early childhood educators are currently accessing off-site PLD despite strong evidence, both nationally and internationally, identifying on-site coaching as the most effective tool for supporting early childhood educators' practice change. The decision to focus this study at the universal level is to acknowledge the findings of both the 2017 and 2022 ERO reports highlighting early childhood educators' under confidence implementing language and communication

strategies and wider international research highlighting early childhood educators' limited PLD in the use of language and communication strategies (Brebner et al. 2017; Kent & McDonald, 2021; McDonald et al., 2015).

Therefore, this study aimed to utilise the resource Te Kōrerorero alongside coaching to support early childhood educators to become more confident and knowledgeable in the application of strategies to facilitate the oral language and communication skills of the children in their classrooms. This research aimed to build on international research on coaching in early childhood education, while weaving the unique cultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand into the coaching process.



## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology of this research. It provides the context for the research, the research questions, followed by the rationale for selecting a case study design. A description of the recruitment and selection of participants, procedures for data collection and analysis are provided, and the ethical considerations are discussed.

### **Research Design**

The aim of this research was to determine how coaching in strategies from Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a) can influence early childhood educators' daily practice within their early childhood centre. To achieve this, it was necessary to first explore early childhood educators' knowledge and awareness of Te Kōrerorero, and their perceptions around coaching. Then, to implement coaching as a professional learning and development (PLD) intervention.

Saracho (2017) describes how qualitative research lends itself to early childhood education by providing complex descriptions of the experiences, and the application of theories within the early childhood education setting. Qualitative research in early childhood education is rapidly expanding, which in turn supports the sharing of new knowledge and understanding across all levels of early childhood (Saracho, 2017).

A case study research design was identified as the most appropriate research tool. Punch and Oancea (2014) describe case study design as a holistic approach to research, attempting to preserve the whole integrity of the case. It can be argued that case study design positions its focus on practical learning and the narratives associated with it (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

A common concern with case study design is that it is challenging to generalise findings, or that case study research is not rigorous enough (Punch and Oancea, 2014; Yin, 2014). The purpose of a case study design is to gather real life experiences and understand phenomenon within a particular context. Its goal is not to generalise to a wider population, but rather to have a depth of understanding about a specific phenomenon or context (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) identified that a key strength of case study design is the ability to utilise a range of data sources, highlighting that the more data sources used, the more rigour the

study holds. Furthermore, the triangulation of data strengthens the validity of the study and, Yin (2014) argues, increases confidence that the case study has accurately captured the phenomenon being studied.

As the purpose of the case study is to gather high-quality in-depth data, trustworthiness is a high priority in the researcher-participant relationship and is particularly true within the context of coaching (Brebner et al., 2017). Priya (2021) pinpoints the research question as the foundation of a robust case study. With clear and specific research questions, it is possible to gather data that has depth and gives clear context to the phenomenon which is being investigated. Priya (2021) continues that reliability within case study design is developed through a robust protocol, featuring an overview of the case, detailed description of procedures and techniques for data collection, clear and detailed research questions, and data analysis guidelines.

In this case study, the boundaries of the case were identified as three early childhood educators working within a single early childhood centre. The coaching provided to the early childhood educators focussed on strategies from a Ministry of Education resource, Te Kōrerorero. The researcher had dual roles as the researcher and SLT coach.

### **Research Question**

The literature clearly demonstrates the benefits of coaching as a PLD tool (Brebner et al., 2017; Ebbels et al., 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011). Therefore, this study aimed to answer the following overarching research question:

**“How does coaching influence early childhood educators’ perceptions of daily practice, their confidence and their awareness and use of Te Kōrerorero and the strategies associated with it?”**

There were three sub-questions as follows:

#### ***Sub questions:***

1. What current principles, tools or strategies are early childhood educators using to notice and respond to children’s skills and support needs?
2. What are early childhood educators’ perceptions of coaching in the application of Te Kōrerorero?

3. How does coaching in the application of Te Kōrerere, influence early childhood educators' daily practice, confidence and awareness when interacting with colleagues and children?

### **Context and Recruitment**

The context for this study was an early childhood centre in a large New Zealand city. The centre was recruited through convenience sampling with information sheets sent to two centres known to the researcher. One centre indicated their willingness to participate. The centre has children and early childhood educators from a range of cultural backgrounds. There are 35 early childhood educators at the centre and it provides early childhood education to 135 children. All early childhood educators were invited to a Zoom meeting where information was shared regarding the purpose and structure of the research, and written information sheets were provided at the conclusion of the Zoom meetings. The only inclusion criteria were the early childhood educators had to be currently employed at the centre. All early childhood educators then had the opportunity to email the researcher regarding questions or concerns before volunteering their time for the research.

As mentioned in the introduction, the early childhood centre works under a Reggio Emilia philosophy. This philosophy has a strong emphasis on child-led, project-based learning where early childhood educators follow the lead of the child and provide learning opportunities in response to the child's interests. These aspects of the Reggio Emilia philosophy align strongly with what the literature considers to be high-quality education (Emerson and Linder, 2019).

### **Ethical Considerations**

When conducting research, it is essential to consider ethical principles of autonomy, trust and beneficence and ensure ethically robust research (Punch and Oncea, 2014). Full ethics approval was sought and approved through Massey University Human Ethics committee (Appendix G).

### ***Autonomy and Informed Consent***

Participants were provided with a detailed written information sheet and consent forms (Appendix H). They were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research before committing to and beginning the process. Whilst children were not directly

impacted by the research, information was provided to whānau about the research that was taking place at the early childhood centre to provide absolute transparency.

### ***Trust and Beneficence***

Participants were provided with details regarding the preservation of their anonymity, and the procedures used to de-identify data collected during the course of the research. Participation in this research required a significant time commitment from the early childhood educators. Participants were offered the choice of sessions taking place in their centre or participating online and they chose to meet in person. The researcher was flexible and worked closely with the centre to ensure that there was limited disruption to the centre and each early childhood educator as possible. Kai was provided as a recognition of their commitment to the research.

### ***Mana – Cultural Safety***

Conducting research in a culturally safe way is vitally important in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Upholding the principles of Te Tiriti and carrying out appropriate tikanga was essential to ensure the research was culturally safe and responsive (Jones, 2012). The researcher liaised with Emma Quigan (Massey University) to ensure the procedures and research design were culturally safe and as a result incorporated the use of the Hui model (Lacey et al., 2011) and tikanga into each research procedure. Furthermore, the early childhood educators and researcher identified tikanga for the focus groups and PLD intervention to ensure that mana, confidentiality and trust were upheld throughout.

### **Participants**

The following paragraph provides brief descriptions of the participants. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym to ensure privacy.

Kate had worked at the centre for approximately 6 months. She was new to early childhood education and had previously worked as a learning assistant. She worked primarily with the under 2-year-olds age group. She had some experience of working with speech-language therapist (SLTs) in previous roles both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas, but had not had much interaction with an SLT since she started working in the early childhood context.

Natalie had worked at the centre for approximately 9 months. She was trained as a primary school teacher but changed to working in the early childhood context. Natalie

speaks English and one other language. She worked primarily with the 'tots' age group, from 2 years old to approximately 3 to 3.5 years old. She had limited experience of working with an SLT, reporting that she had often observed SLTs in her classroom, but had had limited interaction with them as part of her day-to-day work.

Anne had worked at the centre for 12 months. She previously worked in a role outside of education and early childhood and entered the field as a mature student. English is her second language. She had worked at the centre throughout her qualification and had remained there since qualifying as an early childhood educator. She worked primarily with the preschool class ages from 3 to 5 years old. Anne had very limited experience of working with SLTs but identified that there were children under her care who were presenting with speech language and communication needs (SLCN).

### **Research Procedures**

This research included three phases: Understand, Collaborate and Review. There were 10 sessions with each session lasting one hour.

The PLD intervention utilised Rush and Shelden's (2011) coaching framework in early childhood education, and built on Rolfe et al.'s (2001) framework for reflective practice. Rush and Shelden's (2011) coaching framework supported the researcher to use a collaborative approach to coaching, acknowledging the skills that the early childhood educators brought to each session, and adding to that knowledge through coaching. Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) highlighted that whilst coaching is now widely accepted as a useful tool to promote learning in early childhood education, there is not a specific model or models that provide clear definitions or guidance on what coaching is in this context. However, Artman-Meeker et al. (2015) and Lofthouse (2019) identify key components which contribute to successful coaching in an education setting. These include planning, observations, action (through modelling or role-play), reflection and feedback. Rolfe et al. (2001) developed the reflective model "What? So what? Now what?" within the context of nursing to support reflective practice in healthcare. The simplicity of this model provides flexibility in its application across a range of contexts whereby reflective practice is the goal. Further details regarding each phase are detailed below.

## **Understanding Phase**

The Understanding Phase gathered baseline information around what early childhood educators understood about Te Kōrerorero, how useful it was as a tool in their daily practice and their confidence at implementing communication strategies within their centre. The phase was split over two sessions.

### ***Session One – Focus Group***

Participants attended a focus group to share their experiences and understanding of coaching, their knowledge of Te Kōrerorero, and their knowledge and confidence in utilising communication strategies. The Hui Process (Lacey et al., 2011) was used to build connections between the researcher and the early childhood educators, with the aim to establish a relationship of collaboration. This process started in session one and then was built upon in session two. The researcher prepared an interview guide/protocol (Appendix A) and encouraged the early childhood educators to talk freely and openly about their experiences. The early childhood educators were given the opportunity to email the researcher with follow-up comments if they later reflected on the discussion and wanted to add further detail; however, no emails were received.

### ***Session Two – Whakawhanaungatanga***

Session two built upon introductions made in session one to strengthen the foundation for connection and collaboration. In addition, this session provided the opportunity for information sharing regarding Te Kōrerorero.

Kate, Natalie and Anne were invited to learn more about the researcher and to share about themselves, their whakapapa and their journey through early childhood education. There is limited research focusing on group coaching in the early childhood sector. Barrett (2022) investigated the impact of *out group* coaching, where there is an external person providing coaching to two or more people. Barrett (2022) found the most significant outcome of his study was the impact of relationship building on positive outcomes of the coaching triad. He identified that when the coach invested their time in relationship building, there were more successful coaching sessions and better outcomes. With this in mind, the researcher ensured that time was allocated through sessions one and two to incorporate whakawhanaungatanga and build the foundations of strong relationships in order for trust to be developed and for the best outcomes to be achieved.

Once the coaching sessions began, Barrett (2022) found that providing descriptive feedback; acknowledging the experience, competency, and knowledge brought by the teachers in their study; as well as working on common goals, were critical elements to achieving a positive outcome.

Within this session, participants were also provided with an overview of Te Kōrerorero and the strategies associated with it. Participants were invited to share their knowledge of the strategies discussed. The researcher then provided an overview of the coaching cycle. Each coaching cycle comprised of three sessions, which were repeated three times over the course of the study, as discussed below.

To maintain mana within the group and a safe space for coaching to take place, the early childhood educators and the researcher identified appropriate tikanga for the group regarding what coaching is and what coaching is not. It was also agreed that interactions between the researcher (SLT coach) and early childhood educator when providing feedback were confidential and would not leave the group.

### **Collaboration Phase**

Coaching as an intervention, is most successful when there is collaboration and partnering between the coach and recipients. Berryman and Bateman (2008) highlight how the founding principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, call for collaborative work and partnership.

Coaching was conducted in three coaching cycles. Session one focussed on sharing information about a specific strategy from Te Kōrerorero, session two focussed on coaching each early childhood educator in their use of the strategy, and session three aimed to review implementation before starting the next strategy, returning to the format for session one (see Appendix B for protocol). The early childhood educators identified three strategies from Te Kōrerorero that they wished to focus on for the group coaching sessions.

In the first session of each cycle, the researcher (SLT coach) made sure to gather the knowledge and experience of the three early childhood educators and add to their body of knowledge where appropriate. The procedure for the information sharing sessions is provided in Appendix B. A PowerPoint presentation was created to cover key aspects of the strategy as a talking point for the initial sessions. These are presented in Appendix C. The researcher (SLT coach) supported them to plan ways to implement the chosen strategy in their daily work. This was clearly set-out in the information sharing procedure to ensure that

when each new strategy was introduced, the same procedure was used to share information and generate shared goals.

In session two of the coaching cycle, the early childhood educators brought evidence of their application of the strategy to the session, for example an audio or video recording or a written reflection. They were then coached on their use of the strategy, utilising Rolfe et al.'s (2001) framework for reflective practice (see Figure 1). To effectively implement the strategies and ideas that they were coached on, the three early childhood educators needed a reliable way to notice and reflect. Through Rolfe et al.'s framework, the researcher (SLT coach) was able to facilitate the early childhood educators to reflect on their use of the target strategy. The following are examples of reflective questioning that were used during the sessions:

*What?:* What were your goals during that activity with the child(ren)? What happened when you used the strategy? What response did you get from child(ren)? What feelings did you experience? What did you think was good about your use of the strategy? What did you think could have gone better?

*So what?:* So what is your new understanding of that situation? So what does that tell you about your use of the strategy? So what, if anything, would you do differently next time?

*Now what?:* Now what do you do to keep the momentum of your success? Now what would increase your success at implementing the strategy? Now what are your goals/plans moving forward? Now what are your ideas to change the outcome for next time (if negative experience)?

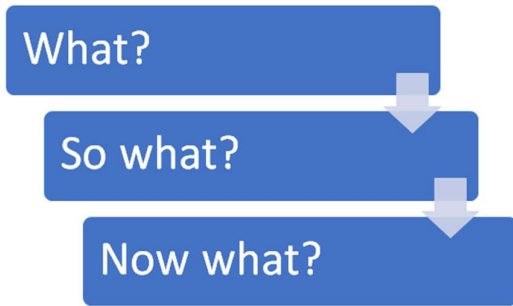
Each coaching session was run utilising the coaching procedure outlined in Appendix B. Each early childhood educator took a turn to complete the sharing, reflection, feedback, summary and plan steps of the coaching session protocol. While one person shared and received coaching, the other two observed and listened. All three early childhood educators focused on implementing the same strategy but each of them determined individualised goals, which they were then coached on.

At the conclusion of this phase, the early childhood educators were asked to write down any reflections they had made, and to utilise a planning sheet to determine what their goals were for utilising the strategy following coaching, which can be found in Appendix D.



**Figure 1.**

*Rolfe et al. (2001) Framework for Reflective Practice*



**Reviewing Phase**

At the end of the coaching intervention cycle, the early childhood educators were invited to a second focus group. The early childhood educators were asked to reflect on their experience of being coached, how it influenced their confidence and application of the identified strategies from Te Kōrerorero and what strengths and barriers were noticed through this process.

**Data Collection**

Case study design is reliant on in-depth data collection to ensure the case is well understood (Punch & Onacea, 2014). Data collection methods are shown in Table 2. Further rationale regarding chosen data collection methods is provided below.

**Table 2**

*Data Collection for each Phase*

	Understand	Collaborate	Review
<b>Focus Groups</b>	✓		✓
<b>Reflective Journal</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>Field Notes</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>Artefacts</b>		✓	

**Focus Groups**

This research consisted of two focus groups, one prior to coaching and one at the conclusion of coaching. These took place over one hour and were audio recorded. The focus group used semi-structured interviews to encourage facilitation (Creswell & Poth, 2016)

Robinson (2020) described focus groups as a way to “promote and facilitate interaction between participants” (p. 338, p. 2). Using focus groups in this research meant that discussions could be driven by the early childhood educators, with the researcher facilitating the interaction. Different to single or group interviews, Robinson (2020) highlights how focus groups allow participants’ social context to remain, adding a depth of knowledge about what participants think and why. Furthermore, when a focus group is facilitated well, it can generate opinions and views that may not otherwise have been known (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

There were initial concerns regarding the impact of a focus group on participants’ willingness to be open and vulnerable, as well as the risk that the researcher may influence the group, particularly when giving feedback in the final focus group. The researcher considered having someone else facilitate this focus group. However, Robinson (2020) discusses the importance of a facilitator being immersed in the research so as to effectively navigate and facilitate the group. They also suggest that the composition of focus groups has the potential to reduce the role of the researcher as the interaction between participants takes discussions to deeper level with less facilitation required. There were also important cultural considerations. The researcher met with Emma Quigan (Work-Integrated Learning Coordinator - Speech and Language Therapy, Massey University) to discuss the project. She discussed how historically; researchers have been perceived to take information from participants in studies without being willingly vulnerable in receiving feedback. Emma advised that as the three early childhood educators had been vulnerable through the coaching sessions, it was culturally important and necessary in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand for the researcher to also be vulnerable in receiving direct feedback from the early childhood educators. It is however necessary to acknowledge the risk that the early childhood educators may not have felt comfortable to share information that was critical of the researcher or the PLD intervention.

Interview guides (see Appendices A and E) were generated from the research questions to facilitate and guide discussions. These were reviewed by the researcher’s supervisors. The Hui Process (Lacey et al., 2011) was utilised to create an environment which was open, and which participants would feel comfortable to share their knowledge and perceptions (as detailed above).

### ***Reflective Journal***

Campbell (2017) discusses how partnerships in research can only be achieved when participants and researchers are “working towards a common or shared vision or goal” (McNae & Cowie, 2017, p. 181). To ensure this happened, the researcher documented thoughts and reflections through field notes and a reflexivity journal whilst carrying out the coaching intervention. Creswell and Poth (2016) discussed the importance of researcher reflexivity on the outcomes of a study. Only when a researcher can identify and acknowledge their values, skills, and biases, can the outcomes of the study truly be realised. Braun and Clarke (2022) view reflexivity as an essential component to good and effective thematic analysis of data. The researcher kept a journal to ensure that they were grounded in the research (Nadin & Cassell, 2006; Punch & Onecea, 2014) and to reflect upon the comments and practice within the setting. This provided transparency and increased the trustworthiness of the study (Choi, 2020).

### ***Field Notes***

Field notes were taken during both the focus groups and coaching sessions to capture what was being shared and spoken. Field notes gave access to reflections on the culture, feelings and practices occurring within the centre at the time of this research (Allen, 2017). They also captured interactions between the researcher and participants around their perceptions of how coaching was impacting daily practice. This was particularly useful as the coaching sessions were not recorded.

### ***Artefacts***

Artefacts, such as emails and written reflections by the early childhood educators were utilised through the collaboration phase and voluntarily provided to the researcher at the conclusion of the final focus group. These artefacts captured the personal reflections of some of the early childhood educators as they were participating in the coaching.

### ***Data Analysis***

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from all data sources. Audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed. In addition, notes and reflections of the researcher were collated and prepared for coding and analysis as well as written reflections from the early childhood educators. Nvivo software was used for

analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases of inductive thematic analysis. These were employed to ensure familiarity with the data set and that themes were driven by the data in a bottom-up analysis. Using an inductive or bottom-up analysis means that the themes which are identified are linked directly to the data, this process of coding is data driven rather than trying to fit the data into pre-existing coding frames (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data was initially read and re-read to become familiar with the data set (phase 1). From here, codes were generated based on patterns or meanings (phase 2). The researcher then looked for initial themes emerging from the codes (phase 3). These were then reviewed and refined (phase four) before finally being defined and named (phase five). Appendix F shows the codebook which was developed through this process which guided the analysis of the data. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe good coding as “...the result of a deep and prolonged engagement with the data” (p. 9), placing the researcher and reflexivity as central to analysis which is rich, deep and compelling. The purpose of the codebook is to ensure a robust process was followed and allowed for the research supervisors to review codes and understand how codes linked to themes that emerged from the data (Roberts et al., 2019). The final phase involved the write up of the results. Throughout the coding process, the researcher received supervision and feedback from the research supervisors.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the case study approach used in this research to describe the impact of coaching on early childhood educators’ practice, confidence and awareness of strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero. The chapter provided the context for the research and a description of the early childhood educators who participated. Next, the phases of the research were described, and the procedures were outlined. The methods for collecting data were detailed followed by a description of the data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations were described. The next chapter will outline the results of the research.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to answer the question “How does coaching influence early childhood educators’ perceptions of daily practice, their confidence and their awareness and use of Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a) and the strategies associated with it?”. To answer this broad and complex question, three sub questions were identified to focus the study and provide a depth of inquiry. The findings of each research question emerged from analysing data obtained from two focus groups, field notes, artefacts and written reflections. Themes emerged from the data through the process of inductive thematic analysis, as per the procedure outlined in the methods chapter.

#### **Research Question One: “What Current Principles, Tools or Strategies are Early Childhood Educators Using to Notice and Respond to Children’s Skills and Support Needs?”**

The analysis of the data relating to this research question generated three global themes: Teaching Principles, Noticing, and Tools and Strategies. Within these three global themes, a further six organising themes were identified: Documenting, Child-Centred Planning, Kaupapa, Facilitating Language, Social Connections, and Visual Support. Table 3 outlines global themes, organising themes and codes.

#### ***Teaching Principles***

When analysing the data, two organising themes emerged: Child-Centred Planning and Kaupapa.

**Child-Centred Planning.** Early childhood educators emphasised the importance of considering the needs and interests of children in their planning and teaching practices. They relayed the importance of spending time developing whakawhanaungatanga with children to ensure relationships could be developed and fostered, catering for the interests of children in their classrooms. The concept of implementing child-centred practice was evident throughout their responses to questions about their work. Natalie said, “*We’ve been modifying that form to try and really get to know that child, as an individual*”. And Anne shared, “*So we have workshop every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday just depends on children’s interests*”.

**Table 3***Themes Relating to Research Question One*

<b>Global Themes</b>	<b>Organising Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Teaching	Child-Centred	Child's Interests
Principles	Planning	Getting to Know Children
	Kaupapa	Philosophy
		Strengths-Based
Noticing	Documenting	Teaching Approaches
		Awareness of Te Kōrerorero and the Strategies Associated With It
		Awareness of Speech-Language Therapists and SLCN
Tools and Strategies	Facilitating Language	Digital Technology
		Commenting
		Extending Language
		Listening
		Modelling Language
		Peer Role Model
		Sharing Books
	Slowing Down	
	Social Connections	Role Play
		Modelling Play
	Visual Support	Child Specific Visual Support
		Photographs
		Sign

**Kaupapa.** The centre operates under a Reggio Emilia philosophy, which complements the concepts and ideas that surround child-centred planning.

*We see all children as being capable and we want them to be capable and confident and engaged even with the babies you see a lot of capable children. There's a lot that they can do and there's a lot that they can convey yeah, without speech [Kate]*

The early childhood educators saw all children as being capable of achieving when provided with the right support. The early childhood educators plan their days around the children that they have in front of them. They report that they consider strengths, weaknesses, friendship groups and interests, and pursue teaching and learning through these fundamental pillars of their teaching practice.

### **Noticing**

The global theme of Noticing centred around early childhood educators' awareness of Te Kōrerorero, the strategies associated with it; as well as their more general awareness of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and how they documented this awareness in relation to the children they support. Only one out of three early childhood educators had any previous knowledge of Te Kōrerorero, and none of them described experiences of using Te Kōrerorero or implementing the communication strategies associated with it within the early childhood environment. Kate described times when she had implemented communication strategies in a previous role but had not interacted with speech-language therapists (SLT) in her current role as an early childhood educator.

The early childhood educators shared how they noticed or documented children's language and communication styles. All three reported using a combination of learning stories, journals, photographs, and videos. Anne described how in her team they used photographs when a child with a language delay started to take interest in a yoga session to share with whānau, *"We take photos and write down her voice"*. [Anne]

All three early childhood educators reported to have had either limited or no contact with an SLT since working at the centre. Their experiences were often limited to an SLT observing a child in the centre and taking notes, followed up with an email containing strategies. Two early childhood educators reported that the emails were sent to the room leader or centre manager and not to the wider teaching team, *"I don't really have any experience. Most of the strategies, especially that last comment, but I haven't [had experience with an SLT]"* [Natalie].

## **Tools and strategies**

The global theme of Tools and Strategies emerged from the analysis of the first focus group with three organising themes Facilitating Language, Social Connections and Visual Support.

### ***Facilitating language***

Seven codes emerged from the theme of Facilitating Language. The early childhood educators initially responded that they were not aware of many strategies to support language and communication development. However, throughout the focus group they described a range of ways that they were supporting the language and communication skills of their learners.

**Commenting.** Both Kate and Natalie described using commenting to support language development in their classrooms. Kate had worked extensively with SLTs in a previous role and indicated this was a strategy she knew and understood well. Natalie said she knew of the strategy, but had heard it second or third hand from a colleague and was unclear how to use it effectively, *“We’re supposed to comment three things and then ask them the question?”* [Natalie].

**Extending language.** The early childhood educators described how during play interactions they may attempt to extend children’s language by adding on new words or describing what they saw, *“They might say ball and say, yes, it’s a yellow ball you know, so just expanding where we can”* [Kate]. Kate shared that this was a strategy she had used before and was comfortable with as a result of working closely with an SLT in previous roles.

**Listening.** To add to their repertoire of strategies, the early childhood educators reported listening closely to their children. All three spoke passionately about the Reggio Emilia philosophy of the centre and the importance of listening to children, *“In babies we do a lot of listening first”* [Kate].

**Modelling Language.** All three early childhood educators provided examples of times they modelled language to children in their classrooms. They could describe ways in which they provided language models but were not necessarily aware of the clinical jargon “modelling” to describe their practice. *“You know, we got to support her [language and communication and show her] how to describe the situation”* [Anne].



**Peer Role Model.** Natalie spoke specifically about how peers supported the use of social stories with a particular child to encourage making good choices. The social story focuses on a specific problem or challenge, in this case throwing rocks. Natalie described how peers supported the use of social stories and reinforced the message that was being communicated to the targeted child.

*So, we like [read] stories about what he can do and what he can't do and everyone joins in. They all gather around, then we read it together. They look at the pictures and they know what [is a good choice] And there's like a big, like "don't throw rocks" and you know they know the story [Natalie].*

Whilst the early childhood educators described how peers influence or support communication, this was not a specific strategy that they utilised but more a consequence of them following the interests of children in their centre and including whoever chose to be part of the story telling.

**Sharing Books.** The early childhood educators described how books played a part in their teaching and their interaction with children. Kate described how the vocabulary available in books supports language and communication development in her room. She acknowledged that the vocabulary available was often beyond what children are currently using, but she was choosing to expose them to this to support language growth and development.

*And we read with them regularly and extend on their language that way, so they're...listening to vocab that's at a higher level than what they're able to speak, but it allows us to have those interactions with them and yeah, explain that way.[Kate]*

**Slowing Down.** A strategy peppered throughout the first focus group was slowing down. All three early childhood educators described ways in which they slowed down or altered their communication style to support language and communication strategies. These strategies were often discovered or implemented independent of any specialist input, such as advice from an SLT.

*But what I do with one of them because like, he has some language, but it all gets muddled. So, I just say each word to him and he'll repeat it back and then I will help him with what he wants to [do]. You know what? Because I know that if he's doing*

*up a jacket, obviously he wants me to help him put [pull] up yeah? So I say can... you... and he will say it. [Natalie]*

### **Social Connections**

Two codes arose from the data related to the organising theme of Social Connections: Role Play and Modelling Play. The early childhood educators discussed ways that play influenced children's connection to their peers and their early childhood educators. Through role play, each early childhood educator presented children with opportunities to rehearse or better understand a specific situation. Anne said, *"Similar strategy is something like a puppet show...like the story when someone is making bad choices. We created the scenario we [are] facing like the best friend situation"*. When the early childhood educators described modelling play, they identified that children had the opportunity to understand what could be done if that situation arose again by modelling alternatives, *"It's like the model and also the visual support to show children what we can do in these scenarios, so when they meet the same situation next time, they probably will know what they can do"* [Anne].

### **Visual Supports**

Three codes appeared from the data under the organising theme Visual Supports: Child-Specific Visual Support, Photographs and Sign.

**Child-Specific Visual Support.** The early childhood educators shared that when supporting children with SLCN, in some instances they had received specific visual strategies that were unique to a particular child. They gave general descriptions of strategies such as social stories and colourful semantics, *"It has the four colours on the piece of paper, Who? When? What? And the other one?"* [Anne]. The early childhood educators did not describe in detail how they used these strategies, rather a description of what visual supports they had available.

**Photographs.** The early childhood educators identified photographs as being an essential tool in their toolkit. They used photographs to document children's learning and development. However, they also used photographs to support children with their language and communication skills. Anne said, *"I am collecting the stories, but some children they just don't know what to say. So, I show them the photo we take before the trip."*

In addition to supporting children to remember and recall events or activities that they had participated in, the early childhood educators also used photographs to support vocabulary recall and vocabulary development. Anne shared an anecdote where children were talking about something they had done on the weekend and she was struggling to understand what the child was communicating, *“our team leader just print out a photo and said is it this one? Is it kayak? Yes, it’s [a] kayak!”*

**Sign.** The early childhood educators talked about the different ways in which they supported children in their centre. One strategy that they used, were signs and/or gestures. One whānau had a Deaf family member who frequently used sign with their child. Kate observed, *“I haven’t seen him signing yet but he seems to understand”*. Natalie and Anne then shared how they had encouraged whānau participation in the centre; and as such, the signing relative had spent some time in the different classrooms in the centre, teaching and supporting the early childhood educators to use New Zealand Sign Language. *“I joined the meeting with the grandmother she teaches me how to use the sign language for stop and look...” [Anne].*

### **Research Question Two: “What are Early Childhood Educators’ Perceptions of Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerorero?”**

The analysis of the data relating to this research question generated six global themes: Pre-coaching Perceptions of Coaching, Post-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching, Facilitators of Success, Barriers to Success, Worthwhile and Extension. Within these six global themes, a further six organising themes were identified: Kaiako Definitions of Coaching, Kaiako Experiences of Coaching, Impressions of Coaching Content, Kaiako Impressions of the Impact Coaching had on their Practice, Perceived Barriers and Actual Barriers. Table 4 outlines global themes, organising themes and codes.

#### **Pre-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching**

Two organising themes arose under this global theme: Definitions of Coaching and Experiences of Coaching.

### ***Definitions of Coaching***

Three codes emerged under this organising theme. The early childhood educators shared their thoughts and understandings of coaching before they participated in the research.

**Coaching as Written Feedback.** The early childhood educators expressed their understanding of coaching as written feedback from a person who they defined as a coach, to influence change in their practice. They described coaching in this context, mostly as an expert-led or a specialist-led binary. The person who held the most knowledge, experience or leadership would provide advice and guidance in a written format for the coachee to take on board. Anne said, *“she also take[s] notes for me, make very clear information there so I know what I can do... to make it better next time”*.

**Colleague Observation.** The early childhood educators described coaching as a colleague or manager observing their practice with the aim to provide feedback. The descriptions of the way this was applied in practice varied. Natalie described this type of coaching as informal.

*“we don’t really do it like, so formal we don’t really say “oh what can we do next time?” but like passing, like that teacher will see what we’re doing I like what you’ve done over here like just little comments like that”*.

Whereas, at other times, Natalie described colleague observation as more structured, collaborative and reflective in their practice.

*we record our group times, but we reflect on our group time after we’ve done our group time. Yea so we do it with two teachers we have like a table with a list of the children at group time and have three columns, activity, peer, and teacher, like how they interacted.*

**Informal Feedback.** The early childhood educators described coaching as informal feedback from a colleague about a specific task they had completed or a particular invitation to play they had created, *“just little comments...like how we like help redirect the child to do something else”* [Natalie].

### ***Experiences of Coaching***

In the second organising theme, the early childhood educators described different experiences of coaching, ranging from no experience to more explicit video coaching. Four

codes emerged from the data: Knowledge of Coaching, Video Feedback, SLT Input Not Available and Observing Therapist.

**Knowledge of Coaching.** Coaching was described by the early childhood educators as something that was new to them, or they had little experience of it, *“I didn’t know coaching before I was in [early childhood education] before I came here” [Anne].*

**Video Feedback.** Kate had received more explicit video coaching whilst in another role as a teacher aide. During the focus group she described how a resource teacher of learning and behaviour (RTL) conducted video coaching during a session, *“when I’ve been working with a student, she’s recorded it and then the student’s gone back to class and we’ve gone over it together and she’s made suggestions and things like that”*. Kate was the only early childhood educator to describe formal, structured video coaching.

**Observing Therapists.** The early childhood educators described their understanding of coaching as observing speech-language therapy sessions with SLTs. The early childhood educators described an expert model where the SLT would provide advice and guidance, following a session with children, and then the early childhood educators would carry out strategies and supports where possible. Kate said, *“...session with the therapist and the child, and then she would leave some notes for me to... work on in between the visits”*

### **Post-coaching Perceptions of Coaching**

Under this global theme, the early childhood educators described what they understood of coaching after they had received eight weeks of coaching from the researcher (SLT coach); two organising themes emerged. The themes captured how the early childhood educators’ perceptions of coaching were different to their perceptions of coaching before they participated in the research. These organising themes were: Impression of Coaching Content and Impressions of the Impact Coaching had on their Practice.

#### ***Impressions of Coaching Content***

Through the data analysis, the early childhood educators described positive perceptions of coaching. Three codes emerged from the data: Collective Reflection and Learning, Practical, and Good Content.

**Table 4***Themes Relating to Research Question Two*

<b>Global Themes</b>	<b>Organising Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Pre-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching	Definitions of Coaching	Coaching as Written Feedback
		Colleague Observation
		Informal Feedback
	Experiences of Coaching	Knowledge of Coaching
		Video Feedback
		SLT Input Not Available
		Observing Therapists
Post-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching	Impressions of Coaching Content	Collective Reflection and Learning
		Practical Good Content
	Impressions of the Impact Coaching Had on Their Practice	Gained Knowledge
Facilitators of Success		Approachable Coach
		Early Childhood Educator Led
		Motivating Content
		Opportunity to Reflect
		Quiet Space
		Time as a Facilitator
Barriers to Success	Perceived Barriers	Worried About Volume of Information
	Actual Barriers	Not as Practical
		Recording Challenges
		Time as a Barrier
Worthwhile		Beneficial
		Great Positive
		Valuable
Extension		More Strategies
		Opportunity to Observe

**Collective Reflection and Learning.** The early childhood educators described how their experience of being coached in a group enabled them to learn from one another. They

described how the group coaching broadened their learning on the strategies covered as they could listen and reflect on their own experiences and that of their colleagues. Natalie said, *“so that I can also try their strategies as well you know? So, it’s like it’s nice that we all chose different ones so you can see how it went and how practical it was”*.

Further to this, the data demonstrated how reflective learning supported the early childhood educators to extend learning they already had. Kate said, *“even if you’ve had a little bit of experience before, like I have, still [there are] things you can pick up”*.

**Practical and Good Content.** Practicality was a common and consistent theme. The early childhood educators expressed that coaching was practical and functional, and could be easily applied to their daily practice, *“yeah, that’s, I think that’s one of the key benefits of the coaching. You get practical things that you can walk out of the room and try straight away” [Kate]*. All three early childhood educators mentioned coaching as being practical. Anne said, *“very practical and I can use it straight away in my practice”*.

The early childhood educators talked about the content of the coaching sessions and their perceptions or opinions of this. They were positive about the content of coaching, saying that sessions were useful, and the information was able to be used in a meaningful way in their classrooms. Anne said, *“[I] learned a lot of like useful and hands on solution[s]”*.

### ***Impressions of the Impact Coaching Had on Their Practice***

When analysing the data, the code Gained Knowledge emerged. It was clear that the early childhood educators felt they had gained knowledge and increased their awareness of the strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero over the eight weeks of coaching. Anne highlighted her limited experience working with an SLT, *“I haven’t worked with speech therapist before, but I learned a lot of hands-on solutions”*. Natalie described how coaching had supported her knowledge of speech, language, and communication strategies, *“I’m like, you know, gaining knowledge”*.

### ***Facilitators of Success***

Through the second focus group, the early childhood educators reflected on what they felt had enabled them to access coaching. As the data was analysed, the global theme Facilitators of Success emerged. Throughout this theme, six codes arose from the data: Approachable Coach, Kaiako Led, Motivating Content, Opportunity to Reflect, Quiet Space and Time as a Facilitator.

**Approachable Coach.** The early childhood educators shared that the personality and attitude of the researcher (SLT coach) was a facilitator for their participation. They described how having a judgement-free, open and transparent relationship enabled them to feel comfortable and confident to be vulnerable and share their thoughts, feelings and ideas. Natalie said, *“also because of you, your personality, and I found that, like, made it go well and you’re approachable”*.

**Early Childhood Educator Led.** From the data, a picture emerged of the importance of early childhood educators leading sessions to inform their practice. The early childhood educators emphasised the importance of being able to be in the driver’s seat of their coaching. Natalie said, *“it’s also a good way to engage in the process because that’s the thing we want to talk about.”* The early childhood educators shared that by having control of the topics covered in coaching and the method of reflection, this better enabled them to engage in the learning process. Natalie shared,

*“I think also, that letting us choose what evidence we bring, and even though if we do capture something on audio or video, we can like decide to share it or not and we can kind of like, pick through the ones that we did get [and decide to share them or not],”*

**Motivating Content.** Motivating content emerged as a factor in enabling the early childhood educators to actively engage in coaching and the coaching process. Having content that was highly relevant to their daily practice and chosen by the early childhood educators yielded positive results. Anne shared, *“that’s the thing we want to talk about. We all think that will help. Will help for our practice.”* The relevance of the content to the early childhood educators’ daily practice ensured that they remained engaged in the process.

**Opportunity to Reflect.** The data demonstrated how valuable having opportunities to reflect was for the early childhood educators. They acknowledged that having the time and space to reflect on their learning with someone to facilitate that reflection, was a significant facilitator in the success of the coaching sessions, *“I like how after we were introduced to a strategy, the next session, we got to focus on reflecting like fully reflect”* [Natalie].

**Quiet Space.** One area that was reported to be useful was utilising a quiet space. The early childhood educators shared how challenging it would be to reflect and discuss strategies in the classroom, *“Time and space. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. If you do it on site, definitely*



*cannot happen because the children will come to you all the time.” [Anne]. The early childhood educators expressed this enthusiastically in the final focus group. Without the support of centre management to provide a quiet space for the sessions to take place, the coaching would not have been as successful, “even if we were using a little side room or you know where there’s noise and distractions, given a nice quiet space where we can work uninterrupted with you has been huge” [Kate].*

**Time as a Facilitator.** The early childhood educators acknowledged that having dedicated time away from their classrooms to participate in the coaching was significant in its success, *“definitely being given the time away from our classrooms...has been huge. Yeh given the time” [Kate].* This feedback demonstrates the importance of support from centre management to facilitate the coaching to take place. Anne identified that time is required to read Te Kōrerorero with or without the coaching aspect. Further, that the success of the coaching was heavily tied to being provided with the time to actively engage in a learning process, *“if you recommend this book to your colleague... you're not sure if they can sitting down and take the time to read the book. So it's quite useful if we can have a coaching like this.” [Anne].*

### **Barriers to Success**

Barriers to Success emerged as a global theme. The early childhood educators reflected on challenges they had experienced with coaching; some of which were perceptions they had before they engaged in coaching and others were actual barriers they experienced. Two organising themes emerged: Actual Barriers and Perceived Barriers. Codes emerged under the two organising themes providing an overview of barriers experienced by the early childhood educators.

#### ***Actual Barriers***

The data demonstrated barriers that the early childhood educators experienced throughout the coaching intervention. Three codes emerged from the data: Not as Practical, Recording Challenges and Time as a Barrier.

**Not as Practical.** Through this code, the early childhood educators challenged the practicality of some of the strategies they were focusing on. Natalie commented that, *“I feel like some strategies are more practical than others”*. Natalie later reflected that initially the

strategy was hard to implement, but after the first coaching session she was able to implement the strategy in a way that better suited her practice.

**Recording Challenges.** The early childhood educators identified that gaining consent from whānau to record children in the centre was a significant challenge and impacted on how they shared what they had worked on over the week with the researcher. Kate said, *“sometimes it was tricky to have a device when you thought you wanted a device”*. Resourcing of recording equipment was scarce, with other early childhood educators requiring the tablet for work-related tasks such as writing learning stories, taking photographs, or similar. Anne shared ways that consent could have been gained more easily with whānau to remove this barrier.

*Maybe [you could] make a video and put it on Storypark? [you could say] I run the session, it's good for the children, good for the teachers as well. I don't interact with the children ... I won't take any photos or videos from the teacher, we only discuss and have a look. [Providing parents with] specific information about the project [Anne].*

**Time as a Barrier.** Whilst the early childhood educators identified time as a facilitator to success, the data also demonstrated how time could also be a barrier. The early childhood educators identified that sessions did not feel long enough; that an additional 15 to 30 minutes could have made it easier to reflect more, and remove the sense of feeling rushed at the end of the session. All three early childhood educators had time to reflect throughout each session, however, the early childhood educators noted that more time for reflection would have been preferred. *“we could have perhaps had slightly longer sessions, maybe an hour fifteen?...Maybe more time for the discussion because that was really valuable”* [Kate].

### **Perceived Barriers**

Prior to starting coaching sessions, the early childhood educators perceived that coaching would involve lots of theory, lots of information, possibly include lots of reading and that this would be challenging to follow and implement. Anne acknowledged, *“I was worried about so many theory and information, and like the educational style [before coaching]”*. When Anne reflected on her experiences of coaching, she considered her learning style and how this brought about some of the concerns she had initially

experienced, *“yeah it’s... about theory. It’s about a book...it’s really hard for me to learn [just from reading the Te Kōrerorero book]”*. Kate agreed with Anne’s perception that learning from reading the text was a challenge, *“And that goes for a lot of us though. You know, if you if you are shown how to do something and you actually do it you pick it up faster than reading about it.”*

### **Worthwhile**

The fifth global theme that emerged from the data was “Worthwhile”. Through the analysis of the data, it was clear that the early childhood educators acknowledged that coaching had been worthwhile. Three codes emerged from the data under this global theme: Beneficial, Great Positive and Valuable. The data demonstrated a consistent viewpoint from the early childhood educators that coaching had been worth their time and energy. The early childhood educators described coaching as, *“I think it’s great...I would have loved more of it”* [Kate]. The early childhood educators continuously reflected on the impact coaching had on their daily practice, *“learned a lot of like useful and hands on solution.”* [Anne].

The early childhood educators not only reflected on how worthwhile they had found the coaching, but that they saw value in it for their colleagues both within the centre and across the early childhood sector, *“Well, we just have to clone you Fern because we need one of you to do all these sessions at every centre.”* [Kate]. As Kate reflected on Te Kōrerorero as a standalone resource, she shared, *“I’d recommend that even more if that was supported by the coaching because that brings it to life.”*

### **Extension**

The final global theme that emerged from the data was Extension. As the data was analysed, themes addressed where the early childhood educators saw opportunities to extend the coaching became clear. Two codes emerged from the data: More Strategies and Opportunity to Observe.

**More Strategies.** The early childhood educators identified a desire for more sessions to cover more of the strategies outlined in Te Kōrerorero. As the above themes indicate, the early childhood educators were enthusiastic and engaged in the process. They found coaching to be a valuable, worthwhile, practical tool that they had in their toolkit. Kate said, *“just more of the strategies”*

**Opportunity to Observe.** The early childhood educators shared their desire to observe the implementation of strategies to extend coaching. Anne said, *“also in many moments I wish someone can modelling the solutions to me you know?”* Anne expanded on situations where she felt having “in the moment coaching” would have added a further layer to her knowledge and skills

*So in that moment I wish I can have a very effective solution to support them to settle down. It's like modelling me the language that I can use, modelling the solutions I can use. I think that would be really helpful.*

### **Research Question Three: How Does Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerere, Influence Early Childhood Teachers’ Daily practice, Confidence and Awareness When Interacting with Teachers and Children?**

The analysis of the data relating to this research question generated three global themes: Impact on Kaiako and their Daily Practice, Impact on Interactions with Tamariki, and Sharing Knowledge. Within these three global themes, a further six organising themes were identified: Behavioural Changes, Capacity Building, Language Strategies, Communication Facilitating Strategies, Social and Emotional Support Strategies and Sharing to Wider Centre Staff. Table 5 outlines global themes, organising themes and codes.

#### **Impact on Early Childhood Educators and their Daily Practice**

The early childhood educators identified a range of ways in which coaching had impacted on their practice. Two organising themes emerged: Behavioural Changes and Capacity Building. A further nine codes emerged from the data under these two organising themes. These are explored and described below:

##### ***Behavioural Changes***

In this organising theme, the data showed ways the early childhood educators identified and noticed how their practice had changed their communicative behaviour. They described exactly what behaviour changed and how this impacted their practice and the children they were teaching.

**Being Intentional.** The early childhood educators reported that after the coaching sessions, they were more intentional in their interactions with children and considered more deeply what they were doing and how they were communicating *“...Trying harder to*

*make sure I'm not using the questions too much using...more comments.*" [Anne]. The concept of intentionality came through also in the written reflections from Anne. She took the opportunity to write down and reflect on what she had gained from coaching, but also how she planned to continue to utilise the strategies and ideas generated from the coaching sessions, *"I plan to be more intentional in my interactions with children during conflicts"*.

**Consistency.** The early childhood educators gave examples and discussed the importance of being consistent in their use of strategies. Anne wrote in her written reflections, *"By fostering consistency in our approach, we can collectively support the emotional well-being and social development of the children in our care."* During coaching sessions, the researcher wrote field notes of discussions taking place. Following coaching regarding conflict resolution, the researcher wrote, *"[Early childhood educators] became more consistent in describing and slowing down during conflicts."* Both the early childhood educators and researcher identified that a result of the coaching was a consistent approach and application of the strategy in day-to-day practice.

**Child-Led.** As part of the results of the first research question, the early childhood educators identified that being strengths-based and child-led was a key principle by which the early childhood educators practiced. It is unsurprising then, that through analysis of the data, a code of child-led emerged. During the coaching sessions, the researcher wrote in her field notes, *"Deliberately picked a book that the child would be interested in to get engagement."* This was a description of the activity the early childhood educators used in their application of a strategy. Then when the researcher was reflecting on the session, she recognised that the early childhood educators had identified the impact of being child-led had on their practice, *"on reflection Natalie identified that the first instance was more adult-led and the second attempt to introduce the strategy was more child-led and as such was far more successful"*.

### **Capacity Building**

In this organising theme, the early childhood educators identified ways in which coaching strengthened their skills, instincts and abilities. Six codes emerged from this organising theme: Increasing Awareness of Communication Strategies, Reflecting on Communication Style, Facilitating the Environment, Improving Communication with Tamariki, Fluency and Automaticity, and Increasing Confidence.

**Table 5**

*Themes Relating to Research Question Three.*

<b>Global Themes</b>	<b>Organising Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
<b>Impact on Early Childhood Educators and their Daily Practice</b>	Behavioural Changes	Being Intentional
		Consistency
		Child Led
	Capacity Building	Increasing Awareness of Communication Strategies
		Reflecting on Communication Style
		Facilitating the Environment
		Improving Communication with Children
		Fluency and Automaticity
		Increasing Confidence
		Using Commenting to Facilitate Language
<b>Impact on Interactions with Children</b>	Language Strategies	Increasing Language Use
		Effective Question Asking
	Communication Facilitating Strategies	Slowing Down
		Using Visual Prompts
		Utilising Tuakana-Teina Relationships
Social and Emotional Support Strategies	Expressing Feelings	
	Improving Conflict Resolution	
	Sharing Amongst Research Group	
<b>Sharing Knowledge</b>		Opportunities to Share to Wider Group

**Increasing Awareness of Communication Strategies.** The early childhood educators reported an increase in their awareness of communication strategies and how they applied them in the classroom. The early childhood educators reflected on ways their practice had changed now that they were more aware of language and communication strategies, *“You realise actually too many questions actually put the pressure on the children and actually you stop them thinking”* [Anne]. When the early childhood educators were discussing coaching and the strategies covered in the final focus group, Kate said, *“[coaching] really heightens the awareness.”*

**Reflecting on Communication Style.** The early childhood educators highlighted how they were reflecting on their practice and making adaptations and adjustments as they went through the coaching process. Kate shared, *“[coaching] made me question the way that I was approaching some things and made me look more closely and consider more closely the way I was communicating with the babies”*. In the field notes from the eighth coaching session, the researcher noted that Kate had said, *“I’d like to try it with children who aren’t so forthcoming with their vocab”*. Kate had reflected that she was able to use commenting effectively, but that she was finding it easy with children who had more robust vocabularies for their age. She reflected that she could utilise this communication strategy and style with those children who have fewer words.

**Facilitating the Environment.** This code considers how the early childhood educators acknowledged their role in creating communication-rich environments. Anne reflected on the communication environment in her written reflections, *“reflecting on this session, I realise the importance of creating calm spaces within our environment to facilitate successful relationships”*. In the field notes, the researcher wrote, *“Natalie reported that the strategy of modelling and scaffolding has “opened up how I view and set-up activities”*.

**Improving Communication with Children.** The early childhood educators described how coaching improved their communication skills with children. The early childhood educators described different ways that their communication styles had changed, and the impact they perceived this had on their interaction with children across the centre, *“it helped me a lot when I was in a group meeting or in a workshop and I can get more voice from children”* [Anne]. When taking notes during the coaching sessions focusing on acknowledging emotions, the researcher wrote, *“Natalie: nappy change now I can comment and increase conversation and increase communication”*. Natalie had shared that she had

previously felt lost when trying to use commenting as a strategy, but this example of the communication shift demonstrates how the early childhood educators perceived their communication improving between them and children.

**Fluency and Automaticity.** This code describes the ways in which the early childhood educators implemented strategies and how over time, implementation became more fluent and automatic. The early childhood educators described not needing to actively think about applying strategies in their practice by the end of the coaching sessions, *“after a few weeks, you find you’re starting to automatically do the things that you’ve been practicing”*. [Kate]. Anne shared that she was finding strategies she was using were becoming habitual in her practice,

*Anne: I can naturally ask how “I can see you are so sad” ... So yeah, I... put this like into my habit.*

*Fern: So, you’ve formed a new habit? So, you’re not needing to think?*

*Anne: Yeah. I can do it naturally.*

**Increasing Confidence.** The final code focused on the early childhood educators’ confidence using language and communication strategies. Throughout the data analysis an increase in confidence became apparent. *“I feel much more confident as well”* [Anne]. Kate went further and said, *“much more confident. I would have liked to have carried on and done all of them”*. When the researcher reflected on the early childhood educators and their confidence as the coaching sessions concluded she wrote, *“there was a notable increase in confidence from the teachers with regards to the strategies they were now using in their practice”*.

### **Impact on Interactions with Children**

Under this global theme the early childhood educators described ways that coaching had impacted on the way they interacted with children within the centre. From this global theme, three organising themes appeared: Language Strategies, Communication Facilitating Strategies, and Social and Emotional Support Strategies. A further eight codes emerged from the data.

#### **Language Strategies**

In this organising theme, the data shows how the early childhood educators identified strategies specifically focused on language. They described strategies they used to



enrich the language of the children they teach and support. There were three codes that emerged under this organising theme: Using Commenting to Facilitate Language, Increasing Language Use, Effective Question Asking.

**Using Commenting to Facilitate Language.** This code spoke specifically to the way the early childhood educators used commenting during their daily practice to facilitate or enrich the language of children in their care. Natalie described how her use of commenting with children changed over time,

*That's what I was saying with the comments as well because when I was doing the nappies sometimes, I would just say oh you're having a good day? Like the first thing [that came into my mind] because obviously I've seen them running around smiling, but then like now, like I can comment on like I saw you out there I saw you were doing this, I saw you playing.*

Anne reflected on her understanding of commenting as a language strategy; how she used it, and how she plans to use it in her practice moving forward,

*Moving forward, I aim to continue using effective pauses and commenting strategies during conversations with children... for example, I plan to comment on a child's response to a question, such as saying, "I saw you playing with E on the monkey bars... [pause]," and then wait to see if the child expands on the topic.*

In the field notes the researcher wrote, “[Natalie shared] comments and question [are] a really good strategy with modelling, a child was able to create new vocabulary. [Natalie is] noticing a child's language is increasing and is forming sentences.”

**Increasing Language Use.** Through the data in this code, the early childhood educators talked about the ways in which they increased their language with children. This may have been through increasing the mean length of utterance, or by increasing the complexity of the vocabulary. Natalie reflected on the way she had been using language with children, “Whereas, it's like, you know...sometimes you just do something [without communicating], but then now it's like you try and like, speak it as you're doing it. Yeah to give them that more exposure to language.” Through the field notes, the researcher identified the early childhood educators had “increased vocabulary complexity” as they moved through the coaching sessions.

**Effective Question Asking.** The early childhood educators considered how they asked questions, when they asked them, and how frequently they asked them and the impact this

had on their interactions with children. Anne reflected on how she used questions in her teaching practice and the impact this had in her written reflections, *“I discovered that by changing the way I asked questions and including a video as a visual prompt, the child became more relaxed, leading to increased language output.”* In this example, Anne described a part of her practice where she was trying to establish the child’s voice. Previously Anne had asked a number of questions to elicit responses. After receiving coaching, Anne adapted her practice for this particular task, and observed the positive impact this had on the type and volume of language she elicited from children. The researcher also noted this in her field notes, *“Anne – too many questions lead to pressure and quiet. Now I know to just wait and listen”*. Kate shared that she had previous experience working with an SLT, and said she had some concept of the importance of reducing questions or being considerate of questions. However, in the focus group she commented, *“[I’m] trying harder to make sure I’m not using the questions too much”*.

### **Communication Facilitating Strategies**

This organising theme identified broader and more general strategies that facilitated and supported language and communication skills in children. Through the analysis, a further two codes emerged: Slowing Down and Using Visual Prompts.

**Slowing Down.** The data demonstrated how the early childhood educators acknowledged the need to slow down when interacting with children and give space for children to think and process the conversation. Anne reflected on her interactions with children, particularly around processing and understanding emotions, *“so now I give them...a pause I give them a time to process, so it’s OK like, you know, quiet. Yeah. Be quiet. But they actually are they are thinking very hard.”* This was supported by the researcher’s reflection log where she wrote, *“She [Anne] used pauses very effectively [in the recording]”*.

**Using Visual Prompts.** Here, the early childhood educators described ways they used visual supports or prompts to support children to understand and use language. The early childhood educators showed they could harness the use of visual prompts to support children to understand the world around them, *“I use the visual support before the discussion so they can see how it looks like.” [Anne]*. In the field notes, the researcher wrote about how Anne took the visual support into her teaching about friendships and connections, *“[Anne] used word web [concept] to create a friendship web – physical with*

*string how we are connected*". The researcher also noted how Kate had incorporated the use of visual supports with the youngest children, *"Kate – increased use of signs and used visuals with some success"*. In her own written reflection, Anne considered how she would continue to use visual supports in her day-to-day work, *"I will consider strategies... incorporating signs, symbols, or gestures to support children's understanding of question words."*

### **Social and Emotional Support Strategies**

The third organising theme was Social and Emotional Support Strategies. Through the data, the early childhood educators shared the strategies they had learnt, developed, and used with children to support their social and emotional development. Under this organising theme, three codes emerged: Utilising Tuakana-Teina Relationships, Expressing Feelings and Improving Conflict Resolution.

**Utilising Tuakana-Teina Relationships.** Through the data, the early childhood educators shared ways they utilised tuakana-teina relationships to support and foster social communication in the centre. In the code, Using Visual Prompts, Anne talked about using a web to weave the children together. She elaborated on this strategy later in her written reflections; and identified how the use of the friendship web alongside her utility of tuakana-teina relationships fostered social communication and connection with children in her class,

*I approached one of the confident children, N, and presented him with a challenge. I asked, "N, can you think about whether you have ever played with E or if there's something you'd like to do with her?" After thinking for a moment, N responded, "I'd like to jump on the trampoline with E." I then turned to E and said, "E, N mentioned that he wants to jump on the trampoline with you. What do you think?" E smiled and nodded in agreement. N proceeded to roll the yarn to E, symbolically connecting them in the relationship web.*

Through the coaching sessions, the researcher had written about Natalie's utility of tuakana-teina relationships. Documented in the field notes the researcher wrote, *"Through modelling and scaffolding how peers can use each other as supports and collaborate to achieve a goal, Natalie has seen that this can be applied to a wide variety of activities"*. In a

later session, where the early childhood educators were reflecting on their ability to foster tuakana-teina relationships, the researcher documented Natalie's spoken reflections,

*Natalie— collaborative sandpit...++ [lots and lots of] modelling of what to say opened up how I view activities [for example] “can we ask X?” redirecting children to ask their peers [rather than early childhood educator presenting a solution]... “Oh X doesn't have any clay, what can we do?” [the children said] “I know how to share” – playing together and rolling it together [the clay]*

**Expressing Feelings.** In this code, the data demonstrated how the early childhood educators supported children to express their feelings. Anne described how her approach to supporting children understand and communicate their feelings has changed over the course of the coaching sessions,

*When I'm busy, I tend to forget and I'm... trying to solve the problem quickly and I'm always like what happened? What's going on? So after this session I realised [I] need to slow down and take the time to discuss the emotions and feelings with children to help them express their feelings, we have to slow down, to acknowledge, and to accept their feelings before you talk about this specific stuff of the conflicts.*

Anne acknowledged this strategy in her own written reflection, “I will take the time to acknowledge their emotions and help them express their feelings”

**Improving Conflict Resolution.** The final code under this organising theme addresses conflict resolution, and the role the early childhood educators played in improving this across the centre. Anne identified that conflict is common in the pre-school room with children wanting turns on the same equipment. She reflected on her approach to conflict resolution after the coaching sessions,

*So now anytime I confront with children's conflict, I can naturally ask how [they are feeling]... I can see you so angry. Yeah. And then you know you can. You can literally see them calm down and we can talk about what happened. [Anne]*

In the focus group, Anne further expanded on the difference between her approach before coaching and after coaching,

*Like 6... weeks before I was oh so what happened? So what happens? But most of the time they can't clearly tell you what happened. They cry and... they're emotional. They couldn't communicate effectively with you, but if you ... take the time with them*

*talking about their emotions and feelings and they feel they're valued and accepted, they feel more comfortable to talk with you. Like [you are] more empathetic*

In her written reflections, Anne considers the importance of improved conflict resolution, *“providing them with vocabulary for conflict resolution equips them with the tools needed to navigate challenges and maintain positive relationships.”*

### **Sharing Knowledge**

The final global theme that emerged from the data was Sharing Knowledge. Through the data, the early childhood educators reflected on opportunities to share knowledge, both amongst their group of three, but also across the wider teaching team at the centre. Two codes emerged under this global theme: Sharing Amongst Research Group and Opportunities to Share to Wider Group.

**Sharing Amongst Research Group.** Repeatedly through the data, the early childhood educators described the value of coaching as a group and the opportunities presented to share knowledge. Kate said, *“it's really valuable to see the perspective of other people as well. Working with different age groups”*. Natalie identified that whilst all three of them agreed about the strategies that were the focus of the coaching sessions, each early childhood educator had their own goals. She recognised that listening to others apply strategies in their rooms impacted her own practice, *“So it's nice like we all could kind of just pick something different because even hearing their experience I'm like you know, gaining knowledge.”* The early childhood educators acknowledged that group coaching felt like a safe space where they encouraged and supported one another with their learning and application of the strategies. In her written reflection Anne wrote, *“Kate also shared her appreciation for how I involved peers to create a more joyful environment for the child to communicate, which proved effective, especially considering the child's occasional reluctance to speak.”*

**Opportunities to Share to Wider Group.** The early childhood educators reflected on the opportunity to share their learning wider than their group of three. The data shows the early childhood educators acknowledging the challenges of sharing outside of their group. Kate identified time as a barrier to sharing more widely, *“if you were doing another coaching session [trying] to figure out how the sharing would work for the centre and maybe make sure time is given for it to happen because otherwise we get swamped”*. Despite these

challenges, the early childhood educators did share ways they had shared their learnings with their colleagues. Natalie said,

*I will share what we've been doing if they asked me like directly. Like you know outside, I was sharing with another teacher, she's like "how's it going?" Then I was like talking through all the weeks "we focus on this [strategy] and then on this [strategy] and changed this and..." so that's also another way I've been sharing.*

Natalie also shared that she had provided written feedback to her colleagues through their group planning,

*I think adding like my strategies I picked, I put it in our planning so we have like this big planning and like this bit where I can add like from here. So I add each week ...So each session I'll write what strategy I'm focusing on. Things that we can do and then when you do the reflection, I like [write] things that you know that we can change.*

Anne shared one way she had shared her learning with a colleague regarding supporting bilingual or multilingual children in their classroom. She said,

*so the other day I saw, I heard one teacher trying to learn some Chinese word, ... to comfort [a child] when she was crying then I talked to her. Actually, you don't have to learn you know Mandarin because of this specific child ... if you want to support a bilingual child to learn language then make sure it is a good quality language and talk about that and she really appreciate that... And [I said] you can speak English, but you can use your gestures, use your face expressions or some pictures to support you so she can learn English as well, so you don't have to learn Mandarin.*

In her written reflection, Anne discussed how she would further share with her colleagues in the classroom, *"I also intend to share my insights with my colleagues, encouraging them to prioritise discussing feelings before diving into the details of conflicts."*

## **Summary**

This chapter has described the main themes and codes that have emerged from the data through the process of inductive thematic analysis. Data was discussed and described in relation to each of the three research questions, identifying the themes that emerged from the data.

Through the first research question, the data showed that the early childhood educators had some knowledge and awareness of strategies supporting speech, language,

and communication skills; but they were not always aware of the specific term for it, or were underconfident in their delivery of these strategies. The data also demonstrated the early childhood educators had limited exposure and awareness of coaching. The perception of coaching appeared to be of an expert model, where the SLT gave answers rather than a relationship model where all parties bring their own skills and expertise.

Through research question two, the data showed that overall, the early childhood educators had a positive experience of coaching with an SLT. Through the analysis it can be seen that prior to coaching, the early childhood educators had some concerns about volume and complexity of content but post coaching, they described it as practical with good content. Facilitators of success were identified, and barriers faced were also discussed. The data showed that the early childhood educators had considered how the coaching sessions could have been extended, with a clear preference for more strategies to be covered.

In the final research question, the data demonstrated the perceived positive impact coaching had on the early childhood educators' interactions with children in their centre. The early childhood educators described how they had implemented the targeted strategies with children, and their perception of the impact on children language and communication skills.

Overall, the results show a positive response by the early childhood educators to coaching and demonstrated impacts on the way the early childhood educators teach and interact with children. Barriers that were identified were primarily focussed on practical aspects, such as coaching sessions perceived to be too short, and challenges with recording children to aid and support reflective practice. The next chapter will discuss these findings in terms of the literature and implications for clinical practice, as well as the limitations of the study and future research directions.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the key results and interpretations of the findings of this research study in relation to relevant literature and current practice. The aim of this study was to answer the research question “How does coaching influence early childhood educators’ perceptions of daily practice, their confidence and their awareness and use of Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a) and the strategies associated with it?”.

There have been numerous studies into the effectiveness of coaching as a model for supporting early childhood educators to strengthen their practice (Artman-Meeker, 2015; Brebner et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2021), some with a specific focus on supporting the use of language facilitation strategies (Brebner et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2022). The contribution of this study was utilising a local, bicultural resource; which aims to promote practical and effective teaching practice to strengthen how early childhood educators support oral language learning in their classrooms. Another key element of this study was facilitating early childhood educators to take the lead in identifying which strategies would be the focus of the training sessions. The study aimed to position the SLT as the guide, rather than the instructor in a collaborative working relationship.

This chapter will be structured around the global themes identified under the three sub-questions:

- 1) What Current Principles, Tools or Strategies are Early Childhood Educators Using to Notice and Respond to Children Skills and Support Needs?
- 2) What are Early Childhood Educators’ Perceptions of Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerorero?
- 3) How Does Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerereio Influence Early Childhood Teachers’ Confidence, Daily Practice and Interactions with Kaiako and Tamariki?

#### **Research Question One: What Current Principles, Tools or Strategies are Early Childhood Educators Using to Notice and Respond to Tamariki Skills and Support Needs?**

Through the first focus group, the early childhood educators provided an overview of the principles, tools and strategies they were using to notice and support language and



communication development. This section is arranged around the global themes that emerged during the analysis; Teaching Principles, Noticing, and Tools and Strategies.

### ***Global Theme One: Teaching Principles***

All three early childhood educators agreed that whakawhanaungatanga was central to their teaching practice. They highlighted the importance of child-centred practice and relationship building to their work and how this shapes their planning and interaction with children. In addition to highlighting relationships, the early childhood educators described themselves as strengths-based, with the view that all children are capable of becoming confident and engaged learners. This finding was unsurprising as this reflects the strengths-based and child centred focus of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) and the Reggio Emilia philosophy, under which the centre operates. The results support a body of literature putting relationships at the centre of all work undertaken by early childhood educators (David et al., 2016, Emerson & Linder, 2019; Giardiello, 2023; Phillips & Boyd, 2023). When speech-language therapists (SLTs) enter early childhood settings, it is critical that they understand the importance of relationships and how this forms the basis of interactions and learning for the early childhood educator and children alike.

### ***Global Theme Two: Noticing***

The early childhood educators discussed noticing in different ways. They talked about how they noticed learning and then how they documented this learning. The early childhood educators discussed what they noticed about language and communication development, any contact they had with SLTs and what they knew about Te Kōrerorero.

**Documenting.** The early childhood educators documented language and communication development using learning stories and photographs. This aligns with the requirements from the Ministry of Education to assess children's skill development. The use of Learning Stories is a common practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and supports early childhood educators to meet the requirements under Te Whāriki to engage whānau in children's learning (Ministry of Education, 2004).

**Awareness of Te Kōrerorero.** When discussing oral language and communication development, the early childhood educators knew of Te Kōrerorero but had not implemented strategies from it, and did not consider themselves to be well skilled or

knowledgeable with regards to this resource. ERO (2017) found that as few as 19% of early childhood centres were well equipped to support oral language development. Te Kōrerorero is an important and timely resource for addressing these issues, however, for the resource to be implemented and the strategies embedded, it is likely that additional support for early childhood educators will be needed. This aligns with Neuman and Cunningham (2009) and Shannon et al. (2015)'s studies which found that when early childhood educators were expected to learn through reading alone, this did not carry over into day-to-day practice.

**Working with SLTs.** The early childhood educators described little interaction with SLTs in their current roles, with two early childhood educators having a limited understanding of the role of SLTs within the early childhood context. This echoes the findings of ERO (2022) who reported that collaborative work between agencies was not happening effectively, particularly in urban centres. Siversten (2022) points out that whilst ERO identified that improvements were needed to better facilitate language learning in early childhood, it did not set out how this should happen. This is a concerning finding as the evidence is clear that early childhood educators play a critical role in the development of language and communication skills (Chaitow et al., 2023; ERO, 2022). When SLTs and early childhood educators work successfully together, they can achieve more than if they were working independently of one another (Gallagher et al., 2019). It is critical then, that early childhood educators are provided with the opportunity to work collaboratively with SLTs.

### ***Global Theme Three: Tools and Strategies***

When analysing the data, organising themes emerged which included strategies that facilitate language development and support social interaction. These themes are discussed in this section. The early childhood educators initially reported they had limited knowledge of language and communication strategies. However, throughout the first focus group, the early childhood educators described nine different strategies they had built into their daily practice. The early childhood educators were not necessarily aware that the strategies they were using were linked to facilitating language and communication development, as they formed part of the underlying teaching principles within the centre. For example, the early childhood educators utilised whānau to build their own skills with the use of New Zealand Sign Language which aligns with Te Whāriki and the Reggio Emilia philosophy of collaborative and co-operative relationships between early childhood educators, the child

and their families (Emerson & Linder, 2019; Giardiello, 2023). Additionally, when the early childhood educators described how peers influence or support communication; this was not a specific strategy that they utilised but rather a consequence of them following the interests of the children in their centre and including whoever chose to be part of the activity, for example story telling. When considering the early childhood educators use of strategies such as commenting, it was clear through the focus groups that they were not always aware if their application of the strategy was “correct”, with Anne asking “is that right?” after describing ways that she facilitated language in her classroom. These findings are in line with the literature which clearly identifies that early childhood educators may be aware of strategies that support language and communication development, but are underconfident in their utility of these strategies (Brebner et al., 2017; Gallagher et al., 2019; McDonald, 2015).

The early childhood educators reported that they did not have a working relationship with an SLT in their centre. As such, they were not able to draw on the knowledge from an SLT to support them to utilise or extend the use of the strategies they had some awareness of. This was supported by the variation in confidence between the three early childhood educators. Kate, who had worked closely with an SLT in the past in a separate role, was more confident and could describe more specifically what strategies she used and how she used them. Whereas the other two early childhood educators, who had limited to no involvement with an SLT, appeared to feel less confident in their ability to actively utilise language and communication strategies. It is important to note that all three early childhood educators had similar experience teaching within the early childhood context. This finding echoes Gallagher et al. (2019) who highlighted the importance of inter-professional collaboration between SLTs and teachers, postulating that close collaboration may lead not only to improved outcomes for children, but also an increase in the skills and knowledge of the professionals. Brebner et al. (2017) demonstrated that when early childhood educators have the opportunity to work collaboratively with SLTs in their centre, they have the ability to support the language and communication development of all children.

It is also important to consider the use of terminology and jargon and the relationship to early childhood educator confidence. Given the contrast between what early

childhood educators perceived they used in relation to language and communication strategies, and then how they described their practice; it appears that early childhood educators, in this research at least, may be under-reporting their use of language and communication strategies. As highlighted, some of the strategies that support language and communication development, such as listening before doing, are embedded in the philosophies of early childhood education, and as such, early childhood educators may not consider these language facilitation strategies, but rather teaching principles (Emerson & Linder, 2019; Giardiello, 2023). However, as the early childhood educators were not observed in their practice by the researcher, it cannot be confirmed what language and communication strategies were already embedded in the practice prior to coaching.

### **Research Question Two: What are Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerorero?**

Data analysis relating to research question two generated six global themes: Pre-coaching Perceptions of Coaching, Post-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching, Facilitators of Success, Barriers to Success, Worthwhile, and Extension. The data demonstrated what early childhood educators' perceptions of coaching were before and after sessions. The data is discussed in relation to each global theme.

#### ***Pre-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching***

Before coaching took place, the early childhood educators described both their understanding of coaching and their experiences. The early childhood educators described coaching as either feedback from a colleague, which was usually informal in nature, or more structured written feedback about their practice, which was usually expert-model coaching. In both instances, the early childhood educators described receiving feedback, rather than an experience of being coached in a way that promoted reflective thinking and practice-change. When the early childhood educators described their experiences of coaching, Kate was the only early childhood educator who had experienced video coaching, and this had occurred in a different role in a different setting. Anne and Natalie had not experienced formal coaching regarding their own practice, but instead had received written support for children in their classrooms who would benefit from SLT intervention and the use of language and communication strategies.

It is generally agreed in the literature that coaching draws on adult learning models, whereby the coachee is engaged in active learning which includes collaboration and reflection (Elek & Page, 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011). The absence of these terms from early childhood educators' descriptions and definitions of coaching, provides an indication of their experience of coaching. This supports findings by Clarke et al. (2021) who found that despite the large body of evidence supporting coaching in the early childhood sector, there is limited evidence of early childhood educators participating in coaching. When considering the role of an "expert" in the centre, in this case the SLT, the early childhood educators reported taking a passive role by observing and then attempting to recreate therapeutic interventions. The evidence identified that adults learn best when they are active participants in the process (Elek & Page, 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011), therefore it is unlikely that early childhood educators can successfully implement language and communication strategies by simply observing an SLT or colleague in their practice.

### ***Post-Coaching Perceptions of Coaching***

The early childhood educators considered their thoughts and feelings regarding the content of the coaching sessions and what supported them to access coaching. They also described the perceived impact of coaching on their daily practice.

**Impressions of Coaching Content.** The early childhood educators described coaching as a place for collective reflection and learning. Through the sessions, the early childhood educators were supported to reflect on their own practice and reported that they gained insight and knowledge, not just from the SLT/coach, but also from their colleagues. This was in contrast to their perceptions of coaching in the first focus group. This complements Barrett (2022) who investigated out-group coaching and found participants reported benefiting from their colleague's insights and experiences as well as that of the expert-coach. The aims of the coaching sessions were to provide opportunities for reflection and collaboration, as these were identified as critical features of coaching in the literature (Elek & Page, 2019; Elek et al., 2022; Rush & Shelden, 2011).

The early childhood educators also described coaching as practical with content that was appropriate for their setting. These findings echo Trembath et al. (2019) who found early childhood educators described on-site PLD as practical as it provided hands-on

experience with the opportunity to learn how to adapt their own behaviours to support children in their services.

### ***Facilitators of Success***

The early childhood educators shared in the second focus group, their perception of what supported coaching to be successful in their centre. Six organising themes emerged which considered the role of the coach, the structure of the sessions and the support from centre management.

**Approachable Coach.** One of the fundamental characteristics of successful coaching interventions is a strong relationship of trust between the coach and the coachees (Elek & Page, 2019; Rush & Shelden, 2011). The early childhood educators in this study described the attitude of the researcher in her role as SLT coach and the environment that was created during the sessions, as a facilitator of success. Brebner et al. (2017) also found relationships to be a critical component of coaching and found when relationships broke down or did not develop in the first instance, the impact of the SLT in the early childhood centre was minimal. SLTs need time to foster relationships with early childhood educators to ensure the best outcomes for all children. It is important to highlight that as the researcher also conducted the focus group interviews, the early childhood educators may not have highlighted any difficulties they experienced with the researcher in her role as SLT coach. As identified in the methodology, the researcher decided to conduct the focus groups herself to acknowledge the vulnerability of the early childhood educators in their participation in coaching sessions in a group, and to be willing to be equally vulnerable in receiving feedback.

**Early Childhood Educator Led and Motivating Content.** The early childhood educators perceived that by identifying strategies from Te Kōrerorero that were most relevant to their practice, it made it easier for them to engage in the learning process. They reported that the content covered was highly motivating, and therefore it appeared that it was easier for the early childhood educators to actively engage in the learning process. Strategies that were targeted were picked by-them-for-them. This opportunity for the early childhood educators to drive their own learning and development through joint planning with the SLT, is shown through the literature as a characteristic of successful coaching

models. Rush and Shelden (2011) describe joint planning as critical, highlighting its ability to promote collaboration between the coach and coachees. Brebner et al. (2017) also found the collaboration between SLT students and early childhood educators resulted in strategies becoming embedded in educators' daily practice. It is therefore more possible that early childhood educators will be able to continue to use the strategies they chose and worked on, after coaching intervention has completed.

**Opportunity to Reflect.** As already identified, reflection is a critical strategy in coaching models (Elek & Page, 2019; Rush and Shelden, 2011). The early childhood educators described the opportunity and support to actively reflect on their practice was welcomed, and facilitated them to engage in the coaching process. They identified that this was not something they had been able to easily accomplish without coaching. Reflective practice as part of a coaching framework, builds capacity in early childhood educators to generalise the reflective process into the classroom and as a result, positively impact the children they are teaching (Rush & Shelden, 2011).

**The Role of Management.** Time away from the classroom and in a quiet space were identified as the final two facilitators of success in this coaching practice. The early childhood educators reflected that without the opportunity to be away from the classroom to fully reflect on their practice, it would have been considerably more challenging to participate. Centre management played a key role here; as they worked closely with the researcher to facilitate the time and space for the early childhood educators to be available that did not put unnecessary pressure on other early childhood educators in the centre or require a reliever to be brought in. ERO's 2022 report identified strong and effective leadership as one of the essential components to high-quality education. In this report, ERO considered effective leadership to be leaders who set clear expectation for inclusion, promoting inclusive practices through the effective use of information to ensure equity of outcomes.

### **Barriers to Success**

Whilst the early childhood educators reported a range of factors that enabled coaching to be successful, they also shared barriers they encountered when accessing coaching. Some of these barriers were perceived, and/or spoken about retrospectively, while others were aspects they experienced during the course of the coaching intervention.

### ***Actual Barriers***

The majority of challenges experienced by the early childhood educators were related to the practicalities of engaging in the coaching sessions. While time was identified as a facilitator, it was also identified as a barrier. Being given time away from classrooms was significant, however, all of the early childhood educators agreed that having more time per session would have been beneficial. The time spent discussing, reflecting and working through strategies was identified as being the most valuable, compared to being provided with advice and guidance without time set aside to consider how to incorporate strategies into their practice. Again, these findings align with a body of literature that puts reflection and collaboration at the centre of successful coaching interventions (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015; Brebner et al., 2017; Elek & Page, 2019; Lofthouse 2019). The researcher was mindful of the significant time commitment the early childhood educators were already making to attend 10, one-hour sessions over the duration of the research, and therefore did not want to discourage participation in the research by facilitating longer coaching sessions. It may have been beneficial to open up discussions after the initial sessions around session length and the possibility of re-negotiating this, considering the feeling of wanting more time was shared by all of the early childhood educators in the final focus group.

To support reflection, the early childhood educators were asked to audio or video record themselves using strategies. To do this, consent was requested from all whānau in the centre. Gaining consent was a significant barrier. Many whānau did not return or sign consent forms. Whilst this was challenging for the early childhood educators, it did not prohibit them from reflecting, with all three early childhood educators writing down their thoughts and reflections prior to each session, regardless of their ability to record interactions in their classroom.

The final barrier that the early childhood educators experienced was around practical application of the strategy. Natalie shared that commenting while reading a story was more challenging than she initially thought, and did not feel as practical as other strategies she utilised. She went on to further explain that while she found it hard to implement the strategy of commenting during a story, she had still had the opportunity to use commenting as a strategy in other aspects of her work. She later used her colleagues' examples of how they applied commenting and built that into her practice. Therefore, although the initial



application of the strategy was not as practical as she imagined, she reported that she could still learn from her reflections. While listening to the reflections of others, she could see how to use the targeted strategy in a more practical way. It could be hypothesized that it was in fact the impact of coaching that shifted strategies from feeling impractical to embedded into daily practice. The literature describes coaching as impacting on early childhood educators' confidence and application of strategies (Brebner et al., 2017) and therefore, it is possible that as Natalie built her confidence with applying strategies, the strategies became more practical. Coaching in a group setting provides the opportunity for collegial peer-to-peer learning, not solely learning from the "expert" coach facilitating the sessions (Barret, 2022).

### ***Perceived Barriers***

Understanding perceived barriers by the early childhood educators is essential when considering replication opportunities for this research. The early childhood educators perceived that coaching would involve a lot of information, theory, reading and that it would not be practical or easy to embed into their practice. They considered these concerns retrospectively having completed the coaching sessions. They highlighted that reading texts, such as *Te Kōrerorero*, and trying to understand and apply it was something they perceived to be difficult. Two early childhood educators had attempted to read it prior to coaching started, and they reported they had not been successful in applying strategies within their classroom. Kate said, *"you know, if you are... shown how to do something and you actually do it you pick it up faster than reading about it."* It is well known and accepted that adults learn through active engagement with a topic and coaching enables this to happen (Rush & Shelden, 2011). When considering future implications, recruiting to coaching interventions needs to clearly state what coaching is and what each session entails. This was provided to all early childhood educators through a Zoom session and the information sheets; however, further exploration into ways the researcher can explain the commitment to coaching is required, especially in centres where coaching is not common practice.

### **Worthwhile**

The Ministry of Education forums (2015b) and the ERO 2017 report clearly show that early childhood educators want to know and understand more to support children in their care. In both reports, early childhood educators communicated that they wanted better

access to PLD to enable them to embed strategies and supports into their practice. This research provided early childhood educators with eight sessions focusing on language and communication strategies, and overwhelmingly the early childhood educators reported that coaching was worthwhile and beneficial. The early childhood educators found the sessions were practical, which enabled them to consider practical application in their daily work. In addition to this, the early childhood educators stated that they would highly recommend engaging in coaching to their colleagues, going as far to say in some instances, “*we need one of you to do all these sessions at every centre.*” [Kate]. When considering the unique aspects of this PLD, it must be considered that designing coaching around a bi-cultural resource created in Aotearoa New Zealand to fit within Te Whāriki and He Pikorua, was likely a key factor. In addition, fostering an environment whereby the SLT and the early childhood educators worked collaboratively, without hierarchy, enabled trust to be developed which allowed coaching to be successful.

### **Extension**

The final global theme for this question considered what the early childhood educators wanted in order to extend the coaching, or what they would change. The early childhood educators overwhelmingly called for access to more strategies to be covered. This again is unsurprising considering the local ERO and Ministry of Education reports identifying that early childhood educators want to access high quality PLD, and they want to support all learners to be successful (ERO, 2017; ERO, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2015). The early childhood educators mentioned several times that they wanted to learn more strategies, to continue the sessions until they had worked through all of Te Kōrerorero. This supports previously discussed findings, that the early childhood educators had a positive and productive relationship with the coach, as well as motivation to learn and engage in the process.

In addition to wanting to access more strategies, the early childhood educators also discussed the benefits of on-the-floor observation opportunities. The early childhood educators received demonstrations of how to apply strategies from the SLT, but this was done off-the-floor and not in-the-moment with children. The early childhood educators felt that observing or co-constructing sessions in the centre would have added further tools to their tool kit. Brebner et al. (2017) found early childhood educators and SLT students were

able to actively learn from one another because of the SLT students being embedded in the early childhood environment. Therefore, the suggestion to take some aspects of coaching on-the-floor whilst continuing to make a quiet space available for the coaching and reflection sessions, is sound, with embedded practice yielding positive results.

**Research Question Three: How Does Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerere Influence Early Childhood Teachers' Daily practice, Confidence and Awareness When Interacting with Teachers and Children?**

Data analysis relating to research question three generated three global themes: Impact on Early Childhood Educators and their Daily Practice, Impact on Interactions with Tamariki and Sharing Knowledge. The data demonstrates how the early childhood educators perceived coaching impacted practice. The data is discussed in relation to each global theme.

***Impact on Early Childhood Educators and their Daily Practice***

During the final focus group, the early childhood educators reflected on their practice and how they perceived coaching impacted it. Firstly, the early childhood educators considered how their behaviours changed and secondly, how their capacity for impacting language and communication development changed.

**Behaviour Changes.** The early childhood educators described the changes in their practice as intentional, consistent and child-led. The early childhood educators thought about their communication behaviours, and how these were different after receiving coaching. They considered what they were doing with their communication with children, how and why they were doing it. The researcher noted in field notes, that the early childhood educators appeared to become more consistent in their approaches to identified strategies as sessions went on. Rush and Shelden (2011) identify that coaching has a direct impact on the behaviour of coachee's, when successfully implemented. The utilisation of adult learning strategies such as reflective questioning through the "what, so what, now what" model, enabled the early childhood educators to consider their behaviour during specific scenarios.

**Capacity Building.** Coaching is identified as a way to change current practice as it enables early childhood educators the space to consider new practices and how they might

embed them in the classroom (Twigg et al., 2013). The early childhood educators reflected on their confidence post-coaching to use and implement language and communication facilitating strategies.

***Communication Strategies and Communication Style.*** Brebner et al. (2017) found embedded PLD had a significant impact on early childhood educator's application of strategies that facilitate language and communication development. The findings of this research echo those found in Brebner et al. (2017). Through utilising coaching as a PLD strategy, the early childhood educators were able to confidently reflect on strategies they were implementing after coaching, and how this was different to their practice before participating. They noticed that with coaching, their awareness of communication strategies and their awareness of their own communication styles was heightened. Coaching provided the early childhood educators with the space to reflect on their practice, and make small changes that they could easily apply and build on week-to-week.

***Facilitating the Environment.*** It was not only the communication styles of the early childhood educators that changed through the course of the research, but also the communication environments; with the researchers' field notes stating that the early childhood educators were considering how they set-up activities to foster communication to occur. This adaptation of activities and the environment of the centre speaks to features of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Moffat (2022) discusses UDL in the context of He Pikorua. When early childhood educators adapt an environment to ensure that an activity is accessible to all, children can flourish. Through coaching, Natalie reported she was able to consider how the way she sets up activities has an impact on what language and communication opportunities are available to children.

***Improving Communication with Children.*** Bleses et al. (2018) stated that many PLD models are based on the concept that when early childhood educators have access to more knowledge, that impacts practice and in turn, children gain skills. In the final focus group, the early childhood educators reflected on their communication with children after receiving coaching. They described how their communication style had changed and how this had facilitated communication between them and children they are working with. Whilst this research did not measure communication style before and after coaching, the early childhood educators' ability to reflect on their communication with children and notice how

they perceive this has changed, is important. Coaching aims to build capacity so that coachee's can learn to reflect and adapt their practice without the need for a coach in the long term (Rush & Shelden, 2011). This ability to consider the impact coaching had on their interaction, indicated early childhood educators are able to notice and reflect on their practice.

***Fluency, Automaticity and Increasing Confidence.*** The aim of the research was to empower the early childhood educators to acknowledge their skills, and build their confidence in utilising effective language and communication strategies with children. When reflecting on their use of strategies after coaching; the early childhood educators described ways they began to embed strategies into their practice after only a few weeks, and they felt more confident in their ability to utilise language and communication strategies in their classrooms. Learning new skills and then applying them practically within the context of an early childhood classroom is challenging (Clarke, 2021). Coaching supports early childhood educators to apply new learning into their day-to-day practice (Clarke, 2021). This demonstrates the importance of utilising coaching to increase confidence in early childhood educators, and support them in the consistent application of strategies by fostering communication habits.

### ***Impact on Interactions with Children***

The early childhood educators considered the impact of coaching using Te Kōrerorero, and the influence this had on interactions with children. They described change across the domains of language, communication, and social and emotional strategies, which is in-line with findings from Brebner et al. (2017), who found coaching influenced the domains of communication, relationships, environment and translating knowledge into practice.

**Language Strategies.** The early childhood educators identified ways they altered their use of language in interactions with children. In some instances, this was an increase in the amount of language they were using in scenarios where they may not have communicated with children, for example during nappy changes. In others, it was considering how they used language with children, such as commenting and pausing and reflecting on their use of questions with children. Initially, in the first focus group, the early

childhood educators described ways that they were utilising commenting to some degree in their practice, but they were under confident, and they were not clear and intentional in the way that they used it. In the final focus group, however, they described in detail how they utilised the strategy of commenting to enrich the language of children in their care.

During one coaching session, Natalie described how one child in her classroom had noticeably increased language output since the beginning of the coaching sessions. As children's language and communication skills were not measured in this research, it is not possible to determine if this was a direct impact of coaching and Natalie's use of strategies, or if this was a combination of factors. However, the evidence suggests that when utilising a universal service delivery model, such as Te Matua, coaching has the potential to have a significant impact on practice change, and ultimately the language and communication development of children (Clarke, 2021; Moffat, 2022).

**Communication Facilitating Strategies.** The early childhood educators reflected on ways they built on strategies they were already using, such as using visual prompts to facilitate communication, and incorporated the strategy of slowing down to facilitate communication. Anne in particular, drew attention to the use of pauses in her interactions with children to support them to process and respond to the information presented to them. The use of visual strategies built on the information collected in the first focus group; that the early childhood educators were able to increase their use of signs, gestures and visuals to support children's communication in their classroom. Anne's written reflection flagged an intentional and planned use of visual strategies in her daily practice. This intentional planning ties into Hadley et al.'s (2022) findings that it is not enough to talk more to children, early childhood educators need to be intentional and responsive to the child in front of them when using language and communication strategies.

**Social and Emotional Support Strategies.** As highlighted in the literature review, language and communication skills underpin the development of a range of skills, which include social and emotional development (Bercow, 2008; Bercow, 2018). Supporting social and emotional development was not an area the early childhood educators highlighted in their practice in the first focus group, before the coaching sessions. However, in the final focus group, the early childhood educators described in detail a variety of ways they supported children in their social and emotional development. Anne described how before

coaching, she would use lots of questions and try to solve problems for the children in her care; whereas after coaching she would support children's social and emotional needs by acknowledging their feelings, describing what she could see and then waiting for a response. This highlights the potential of coaching when changing educators practice in meaningful ways. Similar to the findings of Brebner et al. (2017), coaching provided an opportunity for the early childhood educators to make meaningful changes to their practice. They described how they supported children in their classrooms to problem solve with support through utilising tuakana-teina relationships, effective question asking and acknowledging the feelings of children.

### ***Sharing Knowledge***

In the final global theme, early childhood educators considered how they shared knowledge both within the coaching group, and outside of the coaching sessions with their colleagues. The early childhood educators acknowledged the benefits of coaching within a group setting, and highlighted the benefits of hearing different perspectives and different ways to utilise each strategy. This aligns with Barret (2022) who found that coaching alongside a colleague brought benefits and enabled them to support each other in their application of strategies in the workplace.

However, when the early childhood educators reflected on sharing knowledge beyond the coaching group, they acknowledged that this was challenging. They described sharing as ad hoc, and reliant on colleagues asking what had been covered in the coaching sessions. This difficulty with sharing information with colleagues ties into earlier reported results, highlighting the importance of time and space for coaching to take place. Early childhood educators reported having little time off the floor to actively engage in learning. Sharing of knowledge and information was reported to be mostly informal. Kate highlighted the importance of considering how knowledge might be shared with the wider team in future iterations of a coaching PLD in the early childhood sector, *"...figuring out how the sharing would work for the centre and maybe make sure time is given for it to happen because otherwise we get swamped"*.

## **Key Findings**

Key findings were identified around each research question. Research question one found that early childhood educators were child centred, relationship focussed and strengths based, which is strongly evident in the literature. The early childhood educators had a range of tools to support communication development in their repertoire, however they were under confident in their utility of these and often had not had sufficient training to utilise strategies effectively. Research question two found that prior to coaching, early childhood educators had limited knowledge or experience of coaching with most feedback given informally, and was not typically a collaborative process. Post coaching, early childhood educators were positive about their coaching experience, and they were able to highlight a number of facilitators as well as barriers they encountered. Finally, research question three found a range of perceived changes in educator behaviour, and capacity building of early childhood educators as key outcomes of coaching. In addition to early childhood educator behaviour, there was also a perceived impact on children's speech, language and communication skills. Coaching as a group was positive and added value to discussions; however it was challenging for sharing to occur outside of the coaching sessions due to time constraints and the day-to-day work pressures that come with the busy early childhood education environment.



## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will summarise the purpose, rationale and findings for this research. Thoughts on future research and implications for clinical practice will also be explored.

### **Purpose and Rationale**

The purpose of this research was to investigate how coaching influenced early childhood educators' perceptions of daily practice, their confidence and use of strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Early childhood educators were encouraged to select three strategies that were meaningful and relevant to their day-to-day work. A collaborative coaching model was utilised with the aim to increase early childhood educators' confidence in their application of these strategies in their day-to-day work. A review of the existing literature strongly supports the use of coaching as a professional learning and development (PLD) model in early childhood education, including when supporting the use of strategies to support speech, language and communication development (Artman-Meeker et al., 2015, Clarke et al., 2021; Elek & Page, 2019, Rush & Shelden, 2011).

This research demonstrated that weekly coaching utilising a bi-cultural resource that acknowledges the unique landscape of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, can have a positive impact on early childhood educators' confidence implementing language and communication facilitating strategies. It also suggests the potential impact on the children's language and communication skills in the early childhood centre.

The study utilised a case study design, utilising inductive thematic analysis to analyse the data. The data suggests that coaching was a new tool for the early childhood educators, which had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their confidence and reported use of language and communication strategies.

### **Trustworthiness**

As this research study employed a qualitative design, it is necessary to discuss trustworthiness of the research including its transferability, credibility and dependability (Mills, 2014). Mills (2014) suggests that triangulation of data can be used to establish

credibility. In this study, triangulation was used across the range of data sources (focus group transcription, field notes, reflexivity journal and artefacts). Findings from the focus group were also supported in the artefacts (written reflections by early childhood educators) and the researcher's field notes. The researcher debriefed frequently with the research supervisors during the data analysis phase and received feedback on the process including the development of the codebook. Returning to the data frequently, and engaging in discussions with the research supervisors, enabled a deep and rich understanding and interpretation of the data as outlined in Braun and Clarke (2022).

When considering transferability, Punch and Onacea (2014) recognise that the purpose of case study research is to study a particular phenomenon within the boundaries of a case and contextualise the findings so that it may be applied in similar contexts. The aim of this research was to demonstrate what a successful coaching model could look like within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood sector. The researcher in her role as speech-language therapist (SLT) coach aimed to build a collaborative relationship with the early childhood educators over regular sessions, which would potentially influence early childhood educator behaviour and ultimately the development of language and communication skills in children within that context. Detailed descriptions of the processes and procedures have been outlined, which will provide the reader with enough context and information to make comparisons to other potential contexts (Mills, 2014).

### **Limitations of the Research**

Whilst the results of this research are largely positive, there are limitations that require discussion. These limitations consider factors that influenced the research, but also lead into future directions.

**Consideration of the Setting.** This research was conducted in an early childhood setting in an affluent area of Auckland. The management team were highly engaged throughout the process and ensured that the early childhood educators had time and a quiet space to engage in coaching without interruption. These factors likely had a positive impact on the effectiveness of coaching. There is strong evidence demonstrating the effects of management's role in achieving high-quality early childhood education (ERO, 2022; Phillips & Boyd, 2023). It is hypothesised that if coaching had taken place in a setting with

inadequate management support, the impact of the coaching would have been reduced. When we consider this in the context of the OLLI study (Ministry of Education, 2022), it was acknowledged that the limitations of the study were that early childhood educator release was not funded and as such, not all early childhood centres would be able to afford to release their early childhood educators to participate in the programme.

**Ease of Video and Audio Recording.** To support their reflections, each of the early childhood educators were encouraged to audio or video record their interactions with children in the centre. In order to achieve this, consent was required from all children and their whānau in the centre. This was a considerable barrier to overcome as few whānau returned consent forms, with the early childhood educators suggesting that whānau had misunderstood the nature of the request. The early childhood educators suggested a video uploaded to Storypark would have been more effective than the written information sheets for whānau to understand how the video was used and that none of the video or audio equipment was kept after the coaching sessions.

**Experience of the SLT.** When reflecting on the skill set of the SLT, it is clear that this would have influenced the impact of coaching. The SLT has a lengthy work history of collaborating and empowering adults around the child in complex communication strategies. This history of applying coaching strategies in her work, meant coaching was something she was comfortable and experienced in. It is possible that a less experienced SLT would not have been as confident or skilled in coaching so as to influence early childhood educators practice as effectively.

**Measuring Impact.** This research set out to capture early childhood educators' perception of coaching and the impact it had on their practice. This was an entirely qualitative study that relied on early childhood educators' self-report and video or audio recordings of practice, to determine if coaching had impacted the early childhood educators' daily practice. Whilst some change could be observed through the reflections and discussions in the sessions, these were not concretely measured and analysed and as such, are not definitive. It is also the case that measurements were not taken following a gap in coaching, and therefore the medium or long-term impact of coaching cannot be measured. Case study design sets out to provide a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon within a specific context which this study has achieved. However, further investigation

regarding the impact on children's language and communication skills would indicate if practice change has a direct impact on language and communication development.

### **Clinical Implications**

This study complements studies conducted internationally supporting coaching as PLD in the early childhood education sector. It has also added to existing research by considering how a tool developed in Aotearoa New Zealand specifically to support language and communication development in the early years, can be best utilised to support all children's language and communication development.

### ***SLTs in Early Childhood Education***

The results of this research clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of coaching on early childhood educators' confidence and utility of language and communication strategies. The early childhood educators acknowledged that reading material on language and communication strategies is insufficient to meet their PLD needs. The ERO report (2022) highlighted a need for better collaboration between early childhood educators and support services in order to achieve the best outcomes for all children. The results of this study demonstrate one way this may be achieved. The results show early childhood educators reporting an increase in their confidence through working closely and collaboratively with an SLT. In the final focus group, they shared explicitly about the impact coaching had on their ability to functionally utilise strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero.

This research showed that when relationships between SLTs and early childhood educators are well established, where each member of the group acknowledges the knowledge and skills of all other members, early childhood educators can build capacity to utilise language and communication strategies within their daily practice. Without meaningful relationships, coaching is less likely to be successful, as highlighted in Brebner et al. (2017), where the early childhood centres with the best outcomes also reported strong relationships with the SLT students. SLTs and managers of SLT services, should consider ensuring whakawhanaungatanga is embedded in their practice, putting relationships at the centre of working in early childhood settings, in order to maximise the impact of their service delivery for all children (Gallagher et al., 2023). This also aligns with the He Pikorua

service delivery model, which emphasises relationships at the centre of practice and should be carried throughout each tier.

**Group Coaching.** As SLT resourcing continues to be stretched, utilising group coaching is one way to impact daily practice in early childhood settings whilst balancing resourcing needs. All three early childhood educators described how working in a group supported their learning, as they had the opportunity to reflect on how their peers utilised the strategies, as well as their own learning. This is supported in the literature by Barret (2022) whose participants described the benefits of working in a dyad, as they were able to support each other in their application of communication strategies. In addition, Lofthouse (2016) investigated coaching in a primary school, and found teachers began to coach one another towards the end of the intervention. Through this shift towards a coaching culture, the study found language and literacy levels increased, not just in the targeted classrooms, but across the entire year group. If SLTs can foster a positive robust relationship with early childhood educators and their management team, they can investigate the possibility of group coaching scenarios, to build capacity across a team and support a coaching culture within that setting.

**Dosage.** There is literature that discusses dosage of coaching – how much coaching is enough to effect practice change? Law et al. (2019) acknowledged that determining how many sessions are required for each clinical scenario was complex and is influenced by a range of factors such as: the knowledge, skills and confidence of the SLT, centre management's attitude to collaborative multidisciplinary work, and attitudes of the team towards collaborative work with an SLT. The findings from this research indicate that early childhood educators wanted more sessions, and they found an hour per session was not long enough to really reflect and evaluate their practice. This mirrors the findings of Brebner et al. (2017) who found, in the centres where coaching had been successful, early childhood educators reported that the block of intervention was not long enough, and more coaching and collaborative working was requested. In addition, McDonald et al. (2015) attempted to adapt the Learning Language and Loving It (LLLI) Hanen programme to reduce the time commitment of both SLTs running the programme and early childhood educators, only to find that there was little statistically significant change to early childhood educators' communicative behaviour. Successful coaching interventions requires time (Rush & Shelden,

2011): time to build relationships and trust, time to provide education around a given strategy and time to reflect on current practices in the classroom. It cannot be rushed, but when done well, it has the potential to build confidence and capacity in early childhood educators, and when practice change occurs, this benefits all children and supports them to reach their language and communication potential.

**Te Kōrerorero.** The ability to utilise a resource that has been developed for Aotearoa New Zealand and the early childhood context in this country, meant the model of coaching could focus on factors that were truly relevant to early childhood educators in their practice. Overwhelmingly early childhood educators praised Te Kōrerorero as a resource, but warned that a written resource on its own is not enough. Early childhood educators are limited in the time they have available to them “off the floor”. When early childhood educators are not teaching, they are planning for sessions, writing learning stories and liaising with whānau. In this research, the early childhood educators expressed that they do not have the time available to read and consider how to apply a resource like Te Kōrerorero without support. In addition, the early childhood educators reported feeling intimidated by lots of reading material, and reflected on their learning styles and how practical application was preferred to support their application of new strategies. Both Rush and Shelden (2011) and Elek and Page (2019) identify consideration of adult learning models as critical in the PLD of early childhood educators, reading information alone does not necessarily support the practical application of strategies. They all recognised that coaching around the strategies in Te Kōrerorero was the vehicle to impact their practice. With this in mind, service providers and SLTs should consider how information is presented to early childhood educators, the demands on their time and the evidence regarding adult learning models. When creating new resources, it is vital to consider how this resource might be utilised, who can support its practical application, and how much time or resourcing is required to have the biggest impact on day-to-day practice.

### **Consideration for Future Research**

As this study utilised a small group, it is not possible to be representative of all early childhood educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. This study has investigated a potential model for supporting early childhood educators in their capacity to utilise language and communication strategies in their classrooms.

The first area to consider for future research is to measure the impact of coaching on children's language and communication skills within the centre. During the final focus group, the early childhood educators described differences they had observed in children's language and communication skills. However, as no data was collected for the children, it is not possible to determine if coaching had a positive influence on language and communication skills. A study measuring the impact on children has the potential to add further rigour to the coaching model utilised.

One area identified as potentially impacting the success of this research, was the SLT's previous experience working collaboratively with adults around a child. An investigation into SLTs' understanding of coaching and their confidence utilising coaching in the early childhood environment would provide further information regarding factors of success in this study.

This study took place in an affluent area, with a centre manager who was highly motivated and considered the development of speech, language and communication skills to be fundamental to learning for children across the centre. All three early childhood educators acknowledged the role of the centre manager in their ability to access coaching sessions in a quiet, distraction free environment, and how important this was to their ability to engage in the activities. So therefore, future research should consider the scalability of group coaching across a range of early childhood centres, particularly looking at feasibility of weekly coaching in low socio-economic areas. ERO's 2022 report identified the critical role of centre managers in the inclusion of disabled children in early childhood education. Considering this and the findings from this research, future research could investigate the impact of the attitudes of centre management on the success of coaching in the context of language and communication development.

Finally, investigating the impact of longer sessions or an increase in the number of strategies covered, and the stamina of early childhood educators to engage in coaching for longer should be explored. Through the final focus group, all three educators reported they wanted to continue with sessions and cover more strategies. Brebner et al. (2017) found similar results, that early childhood educators requested more weeks working with SLT students. Elek and Page (2019) identify duration as a key factor in the success of coaching. They identified that it was too challenging to be prescriptive with the dosage of coaching as

each coaching intervention needed to be personalised to the desired outcomes. They did, however, acknowledge that coaching should continue for as long as needed for the coachee to feel confident in their application of skills and strategies.

### **Final Thoughts**

In this research, group coaching was perceived as an effective method of PLD for early childhood educators. It impacted early childhood educator's confidence and their reported use of strategies to support the language and communication skills of children attending an early childhood education centre. Early childhood educators are time poor, working in a dynamic environment with limited time off the floor to engage in tools such as Te Kōrerorero. By investing time in weekly coaching, SLTs can establish meaningful relationships with their colleagues in early childhood, where knowledge is shared across the professions to build the skills needed to positively impact the language and communication development of all children. By supporting early childhood educators at the universal level, SLTs can not only foster strong relationships, but also empower early childhood educators in their ability to utilise language and communication strategies in their daily practice.



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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol – Pre-Coaching

- 1) Open with karakia –  
Kia hora te marino  
Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana  
Hei huarahi mā tātou i te rangi nei  
Aroha atu  
Aroha mai  
Tātou i ā tātou katoa  
Hui ē! Tāiki ē
  
- 2) Introductions – provide group with my own background both work and personal and then ask for them to share including how long they have been teaching/working in early childhood education. Thank them for volunteering and participating in the group. Offer kai throughout the session.

Provide an overview of the focus group session “this session is really about gathering information and knowledge and is really a discussion around the research questions I have. I have a few questions that will guide our discussion but it would be great for this to become a group discussion around a few key points. If there is a question you do not want to answer then you don’t have to. I’m going to be recording this so that I don’t miss any important pieces of information that you share and I’ll also be taking some notes. I won’t be using anyone’s names or the name of the centre in any of my notes, I’ll just be using teacher a, b,c so there’s nothing that would identify you. After today’s session I’ll be analysing the information you’ve given me which will help inform some of the coaching that we do in our sessions. Next session we will talk in more detail about Te Kōrerorero and we will work together so we can determine which strategies we want to work on over the next 9 weeks”

- 3) Perhaps we can start with you sharing a bit about your centre and centre philosophy?
- 4) What do you know about Te Kōrerorero? If they do know of it - Has it influenced any of your practice within the centre?
- 5) If they have used strategies from Te Kōrerorero which strategies have you used and how confident do you feel implementing strategies from Te Kōrerorero in your centre?
- 6) What strategies are you currently using to support tamariki language and communication development?
- 7) When observing tamariki interacting with their peers or Kaiako, what tools or strategies do you use to record and reflect on their skills and achievements?
- 8) What is your experience of coaching? One another or being coached by an external person?
- 9) What are your thoughts on coaching?
- 10) Have you had any experience of reflective practice, where you might have used video or feedback “in the moment” from a colleague around a particular practice you are trying to implement?
- 11) What is your experience of having a Speech-Language Therapist (SLT) in the centre?
- 12) Winding up and closing off “that’s been a really great discussion and I’ve learnt a lot about how you work and how things work within your centre. Thank you for sharing it has been really valuable. Before we finish up is there anything else you want to share or any questions

you have for me?

Would anyone like to close with a karakia or would you like me to?

13) Closing karakia:

Pou Hihiri

Pou Rarama

Pou o te Whakaaro

Pou o te Tangata

Pou o te Aroha

Te Pou e here nei i ā tātou

Mauri ora ki ā tātou

Haumi ē!

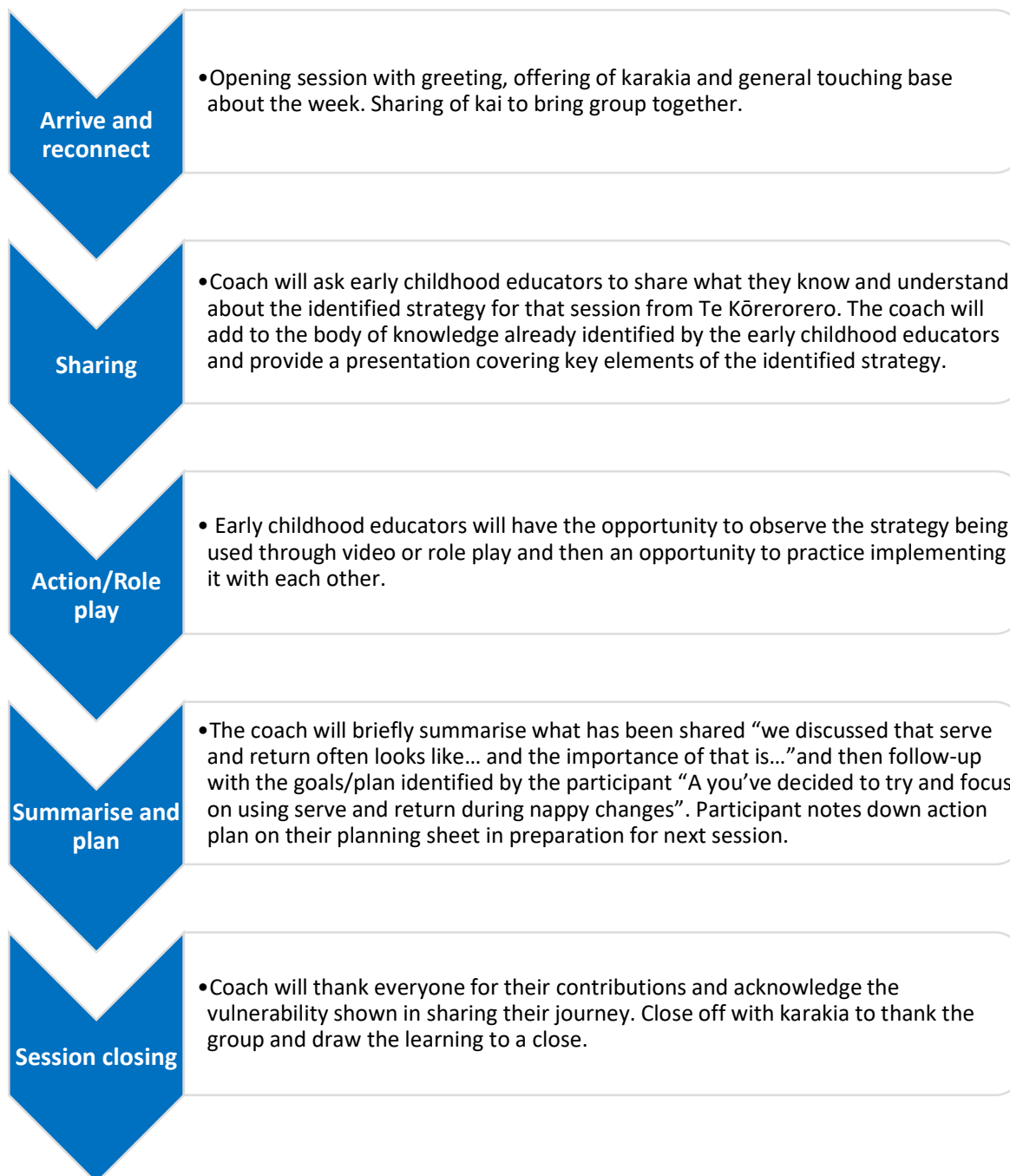
Hui ē!

Tāiki ē!!!

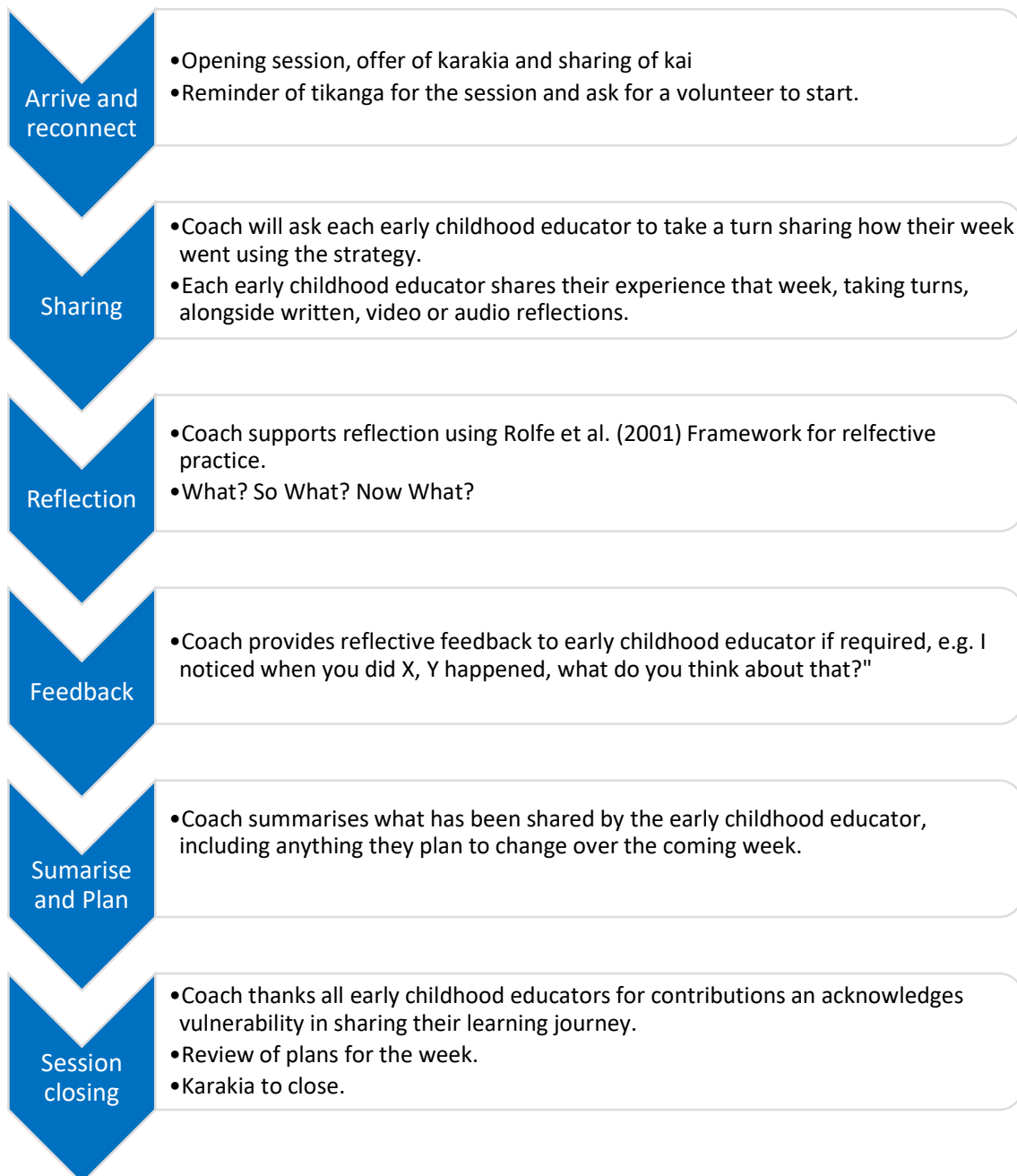
## Appendix B

### Coaching Protocol

#### Protocol for Session One of the Cycle



## Protocol for Coaching Sessions Two and Three





# Appendix C

## Content of Coaching Modules

### Coaching Module: Talking About Feelings Slides



**Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero**

Fern Maxwell, Speech Language Therapist  
Masters research Massey University

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#### Talking about feelings

- Self regulation
- Vocabulary – what words come to mind?
- Identifying emotions in others
- Behaviour as communication

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## Talking about feelings – what do you currently do?

- What feelings or emotions do you currently notice across your day?
- What strategies do you currently use to teach or discuss emotions?
- What happens when you use those?
- If you stick to simple emotional vocabulary, how would you introduce more complex feelings such as whakama, shy?

## Video examples of communicating with emotional children



## Coaching Module: Fostering Peer Communication Slides



**Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero**

Fern Maxwell, Speech Language Therapist  
Masters research Massey University

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### Fostering Peer Communication

- Successful relationships rely on language and communication skills
- Encouraging tuakana-teina relationships by encouraging the more experience child to support the less experienced child or even taking guidance and support yourselves
- Environmental design for success – calm spaces
- Planning interactions which foster collaboration and co-operation
- Providing vocabulary for conflict resolution

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## Fostering peer communication– what do you currently do?

- What supports or challenges peer relationships in your classrooms?
- What strategies do you currently use to support tamariki to build their relationships with others?
- What happens when you use those? What do you notice?
- If you explicitly practice social skills, such as turn taking, how do you do that? What works well?

## Coaching Module: Conversation and Questions Slides



### Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

Fern Maxwell, Speech Language Therapist  
Masters research Massey University

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#### Conversation and questions

- Knowing when and how to ask tamariki questions can extend and enrich a conversation
- Too many questions can be problematic...why?
- Open Vs closed questions
- How many questions are too many?
- When to comment and when to question?
- How long to wait?

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### What is the difference between commenting and questioning?

- Commenting provides tamariki with the language and vocabulary related to the task
- Questions expect responses
- Comments can introduce new vocabulary to the child
- Questions can either close down or expand the conversation

### Commenting and questioning – what do you currently do?

- What sorts of questions do you think you use in your teaching practice?
- Do you notice which questions are most useful?
- What do you know about question complexity?

## Question complexity

- Not all questions are equal!
- Closed questions are generally the easiest to understand and respond to *but* they don't extend conversations
- What is it/that and who is it/that are some of the earliest understood questions with "where is/are your..." closely following behind
- "What is X doing", "what do you like/think" and where questions out of context come next
- When is a more complex question because time words are abstract and harder to understand
- Why and how are some of the last questions to be understood

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## What about why?

- Often children can and do ask "why..." questions long before they can understand and answer them themselves...why?

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## Conversations and questions – what if...

- Comment then question e.g. while looking for a colouring pencil “I really like blue what’s your favourite colour?” – recall the rule of 5!
- Using an open question instead of a closed one e.g. do you like that story? Vs “what did you like/think/notice about that story?”
- Consider adding a sign, symbol or gesture to support tamariki understanding of question words/components
- Allow yourself to wait, give the child time to process and respond
- Use serve and return strategies to keep the flow going

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## Think of how you can support conversations and questions in your classroom

- What will you focus on this week?
- How is this different to what you usually do?
- What do you hope will happen?
- ***This week video or audio recording is going to be particularly helpful for reflection***

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## Appendix D

### Goal Planning Table for Educators

What strategy am I working on?	What I'm going to do	How I know I am doing it

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol – Post-Coaching

- 1) Open with karakia –  
Kia hora te marino  
Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana  
Hei huarahi mā tātou i te rangi nei  
Aroha atu  
Aroha mai  
Tātou i ā tātou katoa  
Hui ē! Tāiki ē
  
- 2) Introductions –Thank them for volunteering and participating in the group and their contributions so far to the research . Offer kai throughout the session.  
Provide reminder re. the focus group session “this session is a discussion around the research questions I have in relation to my research. I have a few questions that will guide our discussion but it would be great for this to become a group discussion. If there is a question you do not want to answer, then you don’t have to. I’m going to be recording this so that I don’t miss any important pieces of information that you share and I’ll also be taking some notes. I won’t be using anyone’s names or the name of the centre in any of my research data, I’ll just be using teacher a, b, c so there’s nothing that would identify you. Just a reminder to respect the privacy of the other members of the group in the focus group by not disclosing any information that is shared during our discussion with others who are not here today”.

#### Coaching focus questions:

- 3) Perhaps we can start with you sharing a bit about how you found the coaching sessions generally?
- 4) What, if anything, did you feel you gained from the coaching sessions?
- 5) How did you find coaching? How did it influence your awareness and use of the strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero?
- 6) What helped you engage with coaching?
- 7) What, if any, barriers did you find impacted your ability to engage with coaching? [consider prompting w/sickness, time of the session, length of sessions]
- 8) What was your experience of working with a speech language therapist?
- 9) Since receiving coaching, how confident do you feel using strategies associated with Te Kōrerorero?
- 10) How did the coaching sessions influence your daily practice as kaiako?
- 11) Could you describe how you have used one or more of the strategies in your daily practice since receiving coaching?
- 12) What did your team gain from participation in this research?
- 13) Was there any other support you would have liked or would like in the future?

#### Te Kōrerorero focus questions:

- 14) How useful did you find Te Kōrerorero and the strategies associated with it?

- 15) Would you recommend Te Kōrerorero to your colleagues to support their practice. What would you tell them?
- 16) Was there any other support you would have liked or would like in the future?
- 17) Is there anything else you wish to add?
- 18) Winding up and closing off “that’s been a really great discussion and I really appreciate your feedback on the sessions covering what you feel worked well and things you think could change. Thank you for sharing it has been really valuable. Before we finish up is there anything else you want to share or any questions you have for me?  
Would anyone like to close with a karakia or would you like me to?
  
- 19) Closing karakia:  
Pou Hihiri  
Pou Rarama  
Pou o te Whakaaro  
Pou o te Tangata  
Pou o te Aroha  
Te Pou e here nei i ā tātou  
Mauri ora ki ā tātou  
Haumi ē!  
Hui ē!  
Tāiki ē!!!

## Appendix F

### Codebook

**“RQ1: What current principles, tools or strategies are early childhood educators using to notice and respond to tamariki skills and support needs?”**

Global themes	Organising themes	Codes	Definition	Quotes
Noticing			Ways kaiako notice or take note of tamariki oral language	
		Awareness of Te Kōrerorero	Kaiako awareness of Te Kōrerorero and the resources associated with it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“ I remember when I first read this, I haven't read it recently. Yeah, it's it seems pretty good. As I said, haven't gone through it recently.” “ I read it a few months ago and I must admit I haven't revisited it,”</li> <li>“ So yeah But I did read most of it. All the bits that I Thought applied to babies. Yeah, yeah.”</li> </ul>
		Awareness of SLTs and SLCN	Kaiako own awareness of SLCN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I don't really have any experience. Most of the strategies, especially that last comment, but I haven't. [had experience with an SLT]”</li> </ul>
	<b>Documenting</b>		The way in which kaiako document or note down tamariki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Some children will not talk? “</li> <li>“we've got iPads and a Phone that we can use”</li> </ul>

		language and communication styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we've quite often record Video clips and also photos that we use in the learning stories and daily journals that come out.”</li> </ul>
	Digital technology	Photos, videos, learning stories shared to Storypark or similar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “She likes doing yoga session and we take photos and write down her voice, so we also shared with the speech therapist when she comes.”</li> </ul>
Teaching principles		The principles or kaupapa that underpins the teaching	
	<b>Child centred planning</b>	Kaiako consideration of the needs and interests of tamariki as part of their planning or teaching practice.	
	Child's interests	Using what the child is interested in to facilitate learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So we have workshop every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday just depends on children's interests”</li> <li>• “You know, we got to support her. How to describe the situation and when we found the girls interests, She likes doing yoga session “</li> </ul>
	Getting to know children	Kaiako spend time building relationships with children to facilitate their learning and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we've been modifying that form to try and really get to know that child, as an individual”</li> </ul>
	<b>Kaupapa</b>	The principles and values of the early childhood centre which guide their daily practice.	
	Philosophy	The philosophy which the centre works under	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we are Reggio Emilia centre”</li> </ul>
	Strengths based	Believing that all children can achieve with the right support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We see all children as being capable and we want them to be capable and confident and engaged even with the babies you see a lot of capable children. There's a lot that they can Do and there's A lot that they can convey Yeah, without speech”</li> </ul>
	Teaching approaches	The way in which the kaiako plan and teach tamariki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we plan workshop[s] for them, a group of children depends on their you know, their strengths and weakness, and we</li> </ul>

			also consider their friendship and their interest, so we [the children] can learn in in the workshop”
Tools and Strategies		SLT related tools or strategies identified by the participants in relation to RQ1	
	<b>Facilitating language</b>	Language enrichment strategies which support the development of oral language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “so we can model that and [say] “hey, how about you can say we can play later. I go find something else [to play], we come back to the play later” model the language to give the idea what they can do.”</li> </ul>
	Commenting	Utilising the 4:1 rule of commenting rather than questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we’re supposed to comment three things and then ask them the question”</li> </ul>
	Extending language	Adding words on to tamariki utterance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “they might say ball and say, yes, it’s a yellow ball you know, so just expanding where we can”</li> </ul>
	Listening	Listening and observing behaviour or communication attempts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In babies we do a lot of listening first”</li> </ul>
	Modelling language	An adult providing examples of language structures that can be used as part of play or engaging with children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “so they’re they’re listening to vocab that’s at a higher level than what they’re able to speak,”</li> <li>• “You know, we got to support her [language and communication]. How to describe the situation”</li> </ul>
	Peer role model	Using peers or utilising tuakana-teina relationships to foster learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So we like [read] stories about what he can do and what he can’t do and everyone joins in. They all gather around, then we read it together. They look at the pictures and they know what [is a good choice] And there’s like a big like “don’t throw rocks” and you know they know the story “</li> </ul>
	Sharing books	Sharing books, reading or using books to facilitate language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “And we read with them regularly and extend on their language that way, so they’re, they’re listening to vocab that’s at a higher level than what they’re able to speak, but it</li> </ul>

	Slowing down	Reducing rate of speech or adapting communication style to support tamariki to understand, follow instructions or increase their expressive language	<p>allows us to have those interactions with them and yeah, explain that way.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “but what I do with one of them because like he has some language, but it all gets muddled. So, I just say each word to him and he'll repeat it back and then I will help him with what he wants to [do]. You know what? Because I know that if he's doing a jacket, obviously he wants me to help him put up yeah. So I say can, you, and he will say it.”</li> </ul>
<b>Social connections</b>		Building of skills and knowledge around social interactions between tamariki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “different things we work on like, yeah, building kindness”</li> </ul>
	Role play	Rehearsing, practicing or role playing in relation to social communication or a language script	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Similar strategy is something like a puppet show... like the story when someone is making bad choices. We create the scenario we have facing like the best friend situation we create the scenario where we play together talking to them so in this song,”</li> </ul>
	Modelling play	Modelling play opportunities to facilitate communication repair between children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we create the scenario where we play together talking to them so in this song, it's like the model and also the visual support to show children what we can do in these scenarios, so when they meet the same situation next time, they probably will know what they can do”</li> </ul>
<b>Visual supports</b>		Use of signs, pictures, words, photographs to support tamariki understanding or use of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “the other strategy we use to support children, oral languages using the visual support”</li> </ul>
	Child specific visual support	Social story or visual schedule that is specific to one child's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We have some visual stories for like one of our learners who have some sort of behavioural issue. “</li> <li>• “And it's a first step I think, it has the four colours on the piece of paper who? When? What? And the other one?”</li> </ul>

Photographs

Photos taken or used to facilitate language

- “I am collecting the stories, but some children they just don't know what to say. So, I show them the photos we take before the trip.”
- “So, they see the photos like jog their memories,”

Sign

NZSL or other signs/gestures

- “I joined the meeting with the grandmother she teaches me how to use the sign language for stop and look, it's in the bush, frog. “
- “We have a student whose grandmother was Deaf and she comes in and she signs to him”
- “I haven't seen him signing yet but he seems to understand”.



**RQ2: “What are early childhood educators’ perceptions of coaching in the application of Te Kōrerorero?”**

GLOBAL THEMES	ORGANISING THEMES	CODES	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<b>Barriers to success</b>	<b>Actual barriers</b>		(-) Barriers that prevented or challenged kaiako ability to engage or be successful with coaching.	
			(-) Barriers that kaiako actually experienced whilst participating in the study.	
		Not as practical	(-) Identifying that some strategies were less practical than initially thought.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I feel like some strategies are more practical than others.</i></li> </ul>
		Recording challenges	(-) Barriers to recording audio and video to support reflective practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sometimes it was tricky to have a device when you when you thought you wanted the device you.</i></li> </ul>
		Time as a barrier	(-) Time as a barrier to successful coaching or sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We could have perhaps had slightly longer sessions maybe an hour 15.</i></li> <li>• <i>maybe more time for the discussion because that was really valuable</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Perceived barriers</b>		(-) Kaiako pre-coaching perceptions of aspects that may make coaching challenging or difficult to engage with	
		Worried about volume of information	(-) Kaiako concerned that coaching will contain jargon and become a barrier to implementing strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yeah, it's it's about theory. It's about a book. Teach you the system it's really hard for me to learn you need to take time. A lot of time and a lot of experience</i></li> <li>• <i>I was worried about so many theory and information, and like the educational style [before beginning coaching]</i></li> </ul>

<b>Facilitators of success</b>		<p>(+) Aspects of coaching that facilitated success for kaiako from their point of view.</p>	
	Approachable coach	<p>(+) Coaches attitude as a facilitator to coaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Also, because of you your personality and I found that, like, made it go well, that you're approachable and stuff.</i></li> </ul>
	Kaiako led	<p>(+) Kaiako choose and led the content of the coaching to ensure it was applicable to their day-to-day work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And also at the beginning of the sessions we decide which steps is we are going to talk about</i></li> <li>• <i>It's also a good way to engage in the process because that's the thing we want to talk about.</i></li> <li>• <i>think also, that letting us choose what evidence we bring,</i></li> </ul>
	Motivating content	<p>(+) Content of coaching was motivating for participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We all think that will help. Will help for our practise.</i></li> </ul>
	Opportunity to reflect	<p>(+) Kaiako were provided with opportunities to reflect on their use of a strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I like how after we were introduced to a strategy the next session, we got to focus on reflecting like fully reflect</i></li> </ul>
	Quiet space	<p>(+) Quiet space as a facilitator that supports coaching success.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Time and space. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. If you do it on site, definitely cannot happen because the children you will come to you all the time.</i></li> </ul>
	Time as a facilitator	<p>(+) Time as a facilitator for successful coaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Definitely being given time away from our classrooms because it would be very hard, even if we were using a little side room or you know where there's noise and distractions, given a nice quiet space where we can work uninterrupted with you, has been huge. Given the time.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Pre-coaching perceptions of coaching</b>		<p>Kaiako understanding and knowledge of coaching as an</p>	

		approach to supporting oral language.	
<b>Kaiako definitions of coaching</b>	Coaching as written feedback	What kaiako believed coaching to be prior to participating in research (BC) The coachee receives written feedback from the coach to influence change in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>she'll type it out and then show it to us, and whether we agree or not. Like, [if not] we can, yeah, have that discussion</i></li> <li>• <i>she also take notes for me, make very clear information there so I know what I can do for to make it better next time</i></li> </ul>
	Colleague observation	(BC) Kaiako describe coaching as coaching or observation of kaiako in practice by a colleague or team leader with the view to provide feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>We don't really do it like, so formal we don't really say, oh, what can we do next time? But like passing, like that teacher will see what we're doing, "I like what you've done over here", like just little comments like that</i></li> <li>• <i>we record our group times, but we reflect on our group time after we've done our group time. Yeah. So we do it with two teachers we have like a table with a list of the children at group time and have three columns activity, peer and teacher, like how they interacted</i></li> </ul>
	Informal feedback	(BC) Kaiako understand coaching as receiving informal collegial feedback on a task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>just little comments like that or like how we like help redirect the child to do something else.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Kaiako experiences of coaching</b>		Kaiako experiences of coaching prior to the research study commencing.	
	Knowledge of coaching	(BC) Kaiako had no previous experience or knowledge of coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I didn't know coaching before I was in [early childhood education] before I came here</i></li> </ul>

	Video feedback	(BC) use of video to provide feedback on a strategy or intervention used by kaiako	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[referring to a previous role] When I've been working with a student, she's recorded it, and then the students gone back to class and we've gone over it together and she's made suggestions and things like that.</i></li> </ul>
	SLT input not available	(BC) input from SLTs or any coaching not always available to kaiako outside of the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>and [when I worked] in primary school, I would have loved more of it. It just wasn't available, anything to to make it easier for you to assist the child, that's available.</i></li> </ul>
	Observing therapists	(BC) Kaiako understanding coaching as observing SLT session with a child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>speech therapist will decide if he needs a one-on-one coaching or just a little bit of assistance is it work like that?</i></li> <li>• <i>session with the therapist and the child, and then she would leave some notes for me to to work on in between the visits</i></li> </ul>
<b>Post coaching perceptions of coaching</b>		(AC) Kaiako perception of coaching after they have participated in 8 coaching sessions with an SLT.	
	<b>Impressions of coaching content</b>		
	Collective reflection and learning	(AC) Learning from each other through the coaching process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Even if you've had a little bit of experience before, like like I have still things you can pick up</i></li> <li>• <i>So that I can also try their strategies as well you know so its like it's nice that we all chose different ones so you can see how, when and how practical it was.</i></li> </ul>
	Practical	(AC) Coaching was practical and functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>a lot of good content to take back and use practically.</i></li> <li>• <i>Very practical</i></li> <li>• <i>Very practical and I can use it straight away in my practise.</i></li> </ul>

	Good content	(AC) Kaiako shared that the information provided was good/positive/useful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yeah, that's. I think that's one of the key benefits of the coaching you get practical things that you can walk out of the room and try straight away</i></li> <li>• <i>a lot of useful information from the sessions</i></li> <li>• <i>learned a lot of like useful and hands on solution.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Kaiako impressions of impact coaching had on their practice</b>			
	Gained knowledge	(AC) Kaiako acknowledge their increased knowledge or awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I haven't worked with speech therapist before, but I learned a lot of hands on solutions</i></li> <li>• <i>I'm like you know, gaining knowledge.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Worthwhile</b>		Kaiako viewed coaching as a positive and worthwhile use of their time.	
	Beneficial	Kaiako identify the benefit of the sessions and strategies to their tamariki and teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And actually, if you recommend this book to your colleague, you you're not sure if they can sitting down and take the time to read the book. So it's quite useful if we can have a coaching like this.</i></li> </ul>
	Great positive	has an overall positive attitude towards coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I would have loved more of it.</i></li> <li>• <i>I really enjoyed it.</i></li> <li>• <i>Thought it was great.</i></li> <li>• <i>I'd recommend that [Te Kōrerorero] even more if that was supported by the coaching because that brings it to life, yeah.</i></li> </ul>

	Valuable	Coaching described as valuable to kaiako	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Well, we just have to clone you Fern because we need one of you to do all these sessions at every centre.</i></li> <li>• <i>I think it would be very really valuable for anybody in this setting to have access to coaching sessions like this</i></li> <li>• <i>But that's why I think it would be so valuable for everybody, especially when they're fairly new to the setting to go through some coaching like this,</i></li> </ul>
<b>Extension</b>		Ways in which kaiako felt coaching could be extended or improved.	
	More strategies	Would like further coaching on new strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>more of the the strategies</i></li> </ul>
	Opportunity to observe	Kaiako would like the opportunity to observe strategies being used in the classroom as part of the coaching protocol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>also in many moments I wish someone can modelling the solutions to me you know</i></li> </ul>

**Key:**

BC= before coaching

AC= after coaching

(+) = facilitator

(-) = barrier

**RQ3: “How Does Coaching in the Application of Te Kōrerere, Influence Early Childhood Teachers’ Daily practice, Confidence and Awareness When Interacting with Teachers and Children?”**

GLOBAL THEMES	ORGANISING THEMES	CODES	DEFINITION	QUOTES
Impact on kaiako and their daily practice	Behavioural changes		Kaiako experiences of the impact of coaching on themselves and their practice	
			Kaiako notice ways in which they have changed their communicative behaviour	
		Being intentional	Kaiako report being intentional and purposeful with their communication with tamariki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...Trying harder to make sure I'm not using the questions too much using using more comments.</li> <li>• I plan to be more intentional in my interactions with children during conflicts.</li> </ul>
		Consistency	Kaiako identify the importance of being consistent in their use of strategies and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By fostering consistency in our approach, we can collectively support the emotional well-being and social development of the children in our care.</li> <li>• Became more consistent in describing and slowing down during conflicts.</li> </ul>
		Child led	An identification that being child led resulted in better outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on reflection identified that the first instance was more adult led and the second attempt to introduce the strategy was more child led and as such was far more successful.</li> </ul>
	Capacity building		Kaiako identify ways in which coaching	

<p>Increasing awareness of communication strategies</p>	<p>strengthened their skills, instincts and abilities.</p> <p>Kaiako report an increased awareness of communication strategies and how to apply them in the classroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>you realise actually too many questions actually put the pressure on the children and actually you stop them thinking</i></li> <li>• <i>I have learned that it is crucial to prioritize addressing children's emotions first before delving into the specifics of the conflict.</i></li> <li>• <i>Preschool – I have a tool in my hand continue to acknowledge and affirm, using the teina-tukana model children feel proud to have responsibility.</i></li> </ul>
<p>Reflecting on communication style</p>	<p>Kaiako able to reflect on their communication style and strategies with their tamariki</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Made me question the way that I was approaching some things and maybe look more closely and consider more closely the way I was communicating with the babies.</i></li> <li>• <i>Moving forward, I aim to continue using effective pauses and commenting strategies during conversations with children.</i></li> <li>• <i>I'd like to try it with children who aren't so forthcoming with their vocab.</i></li> </ul>
<p>Facilitating the environment</p>	<p>Kaiako acknowledge their role in creating communication rich environments for tamariki</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reflecting on this session, I realize the importance of creating calm spaces within our environment to facilitate successful relationships.</i></li> <li>• <i>Tots reported that the strategy of modelling and scaffolding has "opened up how I view and set-up activities" ..</i></li> </ul>



	Improving communication with tamariki	Coaching help kaiako improve their communication skills with tamariki.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And it helped me a lot when I was in a group meeting or in a workshop and I can get more voices from children.</i></li> <li>• <a href="#">Tots – nappy change now I can comment and increase conversation and increase communication</a></li> </ul>
	Fluency and automaticity	Kaiako implement strategies automatically, with fluency and without much thought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>after a few weeks, you find you're starting to automatically do the things that you've been practising</i></li> </ul>
	Increasing confidence	Kaiako increase confidence using language and communication strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I feel much more confident as well.</i></li> <li>• <i>Much more confident. I would have liked to have carried on and done all of them</i></li> <li>• <a href="#">There was a notable increase in confidence from the teachers with regards to the strategies they were now using in their practice.</a></li> </ul>
<b>Impact on interactions with tamariki</b>		Kaiako share what strategies they have used since participating in coaching and how they've used them.	
<b>Language strategies</b>		Kaiako describe strategies specific to facilitating language success in their tamariki	
	Using commenting to facilitate language	Kaiako use the strategy of commenting to facilitate language in Tamariki they work with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>That's what I was saying with the comments as well because when I was doing the nappies sometimes I would just say oh you're having a good day? Like the first thing because obviously I've seen them running around smiling, but then like now, like I can comment on like I saw you out there I saw you were doing this, I saw you playing. How are you feeling today? or I can you know ask a broader question.</i></li> </ul>

- Comments and question a “really good strategy” with modelling a child was able to create new vocabulary. Noticing a child’s language is increasing and is forming sentences.

	Increasing language use	Kaiako increase their use of language with tamariki.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>And trying to bring more language into our interaction.</i></li> <li>• <b>increased vocabulary complexity</b></li> </ul>
	Effective question asking	Kaiako more aware of how they use questions with tamariki.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Trying harder to make sure I'm not using the questions too much</i></li> <li>• <b>I discovered that by changing the way I asked questions and including a video as a visual prompt, the child became more relaxed, leading to increased language output.</b></li> </ul>
	<b>Communication facilitating strategies</b>	Kaiako identify broader, general strategies that facilitated language and communication	
	Slowing down	Kaiako slow down their interactions to be responsive to tamariki needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>So after this session I realised [I] need to slow down and take the time to discuss the emotions and feelings with children to help them express their feelings</i></li> <li>• <b>For example, I plan to comment on a child's response to a question, such as saying, "I saw you playing with E on the monkey bars... [pause]," and then wait to see if the child expands on the topic.</b></li> <li>• <b>I want to pause to think of open-ended questions more practice and increase success.</b></li> </ul>

	Using visual prompts	<p>Kaiako use visual strategies or prompts to support the understanding and use of language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I use the visual support before the discussion so they can see how it looks like.</i></li> <li>• incorporating signs, symbols, or gestures to support children's understanding of question words.</li> <li>• Babies – increased use of signs and used visuals with some success</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social and emotional support strategies</b></p>	<p>Kaiako share their use of strategies that support and facilitate social and emotional skills in tamariki</p>	
	Utilising tuakana-teina relationships	<p>Kaiako provide examples of ways they use Tuakana-Teina relationships to support social interaction with children</p>

achieve a goal, tots has seen that this can be applied to a wide variety of activities

Expressing feelings

Kaiako use strategies to support tamariki to express their feelings

- *So after this session I realised...take the time to discuss the emotions and feelings with children to help them express their feelings*
- *Instead of immediately seeking the cause of the conflict, I will take the time to acknowledge their emotions and help them express their feelings*
- *Through modelling and scaffolding how peers can use each other as supports and collaborate to achieve a goal, tots has seen that this can be applied to a wide variety of activities and sessions resulting in tamariki saying things such as "I know how to share" and giving each other a high five when they achieve their end goal.*

Improving conflict resolution

Kaiako use strategies to improve conflict resolution with tamariki.

- *So now anytime I confront with children's conflict, I can naturally ask how I can see you are so sad. I can see you so angry. Yeah. And then you know you can. You can literally see them calm down and we can talk about what happened.*
- *providing them with vocabulary for conflict resolution equips them with the tools needed to navigate challenges and maintain positive relationships.*
- *Tamariki became calm after discussion/ Another felt embarrassed. I felt I could understand their feelings and put myself in their shoes.*

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are calmer because I'm accepting their feelings and emotions then we can resolve the conflict.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sharing knowledge</b></p>	<p>Kaiako consider how knowledge learnt in coaching sessions is shared across the group and the centre.</p>	
<p>Sharing amongst research group</p>	<p>Kaiako coach or share with one another throughout the research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>it's really valuable to see the perspective of other people as well.</i></li> <li>• Very exciting to hear the teachers collectively talk about sharing their thoughts during break times, fostering the coaching to continue outside of the research sessions.</li> <li>• "Hearing the experience of others helped influence my practice"</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities to share to wider group.</p>	<p>Kaiako identify ways they share or intend to share their learning across the centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I will share what we've been doing if they asked me like directly like you know outside I was sharing with another teacher, shes like how's it going? Then I was like talking through all the weeks we focus on this and then on this and changed this and then so that's also another way I've been sharing.</i></li> </ul>

- *if you were doing another coaching session to figure out how the sharing would work for the centre and maybe make sure time is given for it to happen because otherwise we get swamped*
- I also intend to share my insights with my colleagues, encouraging them to prioritize discussing feelings before diving into the details of conflicts.

**Key:**

*Black* – transcript from focus groups

Green – written reflections from Preschool

Blue – researcher field notes and reflections

## Appendix G

### Massey University Ethics Approval



22/03/2023

Dear: Fern Maxwell Jones

**Re: Ethics Application - OM2 23/05 - Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

**Ohu Matatika 2** at their meeting held on **Thursday, 23 February 2023**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Craig Johnson  
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise  
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840  
E [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz); [animalethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:animalethics@massey.ac.nz); [gte@massey.ac.nz](mailto:gte@massey.ac.nz)

## Appendix H

### Information Sheets and Consent Forms

#### Early Childhood Centre Information Sheet

##### **Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero**

##### **Early childhood centre information sheet**

#### **Invitation**

Kia ora, I am a speech-language therapist in your local community who is completing a master's degree through Massey University. My project came about because of the work I've been carrying out in early childhood centres and my passion for ensuring all tamariki who need it, receive support for their speech, language, and communication development. I am interested in supporting kaiako to implement a tool created by the Ministry of Education called Te Kōrerorero. I would like to work closely with one centre and their kaiako to participate in a coaching programme focused on Te Kōrerorero and the strategies it uses. I am inviting your centre to consider participating in this project. This will be a collaborative approach where we will learn from each other about enhancing oral language (in whichever language that may be), for tamariki at the early childhood centre.

Benefits to your centre would be the opportunity for free professional development for three members of your team, as well as the opportunity to support and facilitate tamariki to reach their potential.

#### **The project plan**

- The project will involve three kaiako from the same early childhood centre and myself as the speech-language therapist/researcher. The project will take place through four phases over the course of one term. The attached table (Attach Table 2) shows a breakdown of each phase, week-by-week.
- *Phase 1 (weeks 1-2) – Understand – Explore kaiako use of current communication strategies, understanding and knowledge of Te Kōrerorero and coaching.* We will come together and participate in a focus group. This will be an opportunity to get to know each other, share our journeys, decide how we can work best together and discuss topics related to the research. This is expected to take a maximum of 60 minutes.
- In week 2, we will work as a group to discuss Te Kōrerorero and how it might apply to your daily practice. We will select 3 strategies from Te Kōrerorero to focus coaching on over the coming weeks.
- *Phases 2 & 3 (weeks 3-9) – 2 weeks on each strategy.*
  - *Phase 2 – Collaborate – Meet together to share current knowledge and learn more about the strategy identified in Te Kōrerorero.* We will discuss how you might use the strategy over the coming week. I will provide you with coaching around the implementation of these ideas.
  - *Phase 3 – Noticing – Meet together after a week of using the identified strategy from Te Kōrerorero.* As a group, everyone will share how they implemented the strategy and receive coaching feedback. You will be asked to document what you noticed and any thoughts and feelings that came with this. This might be through the use of a



journal, video recording yourself using the strategy and/or tamariki learning stories. You will reflect further on your use of the identified strategy after the coaching session.

- Journals, audio recordings and notes taken from the meetings and coaching sessions will be considered data sources and with your consent will be collected and later analysed as part of this research.
- Video recordings or learning stories used to demonstrate how you have used strategies that you have learnt, will not be considered data sources and will not be collected.
- *Phase 4 (weeks 10-11) – Reflecting – Final focus group.* I will ask you for your perspectives on the usefulness of Te Kōrerorero and perceptions of coaching as a professional development tool.

Each meeting is expected to last for 60 minutes. It is anticipated that this will take place either during the working day if you are able to be released or in the evening. This will be clarified and negotiated with your centre and you before the project begins.

The kaiako information sheet explains that kaiako have the choice to participate or not to participate in the project and that it will not influence their relationship with their employer or with Massey University.

#### **Additional information**

- Throughout this project I will keep a journal of my own thoughts and feelings relating to the project. This will not contain any identifiable information about your centre, kaiako or any of the tamariki.
- Focus groups will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Prior to the focus group, kaiako will be asked to provide some basic information about themselves including gender, ethnicity and your role in the team, for summative descriptive purposes only. It will not be possible for you to withdraw your data from the focus group discussions.
- When audio recording, I will ensure everyone involved is comfortable. I will stop immediately if any participant shows reluctance to continue.
- Kaiako may share learning stories and/or video recordings of themselves using the strategies during coaching sessions. **These will not be stored by the researcher and no information relating to tamariki will be used as research data.** Whānau, parents and/or caregivers have been provided with information sheets for the collection of this information. Tamariki who do not have parental consent or who do not provide their own agreement to be video recorded, cannot be used for the purpose of this project.
- Information gathered (through interviews; meeting observations, audio recordings, and notes; emails related to the project; reflective journals) will be analysed by myself, in consultation with my research supervisors.
- The results of the study will be presented in my Masters' thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at conferences. The data collected will be kept anonymous.
- Any information will be stored on password protected computers. The only people with access will be myself and my supervisors. Consent forms will be stored separately. Information will be kept for 5 years after the completion of the final publication. When disposed of, the University confidential waste service will be used.
- At the conclusion of the study, I would like to meet with you, and the centre team, to talk about the findings. I will also provide you with a written summary.

**Contact Information**

My supervisors for this research are

Associate Professor Sally Clendon ([S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136537) and

Dr Elizabeth Doell ([E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz](mailto:E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136531).

You are welcome to contact them to discuss this project.

**Ethics Approval**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application OM2 23/05. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43347, email: [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for considering this request.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss this project further

Fern Maxwell

Master's student

██████████@massey.ac.nz

██████████

## Early Childhood Centre Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
TE RURA O TE MATAURANGA

Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching:  
An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

### Early childhood centre consent form

I have read the information sheet provided and have had the opportunity to answer questions. I understand that I can ask further questions throughout the study and that the centre, staff and whānau are able to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the completion of data collection. I understand that any data provided in a focus group will not be able to be removed.

I agree/ do not agree to centre staff participating in the study as outlined in the information sheet.

I agree/do not agree to the study taking place at XXX early childhood centre.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Early Childhood Educators Information Sheet

### Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

#### Kaiako information sheet

#### Invitation

Kia ora, I am a speech-language therapist in your local community who is completing a Master's degree through Massey University. My project came about because of the work I have carried out in early childhood centres and my passion for ensuring all tamariki who need it, receive support for their speech, language and communication development. I am interested in supporting kaiako to implement a tool created by the Ministry of Education called Te Kōrerorero. I would like to work closely with one centre and their kaiako to participate in a coaching programme focusing on Te Kōrerorero and the strategies it uses. Your centre manager has agreed that this research can take place at your centre. I am inviting you to consider participating. This will be a collaborative approach where we will learn from each other about enhancing oral language (in whichever language that may be) for tamariki at the early childhood centre.

#### The project plan

The project will involve three kaiako from the same early childhood centre and myself as the speech-language therapist/researcher. The project will take place through four phases over the course of one term. The attached table (Attach Table 2) shows a breakdown of each phase, week-by-week.

- *Phase 1 (weeks 1-2) – Understand – Explore kaiako use of current communication strategies, understanding and knowledge of Te Kōrerorero and coaching.* We will come together and participate in a focus group. This will be an opportunity to get to know each other, share our journeys, decide how we can work best together and discuss topics related to the research. This is expected to take a maximum of 60 minutes.
- In week 2, we will work as a group to discuss Te Kōrerorero and how it might apply to your daily practice. We will select 3 strategies from Te Kōrerorero to focus coaching on over the coming weeks.
- *Phases 2 & 3 (weeks 3-9) – 2 weeks on each strategy.*
  - *Phase 2 – Collaborate – Meet together to share current knowledge and learn more about the strategy identified in Te Kōrerorero.* We will discuss how you might use the strategy over the coming week. I will provide you with coaching around the implementation of these ideas.
  - *Phase 3 – Noticing – Meet together after a week of using the identified strategy from Te Kōrerorero.* As a group, everyone will share how they implemented the strategy and receive coaching feedback. You will be asked to document what you noticed and any thoughts and feelings that came with this. This might be through the use of a journal, video recording yourself using the strategy and/or tamariki learning stories. You will reflect further on your use of the identified strategy after the coaching session.
  - Journals, audio recordings and notes taken from the meetings and coaching sessions will be considered data sources and with your consent will be collected and later analysed as part of this research.

- Video recordings or learning stories used to demonstrate how you have used strategies that you have learnt, will not be considered data sources and will not be collected.
- *Phase 4 (weeks 10-11) – Reflecting – Final focus group.* I will ask you for your perspectives on the usefulness of Te Kōrerorero and perceptions of coaching as a professional development tool.

Each meeting is expected to last for 60 minutes. It is anticipated that this will take place either during the working day if you are able to be released or in the evening. This will be clarified and negotiated with your centre and you before the project begins.

#### **Additional information**

- Throughout this project I will keep a journal of my own thoughts and feelings relating to the project. This will not contain any identifiable information about you, your centre or any of the tamariki.
- Focus groups will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Prior to the focus group, you will be asked to provide some basic information about yourself including gender, ethnicity and your role in the team, for summative descriptive purposes only. It will not be possible for you to withdraw your data from the focus group discussions.
- When audio recording, I will ensure everyone involved is comfortable. I will stop immediately if any participant shows reluctance to continue.
- You may share learning stories and/or video recordings of yourself using the strategies during coaching sessions. These will not be stored by the researcher and no information relating to tamariki will be used as research data. Whānau, parents and/or caregivers have been provided with information sheets and consent forms for the collection of this information. Prior to video recording taking place, you will check that the child is still happy to be recorded. Video recordings of Kaiako and tamariki interactions will only be used for the project if the parents have given consent. Tamariki who are able to fully understand the request to video record them should have an opportunity to give their assent or agreement.
- Information gathered (through interviews; meeting observations, audio recordings, and notes; emails related to the project; reflective journals) will be analysed by myself, in consultation with my research supervisors.
- The results of the study will be presented in my Masters' thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at conferences. The data collected will be kept anonymous.
- Any information will be stored on password protected computers. The only people with access will be myself and my supervisors. Consent forms will be stored separately. Information will be kept for 5 years after the completion of the final publication.
- At the conclusion of the study, I would like to meet with you, and the centre team, to talk about the findings. I will also provide you with a written summary.

#### **Your Rights**

In following ethical procedures for research, I reassure you that you are under no obligation to consent to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- Withdraw from the study at any stage prior to data analysis commencing, however, your data from any focus groups you participated in will remain;
- Decline to answer any question during the focus group or conversations;

- You may decline answering a question or giving a comment at any stage;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this project. Your decision will not influence your relationship with your employer or with Massey University.

### **Contact Information**

My supervisors for this research are

Associate Professor Sally Clendon ([S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136537) and

Dr Elizabeth Doell ([E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz](mailto:E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136531).

You are welcome to contact them to discuss this project.

### **Ethics Approval**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application OM2 23/05. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43347, email: [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for considering this request.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss this project further

Fern Maxwell

Master's student

██████████@massey.ac.nz

██████████

## Early Childhood Educators Consent Form



### Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

#### Kaiako participant consent form

I have read the Information Sheet and I understand the information included. I have had the details of the study explained to me and any questions have been answered. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate. I understand that I am able to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the commencement of data analysis apart from the focus group data which will need to remain.

1. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group in the focus group interview by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.
2. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

*Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the study group. There are risks in taking part in research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.*

3. I agree to the focus group interview being audio-recorded.
4. I agree to participate in the study and share other data under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

#### Declaration by Participant:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.

[print full name]

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Parent Information Sheet



### Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

#### Parent information sheet

##### Invitation

Kia ora, I am a speech-language therapist in your local community who is currently studying part-time through Massey University. My project came about because of the work I have carried out in early childhood centres and my passion for ensuring all tamariki who need it, receive support for speech, language and communication development. I have been learning about the different ways speech-language therapists work in early childhood centres and professional development for kaiako around speech, language and communication needs. This project is being overseen by two supervisors at Massey University, Associate Professor Sally Clendon and Dr Elizabeth Doell.

##### What is the purpose of this research?

I have approached your child's centre and asked kaiako to participate in an 8-week coaching programme focused on a tool from the Ministry of Education called Te Kōrerorero and the strategies it uses to support children's communication. More information about Te Kōrerorero is available here: (<https://tewhariki.tki.org.nz/en/teaching-strategies-and-resources/communication/talking-together/>).

##### Why have you received this invitation?

Your child's centre and kaiako have agreed to be involved in this project and this information sheet and consent form are being shared with you. In the coaching sessions, kaiako will be invited to reflect on their use of the strategies. As part of this reflection, they may wish to share examples of children's learning stories they have written and/or videos of themselves talking with children. **I am writing to ask your permission for kaiako to share videos of themselves talking with your child and/or your child's learning stories. These will not be collected by the researcher and analysed as data; they will only be used to support teacher reflections during the coaching sessions.** Kaiako will check with your child that they are happy to be video recorded and will be sensitive to any behaviour that indicates they do not want to be video recorded and stop immediately. If any child does not want to be video recorded then they will not be included in the project.

##### Are there any potential benefits from taking part in this research?

There are unlikely to be any direct benefits to the children participating; however, there are expected benefits for the kaiako participating and the skills they develop through participating in this research.

##### Your Rights

In following ethical procedures for research, I reassure you that you are under no obligation to consent to participate. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time;



- Withdraw your child's participation at any time;
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this project. Your decision will not influence your relationship with your child's centre or with Massey University.

#### Contact Information

My supervisors for this research are

Associate Professor Sally Clendon ([S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.Clendon@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136537) and

Dr Elizabeth Doell ([E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz](mailto:E.H.Doell@massey.ac.nz); Ph: 092136531).

You are welcome to contact them to discuss this project.

#### Ethics Approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, Application OM2 23/05. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 2, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43347, email [humanethics2@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics2@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for considering this request.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss this project further

Fern Maxwell

Master's student

██████████@massey.ac.nz

██████████

## Parent Consent Form



### Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

#### Parent consent form

I have read the information sheet provided and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that I can ask further questions throughout the study. I have spoken with my child about the study, the presence of the researcher in the centre and the use of video recording by kaiako.

I agree/ do not agree to my child participating in the study as outlined in the information sheet.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Child Information Sheet

Fern is doing a project at my centre with my teacher /kaiako.

Insert photo of Fern

1



My teacher/ kaiako wants to show Fern my learning stories and videos of me playing and talking. Fern will not keep these.

2



I can say no to my teacher/kaiako videoing me. That's okay I won't get into any trouble.

3

## Child Assent



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Supporting early childhood educators' oral language teaching practices through coaching: An investigation utilising Te Kōrerorero

Tamariki assent form

Fern is doing a project at my centre with my teacher/ kaiako.

I am happy for my teacher/ kaiako to share my learning stories.

I am happy for my teacher/ kaiako to video us talking and playing together.

Yes



No



My Name: \_\_\_\_\_