Strengthening early literacy practice:

Exploring story sharing in diverse, equity-funded kindergartens

Amanda White, Sue McDowall, Georgia Palmer, and Renee Tuifagalele

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This project was made possible through the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's (NZCER's) Te Pae Tawhiti Government Grant programme of research, funded by the Ministry of Education.

We would like to thank Hutt City Kindergartens (HCK) for partnering with us in this research. We are grateful for all the tamariki, whānau, kaiako, and leaders who allowed us to visit their kindergartens and homes, and who took part in the interviews and observations.

We also want to thank our NZCER colleagues for their support at each stage of the project, especially our sponsor Rose Hipkins for her expert guidance and feedback.

Pōkanga rongo | Key messages

Strong literacy foundations in in the early years are critIcal for children's development and progress across the lifespan. In this research project we explored one important aspect of early literacy—story sharing between tamariki (children) and their whānau (families), peers, and kaiako (teachers). This report provides a layered description of the story-sharing experiences of tamariki aged 2-5 years, within and across their homes and equity-funded kindergartens. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) partnered with Hutt City Kindergartens (HCK) to carry out this research. Multiple data sources, including interviews, observations and video-recorded excerpts were analysed to provide a comprehensive view of story sharing encompassing the perspectives of tamariki, whānau, kaiako, and leaders across the six equity-funded kindergartens who participated in this study.

Findings from this study addressed three research questions posed at the outset:

1. In what ways do kaiako and tamariki share stories together in equity-funded kindergartens?
2. How do kaiako employ knowledge about tamariki home story interactions in their everyday practices?
3. What are the enablers and challenges for kaiako in sharing stories with tamariki in equity-funded kindergartens?

Our findings showed that stories were shared between tamariki, kaiako, and whānau in a wide range of multimodal ways and also varied according to individual children and local contexts. Kaiako learnt about home story interactions by building relationships with tamariki and their whānau, and this in turn shaped their everyday story practices in the kindergarten settings. Enablers of story-sharing interactions included a shared passion for story sharing across HCK, use of story-centred approaches, diversity in all its forms, and opportunities for children to revisit stories many times. Challenges to story-sharing interactions included increased demands on teacher time, and the pressures of work, time, and technology on whānau. Experienced teachers and leaders in HCK also noted changes in story sharing over time in relation to initial teacher education and shifting expectations of literacy learning in kindergarten settings.

Key themes in this study were that stories are diverse and multimodal; story sharing is embedded in cultural contexts; and story sharing takes place within multiple social relationships. Based on insights from this research, we offer takeaway messages to shape future dialogue around story sharing as a vital pedagogical practice. Our findings support the conceptualisation of multimodal literacies; the importance of creating space for whānau expertise; and valuing kaiako as agentic curriculum makers in diverse ECE settings.

1. He kupu whakataki | Introduction

> Story sharing is about connecting the hearts of our whānau to our own hearts, and being able to share and give where we can. (Kaiako, Hutt City Kindergartens)

Aim/purpose

Strong foundations in literacy are key to long-term progress and achievement for tamariki. The purpose of this research project was to explore early literacy practices for tamariki aged 2–5 years in equity-funded early childhood education (ECE) settings[1] and family homes. Specifically, we focused on the early literacy practice of story sharing experienced by young children with their whānau, peers, and kaiako.

To learn more about children's experiences of stories across settings, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) partnered with Hutt City Kindergartens (HCK), including their senior leaders, kaiako, and whānau, across six culturally and linguistically diverse kindergartens. Findings from this study contribute new evidence to inform current and future directions for supporting early literacy practices for our youngest tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Rationale—why does this matter?

Stories exist in all cultures and are an important aspect of literacy through which we learn to make sense of the world (Bruner, 1986; Kerry-Moran & Aerila, 2019).

Current evidence shows children's literacy skills in the early years (birth to 5 years) are associated with subsequent learning and wellbeing outcomes across the lifespan (Farrell et al., 2022; McNaughton, 2020). Despite calls to address the need for equitable literacy outcomes for all learners in New Zealand (e.g., Hetaraka et al., 2023; Hughson & Hood, 2022), relatively little research has focused on children's literacy experiences in ECE settings, and especially in communities that have become increasingly superdiverse (Chan & Ritchie, 2020).

Recent reports indicate that children transitioning from ECE to school in New Zealand show considerable variability in their oral language and literacy abilities (Education Review Office [ERO], 2024; Hughson & Hood, 2022), with those in lower socioeconomic communities most likely to experience difficulties in aspects of literacy, including the telling of stories (ERO, 2024). Earlier ERO reports also highlighted variability in the responsiveness of communication and literacy practices in ECE services in New Zealand (ERO, 2011, 2017), suggesting that these challenges have existed for some time.

One learning outcome of *Te Whāriki*, New Zealand's ECE curriculum, is for children to enjoy hearing, retelling, and creating stories of their own and other cultures (Ministry of Education, 2017). Little

1 A focus on diversity recognises multiple ways of being, doing, and understanding across cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions (among others). Equity funding is a Ministry of Education scheme to support and retain "vulnerable" children in ECE settings (ERO, 2013). Equity funding aims to raise educational achievement for all tamariki, regardless of their cultural background, socio-economic status, or location in Aotearoa New Zealand.

is known, however, about how kaiako engage in sharing stories with children in multilingual, multicultural ECE settings, and how they navigate the unique circumstances of supporting stories as a literacy practice in equity-funded contexts.

Theoretical approach

In this project, we consider stories within a sociocultural perspective of literacy, recognising the diverse ways that people represent and communicate meaning in social and cultural contexts (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, we draw on a broad, multimodal view of literacy, or "multimodal literacies" (Flewitt, 2008; Jewitt & Kress, 2003) to consider the multiple ways that children learn to make and share meaning with others, not only through language but also using combinations of modes including eye gaze, gesture, movement, and touch. In other words, stories can be shared via oral, visual, tactile, gestural, and spatial modes and not only via book reading or print-based texts (Kalantzis et al., 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Current literature on sharing stories in New Zealand ECE settings

Little research in Aotearoa New Zealand has focused on the culturally diverse and multimodal ways that children participate in stories at home and in ECE contexts. In focusing on equity-funded kindergartens, we aimed to build greater understandings of literacy learning outcomes for all children in diverse ECE settings.

Māori scholars have emphasised the concept of mana as being central to children's learning from birth, or before children are born (Hetaraka et al., 2023; Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). Hetaraka et al. (2023) argue that children are born with mana, as well as being "inherently and inherited-ly literate" (p. 59), because they come into the world carrying stories of their whakapapa through a wide range of oral and visual narrative practices. In Māori culture, oral storytelling has been identified as a recognised skill in the intergenerational sharing of Māori cultural knowledge, as well as a source of resilience for whānau (Neha et al., 2020; Reese & Neha, 2015). Stories might also be traditionally shared with young children via *karakia* (prayer), *oriori* (lullabies), and *waiata* (songs) from or before birth, connecting babies with their whakapapa, or stories of ancestral lineage, to foster a sense of belonging and mana (Rameka et al., 2016; Reedy, 2019).

In addition to Indigenous research, a small group of other studies in New Zealand have considered ways that stories might be shared with children in a range of different ECE contexts. Findings from these studies have shown that stories are co-created between children and adults in a range of embodied and verbal ways, including the use of cultural gestures, dance, and languages (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018); personal stories shared during mealtime conversations (White & Padtoc, 2021; White et al., 2021); role play (Bateman & Gunnarsdóttir, 2017); and music and picture book interactions (White et al., 2023; Williamson et al., 2023b).

Research into the nature of teacher–child interactions during stories suggests that intersubjectivity is shaped in multimodal ways, and that teachers play a critical role in mediating children's learning in the context of social relationships (Williamson et al., 2023b). Story relationships are not only collaborative; they are also made up of multiple connections that span home, ECE, and community settings, surrounding the child at the centre (White, 2024). Positive story interactions are promoted when teachers blend their professional knowledge with their understandings of relational pedagogy (Williamson et al., 2023a) and family home literacy practices (Jacobs et al., 2021; White et al., 2021).

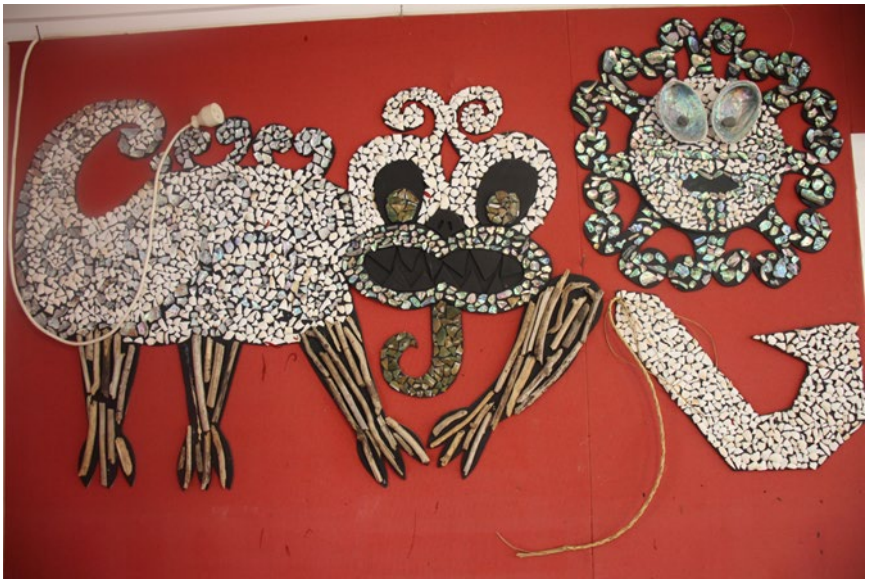
Taking a broad, sociocultural view of stories grounded in multiple relationships challenges traditional, Western notions of literacy where verbal or print-based texts and didactic teaching are often prioritised over other aspects of literacy learning.

Who are we? Researcher positionality and reflexivity

We are a team of researchers from NZCER. Our team was led by researcher Amanda White (Pākehā/Asian ethnicity), with senior researcher Sue McDowall (Pākehā), kairangahau Māori Georgia Palmer (Ngāti Pikiao, Te Arawa, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Awa), and researcher Renee Tuifagalele (Fijian). As a team, we also came from a range of different backgrounds within research and education, including speech and language therapy, teaching, learning and curriculum research, kaupapa Māori research, and Pacific research.

As researchers, we did not live in the communities being studied, so we were aware of the potential for us to be viewed as "outsider observers", and mindful that we were learners in each HCK setting that we visited. While identifying our own positionalities, we also tried to maintain an open, reflexive stance on what we might discover in this project. Ongoing team discussions were also critical to our reflexivity, and making sense of the data throughout the research process.

2. He tikanga rangahau | Methodology



Case study approach

This was a qualitative, interpretivist study employing a case study research design. The unit of analysis in this project was story-sharing interactions, within and across family homes and kindergartens, in the HCK organisation (the wider case).

As researchers, the NZCER team planned a strengths-based, naturalistic approach to learning about the story experiences of children in their family homes and kindergartens. In this project, we took a "ground up" approach to learning from children, teachers, and whānau about current story practices as they naturally happen within and across settings. In doing so, we hoped that the findings of this study would affirm cultural practices that nurture and extend the home languages and identities of all children.

Partnerships and participants

This study was carried out in partnership with HCK, building on an existing working relationship between one of the researchers at NZCER and the speech-language therapist at HCK who was part of the senior leadership team. In setting up the project, we met with senior leaders to co-design aspects of the research design and methods. This included meetings with the HCK Pou Akō and Māori Advisory Group of kaiako and whānau to ensure that our research design was consistent with upholding mana Māori in local contexts.

As an organisation, HCK includes 20 kindergartens, around 100 teachers, and 900 children aged 2–5 years. At the start of this project, 12 out of 20 HCK kindergartens were receiving equity funding. Equity funding is a Ministry of Education scheme for:

> eligible licensed early childhood services to support and enrol vulnerable children in high quality ECE, retain these children in ECE and support their successful transition to school. (ERO, 2013, p. 2)

Equity funding aims to raise educational achievement for all tamariki, regardless of their cultural background, socioeconomic status, or location. The demographics of these kindergartens were diverse, with a wide range of cultures that included 33% of enrolled children listed as Māori, and 13% as Pacific (Cook Island Māori, Fijian, Niuean, Samoan, Tokelauan, and Tongan).

Following a presentation about the project to all headteachers and discussions with senior leaders in HCK early in 2023, six of their equity-funded kindergartens volunteered to participate in this project. At a later stage, one to two families from each kindergarten were also identified with the help of kaiako and invited to be interviewed. Our sampling criteria was purposive, aiming to gain maximum variation in cultural and linguistic diversity of children, whānau, and teachers to address our research questions.

Research questions

Three research questions underpinned this research project:

1. In what ways do kaiako and tamariki share stories together in equity-funded kindergartens?
2. How do kaiako employ knowledge about tamariki home story interactions in their everyday practices?
3. What are the enablers and challenges for kaiako in sharing stories with tamariki in equity-funded kindergartens?

Relational ethics

Ethics applications were submitted and approved by the NZCER ethics committee before each new phase of data generation. Informed consent was gained from senior leaders and kaiako in each of the six participating kindergartens. Headteachers at each kindergarten then distributed information posters and consent forms to all whānau on our behalf, to gain permission for us to visit and carry out observations of children in each kindergarten. Permission was sought to use photo images of tamariki, kaiako, and whānau in any research reports or presentations. Participants were also offered the opportunity to use their own names or pseudonyms (fake names) in publications. While tamariki themselves were not asked to provide consent, special consideration was given to their ongoing assent during our observations, and especially when we introduced the video camera to take short clips of their interactions in kindergartens. Researchers monitored the moment-by-moment assent of tamariki closely and liaised with parents and teachers who knew children best. If any tamariki showed signs of concern or discomfort in their demeanour or behaviour, we were prepared to stop the research activity immediately.

As a team we considered ways to share information about the research project with tamariki, parents, whānau, and kaiako. One example is a poster we created for whānau, available in both te reo Māori and English and distributed by kaiako, along with the consent forms (see Appendices A and B).

Data generation

Multiple sources of data (naturalistic and video-taped observations, interviews, and photos) were generated and analysed over four phases during this study. Table 1 summarises of our data generation process with phase goals, time frames, and method/s of data generated in each phase.

TABLE 1 **Data generation across the four project phases**

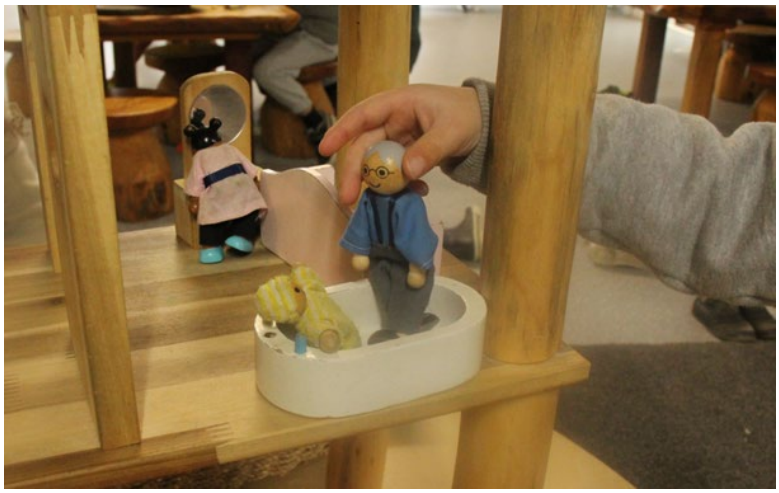
Phase goal	Time frame	Method of data generation
Phase 1: Establishing whakawhanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and reciprocity between HCK and NZCER teams—building foundational relationships.	February 2024—ongoing throughout the project.	Face-to-face hui between NZCER researchers, NZCER Tumu Māori, HCK general manager, HCK Pouako, and senior leaders in February 2024 to discuss the project idea. Ongoing collaboration continued throughout the project between NZCER, senior leaders, kaiako, and parents/whānau.
Phase 2: Interviews with leaders in HCK, including: 1) Senior Leadership Team, 2) Leaders/kaiako in rōpū Māori, and 3) Leaders/kaiako in a culturally diverse rōpū.	March–April 2024. All interviews were carried out in the staff room of the head office at HCK.	Semistructured interviews were carried out with leaders face-to-face by two to three researchers from the NZCER team. All interviews were audio recorded, with notes also taken by the research team as they took place.
Phase 3: Kindergarten observations and interviews with the following teaching teams: · Pukeatua · Avalon · Pencarrow · Naenae · Sun Valley · Epuni.	May–November 2024.	1. Observational notes (no video). 2. Observational notes (with video). The video camera was introduced once children and kaiako were familiar with the research team being present. 3. Interviews with each teaching team were carried out by two NZCER researchers. All interviews were audio recorded, with notes also taken by the research team as they took place.
Phase 4: Whānau interviews with one to two parents at each kindergarten.	December 2024–January 2025.	Semistructured whānau interviews were carried out by two NZCER researchers at a location of the parent's choice (home or kindergarten). All interviews were audio recorded, with notes also taken by the research team as they took place.

Data analysis

Initial exploration and analysis of emerging patterns and themes took place alongside data generation in each phase. As researchers, we recorded and discussed our impressions immediately after each observation or interview, and we also recorded these reflections in notes. Video data were watched and rewatched several times to search for story-sharing patterns in naturalistic interactions.

Once all phases of data generation were complete, the NZCER researchers met as a team to familiarise ourselves with all sources of information across the different participant groups and settings, using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to search for patterns or themes in response to our three research questions. Through ongoing discussion, each of these themes was interrogated further to ensure that the key findings addressed our research questions in a way that gave a comprehensive picture of how stories were shared within and across homes and kindergartens in the HCK organisation.

3. **He kitenga** | Findings



RESEARCH QUESTION 1:
In what ways do kaiako and tamariki share stories together in equity-funded kindergartens?

Analysis of data from observations and interviews with leaders, kaiako, and whānau revealed that stories were culturally diverse, multimodal, and embedded in relationships within and across homes and kindergarten settings. Tamariki/children, whānau/parents, and kaiako were all recognised as playing active roles in sharing stories together. Equity-funded kindergartens were multicultural, multilingual settings that presented rich opportunities for story sharing in a variety of different ways.

Stories are diverse and multimodal

Through observations and interviews, it was evident that tamariki, kaiako, and whānau shared stories through various modes, including oral, visual, auditory, tactile, gestural, and spatial forms of making meaning. Stories were broadly defined, encompassing a range of genres such as oral stories, conversations, play, music, popular culture, and technology. Stories were not only shared via the medium of books; they might also be conveyed via photos, actions, song, and dance with props, or expressed by tamariki through various forms of art and construction across home and kindergartens.

This section aims to highlight the different ways in which stories were shared between tamariki, kaiako, and whānau, across settings. Here, we zoom in a little closer to consider some of the key story examples that we observed and heard about from leaders, kaiako, and whānau: stories through play; books and printed texts; visual stories; music, waiata, and dance.

Example 1 Stories through play

Kaiako described the ways that tamariki shared stories through play, especially dramatic roleplay where tamariki had the opportunity to participate and connect with each other about their life experiences. In our kindergarten observations we saw tamariki sharing stories through role play, such as using the family play kitchen/dining area to re-enact what they had experienced at home.

At Naenae Kindergarten, Kairangahau | Researcher Georgia observed how tamariki shared a small snippet of their whānau, culture, and homelife as they played out different roles in the kitchen. One boy sat down, requesting more food to eat, while sharing his with Georgia; one sat and said karakia with her before pretending to eat; another began serving cups of tea to everyone, while one picked up the pretend phone and started talking on it. Through their initial actions, each child told a story of what sitting down for kai looked like in their homes, or otherwise what they may have seen on TV.

In another example from one of the whānau interviews at Sun Valley Kindergarten, a mother also shared how her son often copied what his dad did for work through his play. This parent explained that at kindergarten her son liked to play the role of "Kindy Safety Supervisor", dressing up in a hi-vis vest. At both kindergarten and home, he used toy cones, work trolleys, and road signs for this role-play. His mum also noticed that during play he would call his friends the same names as his dad's work colleagues.

These examples illustrate how children's stories were enacted multimodally in children's play, using their body actions, gestures, and facial expressions as well as noises and verbal language. Tamariki drew on their knowledge of familiar people, places, and things to co-construct stories with others during play.

Example 2 Books and printed texts

Books and printed texts were also important resources for sharing stories in kindergartens and homes. Our observations suggested that tamariki connected with their own stories and experiences through shared book reading. Reading books also provided a learning context for tamariki to develop their creativity, self-awareness, and their connections with others.

Learning stories were one kind of text that included personalised stories about each tamariki in the kindergarten settings. Tamariki engaged with others about their learning stories, either via an electronic version or in the form of a portfolio book that they could access themselves. During our kindergarten visits, tamariki were especially excited to share their learning story portfolio books with us, including one tamariki who wanted to share the photos of his best friend who had recently started school. While the child looked for the photos of his friend, two other tamariki picked up their books and each slowly went through their books and pointed out pictures of themselves, remembering what they were doing in the picture and who was in the picture with them too.

During our visits, we also observed how tamariki engaged in book conversations with kaiako. We found that, through sharing books, tamariki have the experience of being both a reader and a "teacher", as well as learning to listen to other storytellers. At Naenae Kindergarten, we observed one kaiako sitting with a group of four to five children at the table, sharing storybooks together. The group then moved over to the book corner, where one child sat on the couch, holding the book *Owl Babies* with pages facing outward. The child turned each page, with the book turned outwards so that the group on the mat could view the pictures. The kaiako talked about what she could see on each page, and asked children questions about what they could see too (Observation notes, Naenae Kindergarten).

Example 3 Visual stories

Stories often included photos, pictures, and objects/props in a way that made them more visually appealing and multimodally accessible for tamariki. Many tamariki also used drawing and writing to express themselves in sharing stories of their own.

All kindergartens had photo displays on their walls, for different purposes. Photos often showcased past events and activities experienced by tamariki and therefore provided visual prompts for them to

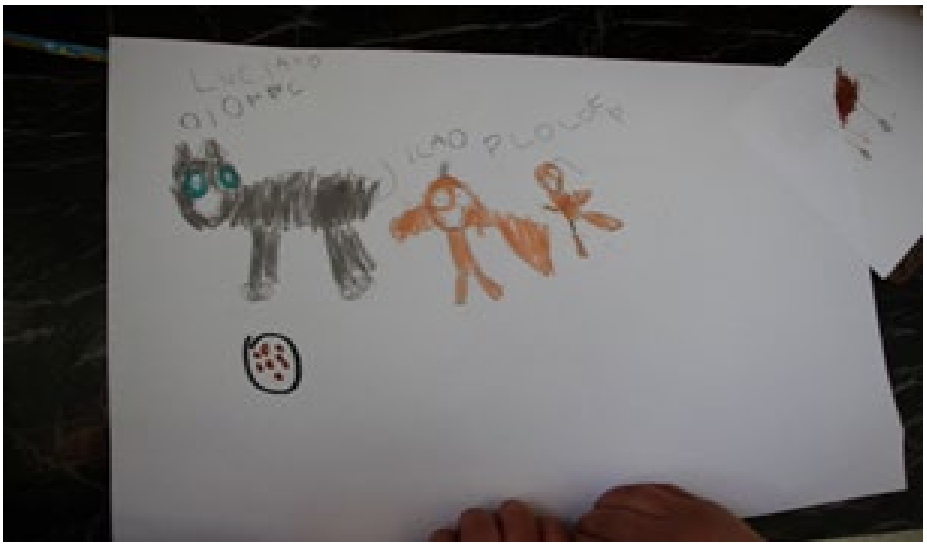
connect with their peers in recounting what happened. One kaiako shared that, “children love seeing photos of themselves … [they] want you to point things out” (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten).

Photos on the walls also included whānau members. Photos from home were either shared in by whānau, or sometimes photos with whānau were taken as they participated in events or activities with tamariki at kindergarten. Sun Valley Kindergarten had a “Hapori (Community) Wall” which had photos and stories from home and their communities. These visual reminders helped tamariki share stories about themselves and the whānau and communities they come from:

> A lot of kindergartens have whānau trees, with a photo of their whānau. And that’s a real conversation starter and story starter as they share about their family. (Leader)

As well as photos, tamariki also engaged with drawing and writing as visual modes of understanding and expression in sharing stories with others. In an example from Epuni Kindergarten, one tamariki shared the story of his cat with researcher Amanda as he wrote words and drew pictures on the page (Figure 1). This tamariki had already written his name on the page, plus drawn his cat. “I put blue, green, and dark orange,” he said. “That’s my cat … the kitty cat and Juliana—I, L, A, O (naming the letters he used to spell Juliana’s name). That is my mum, and that is my dad picking the cat up.”

FIGURE 1 **One child’s story about his cat, with pictures and words**



This example demonstrates one child’s skills and agency in sharing his story using early literacy skills of matching sounds and letters, as well as drawing alongside his spoken words.

Example 4 Music, waiata, and dance

> Music, waiata, and kanikani with instruments and props were also important ways for tamariki to share stories of their culture and life experiences at kindergarten. One kaiako explained how they noticed tamariki Māori at their kindergarten loved it when waiata Māori was playing in the kindergarten, they would jump up and dance and sing, “like it’s in their blood” (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten).

Music, song, and dance were a way of ensuring that all tamariki could participate through storytelling in ways that were inclusive and multimodal:

> Story telling is adapted to meet the needs of neurodiverse children by using movement, music, stories with repetition that children can participate actively in. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

One kaiako at Naenae Kindergarten told us about how one of their autistic tamariki loved to play the drums and how they later found out how it connected to his Indian family culture. They said:

> He's got rhythm. I put music on, and he would listen to the beat and copy it on the drums, catch the tune. He went to India, and he was exposed to the drumming. They attended a few marriages where there was a lot of drumming. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

Kaiako noted that sharing stories through waiata and dancing could be especially helpful for non-verbal tamariki, including those with disabilities. Kaiako at Pencarrow Kindergarten described how one of their tamariki would grab the speaker, and that was his way of asking them to play "Tūtira Mai Ngā Iwi". After speaking with the whānau, the kaiako learnt how he would sing this waiata with his koro (grandfather) before he died. Kaiako also noted one of their other non-verbal tamariki would often attempt to engage with music in tactile and sensory ways, such as holding or licking the speaker to request his favourite Punjabi music.

Kaiako used their own expertise to recognise and support diverse forms of storytelling to help all tamariki grow in creativity and confidence.

Stories can vary, depending on the children and context

Multiple kinds of stories were interwoven into children's everyday interactions in equity-funded kindergarten contexts. As well as the diversity in story forms, kaiako also talked about how stories might vary according to factors such as the ages of children and their cultures, interests, capabilities, and environments.

Stories were closely connected to children's everyday life experiences, interests, and independence. For younger children (2-year-olds), the sharing of stories often revolved around their homes and their close interactions with others, including their families and teachers:

> Their life experiences around 2 [years] are mostly around the home, so their stories are more around family and home. (Leader)

Regardless of children's different ages and backgrounds, kaiako and leaders described the importance of drawing on their knowledge of each child to create and share stories during everyday interactions—in effect, "storying around the child":

> They're sort of episodes of the story of the child, when you greet a parent and say, 'I was so proud of Billy today when he made it right across the monkey bars and he'd been working up to that for 3 months! And do you remember when you could only do one?' You know, it's that storying around the child. (Leader)

These examples illustrate the ways that children's stories spanned their home and kindergarten settings, with each story revolving uniquely around each child positioned at the centre of their own worlds.

Stories have many different functions or purposes

As well as stories that varied according to the child and context, kaiako and leaders also explained that stories were shared for a variety of different purposes and functions, including: 1) story sharing to support wellbeing across home and kindergarten; 2) story sharing for whakawhanaungatanga; 3) story sharing to build friendships; and 4) story sharing to connect with culture, identity, and place.

Story sharing for wellbeing and support across home and kindergarten

One critical function of stories was in supporting the wellbeing and belonging of tamariki by strengthening relational connections within and across kindergartens and homes. Kaiako and leaders talked about the importance of stories from home in helping children to settle into kindergarten, especially when they were new and making initial connections with others in the kindergarten environment:

> There are books that are used to help the kids to settle them in, and I'll sometimes change the names when I can see their attention elsewhere. Using their names. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

> I see stories as a real connection between the home and kindergarten. [Kaiako] was talking about using a book as a story to settle, but so do teachers use family stories to settle. 'Hey, you were telling me about your brother yesterday and how he's got a new uniform' ... you know, those things to make the connection and to settle ... they're really helpful tools to make that connection. (Leader)

Stories in any form could help foster the wellbeing of tamariki, although many kaiako mentioned the special role of books in mediating a relational closeness and bond.

While recognising the importance of stories and books for learning about literacy, teachers also talked about the times that tamariki might bring a book over to a teacher when what they were actually seeking most was emotional connection and support:

> A lot of children, when they first start, like to settle with a story book. Sometimes they bring the book outside. Usually, the ones that are settling in the morning with books read a lot at home too. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

From a whānau perspective, one parent told us how her tamariki needed a book to settle into kindergarten and would often have a preferred kaiako to go to for this. Since adding this to the morning drop-off routine, the kaiako noticed the tamariki would no longer cry when her mum left the kindergarten (Whānau, Naenae Kindergarten). This example illustrates the way in which story sharing had a direct impact on relationships, not only with tamariki and kaiako, but with parents and whānau as well. Viewing stories as having a wellbeing purpose also highlights the important role of kaiako in tuning in to their tamariki and making decisions about how, when, and why stories might be used to support the emotional wellbeing of tamariki at those critical moments.

Stories were sometimes also a part of encouraging healthy movement and physical activity in the kindergarten settings:

> The yoga stories ... are used as a way to present a series of moves and healthy, beneficial activity for children to participate in, but it's framed within a story. (Leader)

As previously mentioned, kaiako and leaders also regarded stories as a valuable tool for supporting children with additional learning needs:

> Often the team, the whānau, and I will collaborate to create a social story, particularly for autistic children. And that lives, as a document, in their house and in the kindergarten ... It is a teaching tool, but it sits within a story and is often a way for children to integrate their understanding. (Leader)

These examples indicate the wide range of ways that stories could effectively support a range of purposes related to wellbeing and belonging in kindergartens, and the potential for story interactions to be adapted to meet the needs and interests of a diverse range of children and their whānau.

Story sharing for whakawhanaungatanga

As researcher "outsiders" visiting each of the kindergartens, we noticed that whakawhanaungatanga was integral to storytelling in each setting. Tamariki demonstrated whakawhanaungatanga as they made efforts to connect and share stories with us when we arrived at the kindergartens, and they were often eager to make connections with us by talking about family members. First questions they might ask would be along the lines of "Who is your mum?" or "Do you know my mum? She is …" This would often lead to more in-depth stories about their family members, as in the following example documented by researcher Georgia:

> When we first arrived, it was kai time for the tamariki. I sat at a small table with a few of the tamariki Māori, who promptly asked me 'What's your name?', quickly followed by 'Do you know my mum?' After sharing our whānau members' names, it was obvious this exchange was a way for the tamariki to connect with me. The tamariki then felt comfortable to share with me for the rest of my time at their kindergarten. (Observation, Naenae Kindergarten)

Through stories, kaiako and tamariki also learnt more about their whānau and where they came from. At mat time, some kindergartens would encourage tamariki to share their pepeha in te reo Māori and in English. This was an important part of growing the children's confidence in expression, listening, and understanding each other through sharing their stories.

Story sharing to build friendships

Story sharing between tamariki and their peers could also help develop their connections and friendships. One kaiako at Avalon Kindergarten recounted the following example about a friendship that grew out of stories shared by two boys about their holiday travel experiences:

> One holidays, two boys separately went on ferries to the South Island so there were big conversations between them about being on the boat. It led to a good friendship on that day, because of the similar experiences. One of the dads got seasick, so they compared. One went on the Bluebridge and one went on the Interislander. One went in the middle of the night, and one went in the middle of the day. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

This example illustrates the potential of story interactions for supporting tamariki to develop a variety of skills in interacting with one other in ways that enabled them to learn about their similarities and differences as well as the wider world.

Story sharing to connect with culture, identity, and place

Kaiako also described the connection they had noticed between stories, identity, and place. In particular, kaiako noticed how much tamariki enjoyed hearing stories about Aotearoa and the Māori culture because it engendered a sense of tūrangawaewae, a place where they belonged.

Kaiako also noticed that, when sharing stories from Aotearoa, the tamariki would weave them into multiple areas of play and storytelling. This is often done through stories about ngā Atua Māori, like Ranginui, Papatūānuku, and Māui. One kaiako shared:

> We're doing *In the Beginning* at the moment and they just love it. It started at mat time when they read the story, and it's just coming through everything, the art that they do … and you can hear them, like 'I'm doing Tāwhirimātua'—they really love Tāwhirimātua and I think it's 'cos they associate it with the weather … And it was quite windy that day and then some of the children were saying, 'Ooh I think he's a bit angry today'. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

Stories were closely interwoven with cultures and shared in a wide range of multimodal ways, including oral stories, books, music, dance, songs and waiata, art, crafts, pictures, and objects.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:
How do kaiako employ knowledge about tamariki home story interactions in their everyday practices?

Kaiako drew upon their knowledge of home story interactions to shape how they shared stories with tamariki in kindergartens. Three key ways that kaiako sought knowledge of home story interactions, which then informed their everyday practices in kindergartens were by: 1) learning from and about tamariki; 2) learning from and about whānau; and 3) strengthening story connections across home and kindergarten settings.

Learning from and about tamariki

Kaiako identified that learning from and about tamariki was an important part of being able to support their story interactions in the kindergarten environment. Kaiako learnt about tamariki through the stories they shared from home; through stories shared during everyday activities and routines; via objects tamariki brought in from home; and through stories shared by tamariki during play.

Tamariki share stories from home

Kaiako learnt about tamariki by paying attention to the kinds of stories that they shared from home and noticing their topics of interest. Tamariki provided these insights at kindergarten through sharing stories in a variety of ways, including family stories, conversations, and through their play:

> They share stories as soon as they arrive ... about what's happened in their family, what's happened at home, what they've done at the weekend ... and they make up stories with things from their world. It could be things from their home, but it could be books ... it could be drama ... (Leader)

One example mentioned to us both by a parent and a kaiako at Naenae Kindergarten was how a girl called Trixie proudly shared the story of how she got her name. Both Trixie and her mother had shared this story with kaiako through conversations, explaining the relationships between her name and books that she loved to read at home. In her whānau interview, Trixie's mum Ruth also told us a little of the same story:

> There's 3 books about Knuffle Bunny and that's where Trixie's name came from 'cos the little girl in the books is called Trixie and she's got a special toy called Knuffle Bunny ... yeah, that's the first time I saw the name Trixie! (Whānau interview, Naenae Kindergarten)

Through shared conversations like this with tamariki and whānau, kaiako gained a deeper and more holistic understanding of tamariki, what matters to them, their identities and home experiences that were significant.

Tamariki share stories during everyday activities and routines

Data from our observations and interviews suggested that everyday activities and routines at kindergarten were often particularly conducive moments for tamariki to share stories at kindergarten. At Epuni Kindergarten, for example, morning tea or kai times were one of the activities where small groups of tamariki might come together with kaiako, and when conversational stories might occur between tamariki within a relaxed atmosphere:

> At our kindergarten we have a rolling kai and we find we have a lot of conversation with children at the kai table, and they're always talking about what's been happening at home and giving us stuff that they're not supposed to share [laughs] ... but they do overshare information at the kai table, like

> there's no filters around here! Yeah, someone's pregnant at the moment and their daughter told us, and they [parents] didn't realise she knew! So she picked it up at home and came and told us … no secrets around here! [laughs] (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

Zooming in a little closer, the following snippet from an observation of a kai time conversation at Epuni Kindergarten illustrates how personal stories between tamariki might unfold:

> Two girls (Iyahlana and Margot) are sitting at the table in a group with four other children and teacher Jodene. As they eat the food from their lunchboxes, the girls talk about a range of topics, including Margot's upcoming birthday party.
>
> 'Hey, I'm going to Margot's birthday!, says Iyahlana.
>
> 'In six weeks I be 5. And after 5, I gonna be 6 like you!', replies Margot.
>
> Iyahlana leans over to Margot, 'Guess what, I've got a present for you Margot.'
>
> 'No boys allowed at my birthday party, only girls,' Margot replies.
>
> 'Yeah … so they can't destroy your cake, eh?' Iyahlana says. (Observation, Epuni Kindergarten)

This example was typical of the many conversational stories we observed tamariki sharing with their peers and kaiako. These snippets of personal stories not only provided glimpses into the everday lives of tamariki outside of kindergarten, but also provided kaiako with information on which to build further story-based interactions at kindergarten. Storied conversations like this were commonly embedded in tamariki's everday interactions during routine activities like kai time, pick up and drop offs, play, or during outings and walks when a slower pace faciliated time for extended conversations.

Tamariki share stories via objects from home

Children often also shared their stories by bringing objects into kindergarten from home, including books and toys that were sometimes related to popular culture like music, TV, and movies. Children might also bring objects or toys in to share at "show and tell" times that were either planned or spontaneous. In this way, objects were also helpful conduits or reference points that supported kaiako in facilitating children's story telling:

> Sometimes on Mondays teachers will ask, 'What have you done over the weekend?', so like teachers will hear what they have done … some children will bring toys or books from home … (Leader)

During a teddy bears' picnic at Sun Valley Kindergarten, we observed how the bears/toys, as artefacts from home, were important in supporting tamariki and kaiako to share stories in a whole-group mat-time setting. The following example from this mat-time interaction illustrates how kaiako learnt a little about family histories and cultures from listening to tamariki and kaiako as each bear or toy was introduced to the group:

> Everyone is sitting in a big circle on the mat holding their bear/toy on their lap. Teacher Wendy leads the mat time. Going around the circle, each person shares a little story about their bear. Stories often link with homes and families, sometimes crossing generations—e.g., Ady's bear is 38 years old, and it used to belong to her mum; Aathira's bear has her name embroidered on it, plus the date when she was born. Teacher Karen says, 'I have a bear Paddington who came all the way from England. My daughter bought it for me.' Teacher Jenny showed her own knitted bear, saying 'My mummy made it for my children, then they got too big, so I brought it to kindergarten.' (Observation, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

As the teddy bears' picnic continued with a picnic lunch outside, one boy shared a small story interaction with researcher Amanda in relation to the drink bottle and lunchbox he has brought in from home:

> Amanda sits down next to the boy on the big mat outside where all the tamariki are eating their kai. He turns to Amanda and asks, 'Do you want to be my friend?', then proceeds to show her his drink bottle with his name on it, and all the food items in his lunchbox. Amanda asks the boy who lives at his home. He tells her that he lives with his dad and uncle M, then he says proudly, 'I'm a superstar. My dad is a superstar, he builds things.'

This boy's example further illustrates the way in which tamariki might use objects to actively offer information of personal significance during seemingly small story interactions with adults. In this way, kaiako can learn from and about what matters to tamariki, providing a shared context to draw on when they engage in further story interactions with tamariki at kindergarten.

Tamariki share stories during play

Children often drew on social and cultural family experiences to share stories during play with their peers and kaiako in the kindergarten environment. Sometimes these stories grew over time as tamariki added and adapted new ideas through conversation and play with their peers. Kaiako talked about children sharing stories with each other through tuakana–teina relationships as they shared their stories through different languages and embodied actions.

In the following example, one kaiako Māori shares a story that was re-enacted by a tamariki during play to express what happened at a tangihanga she had recently attended with her whānau. In the retelling of this story, the child had acted as storyteller and director, giving her friends roles in playing out the tangi experience over several episodes at kindergarten:

> We had a little girl share a drama play with the kids and I was like, 'Why are you making them be dead?' but she'd just been at a tangihanga … so she was role modelling what she just spent the last 5 days being a part of. 'Cos she wanted to do the wailing and she wanted to do the waiata and sitting around people and what she's been a part of … she was up at the marae for those days with her family … so it was her trying to share her knowledge but obviously in the way she knows how to … She didn't want to play the dead person, she wanted to play the manuhiri! And some of them [children] were like, 'I didn't wanna be dead!' I kinda observed it over a few days … but the funny thing was that she always played it by the marae … in the back corner. 'Cos she's associating it with these things she's just seen … And when I told her mum she was like, 'Oh my God [laugh]!', I was like 'No, it's cool—that's how much learning she did … so much so, she wanted all her friends to play!' (Pouako, HCK).

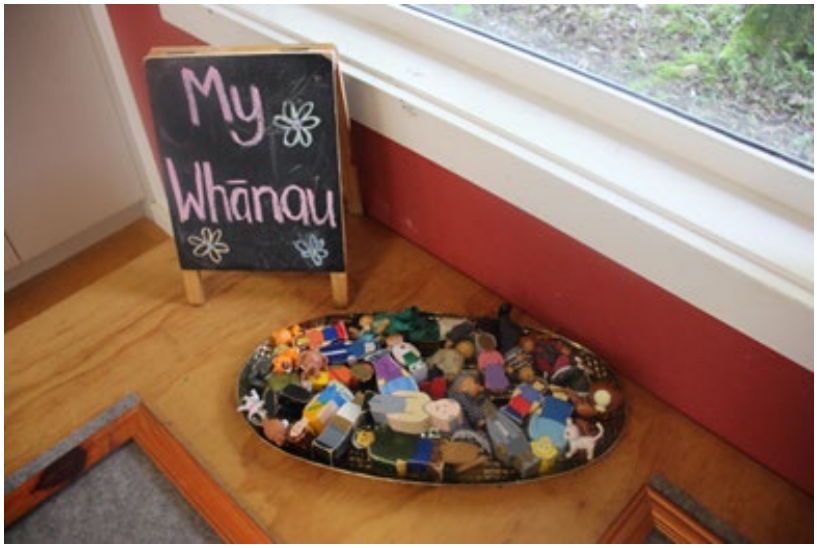
This example not only illustrates ways in which children might express their stories in multimodal ways in association with place, but also the way in which this kaiako Māori noticed the child's verbal and embodied actions, recognised their cultural significance, and then responded by connecting with the parent to reinforce the importance of this learning that had stemmed from a significant family event in their lives.

When teachers knew children well, they were also able to employ strategies in supporting the sharing of stories at kindergarten, drawing on children's interests, strengths, and dispositions:

> So, if you know the 2-year-old … if the challenge for them is keeping engaged with the story for more than a minute, then you can be targeting a statement to them, you can be saying, 'Look, Billy, look! There's a dog like yours in the book!', while you keep going on telling the story to the main group. So, you're drawing on your knowledge of the children to tailor your interactions around the story. (Leader)

Kaiako often also talked about letting children share their stories in their own ways. Teachers were intentional and prepared, but they also talked about the importance of remaining flexible and encouraging children to show agency as active, competent storytellers.

Learning from and about whānau



As well as getting to know tamariki well, kaiako also drew on their relationships with parents and whānau to learn more about family cultures as a basis for supporting story interactions at kindergarten. Here, we present examples of four ways that kaiako learned about whānau and culture through building connections with parents; building connections with other whānau members; celebrating intergenerational stories; and drawing on the cultural and linguistic strengths of kaiako.

Building connections with parents

In addition to learning about children, kaiako also made efforts to connect and learn from parents about how stories were shared with tamariki at home so they could reinforce these practices at kindergarten. Daily drop-off and pick-up times afforded regular opportunities for personal stories to be shared between parents, whānau, kaiako, and tamariki, as well as more formal parent–teacher meetings:

> We have lots of conversations when they drop them off and pick them up, yabber yabber yabber, some more than others! (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Family story practices varied widely due to parent/whānau beliefs, cultural expectations, and aspirations for their child's learning. Again, kaiako highlighted the importance of knowing parents well, and building relationships and trust in ways that would support story sharing at kindergarten:

> Our relationships with our families start from the minute they walk through the door, when you ask about their homes … Even though it's taking us a little bit of confidence to build that up, the sense of belonging for our families starts from day one. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Some whānau could be shy or whakamā about spending time in the kindergarten setting, and it could take time for them to feel comfortable to openly share their stories. Once kaiako had built relationships with whānau and learnt more about the stories of their home situations, it gave them greater insight into ways they could help support their children to learn:

> And if they're finding that they financially can't afford lunch for that day, they come and tell us and we're happy to make their child's lunch—yeah, they're not like (whaka)'ma to tell us … (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten).

Kaiako observed that for tamariki to feel confident and competent at sharing their stories at kindergarten, it was important that their parents and whānau felt trust in the kaiako, because tamariki would then feel that trust too:

> I think it's about us being aware of our families and having that relationship ... so we know who our families are, so we can have that kōrero with them ... I think the children are happy to talk about their religion, they talk about the songs they sing at home, what they listen to on the radio, what they do with their family because they have that relationship with us. (Leader)

> And the children know the relationships we have with their whānau, they model it to the children so the children are trusting us too. That's the first thing we always tell the parents —'If you're happy in our space then your children will be the same.' (Leader)

Kaiako noticed the ways in which intergenerational challenges could sometimes have an impact on the openness of some tamariki and parents in sharing their stories. Some whānau were more hesitant to come into kindergarten, especially when they did not feel confident communicating in English, or if their experiences of education had not been positive. One kaiako Māori described the intergenerational trauma experienced by some tamariki Māori and their whānau, affecting how they might feel about literacy and learning in general:

> I think a lot of it might boil down to their educational journey, and once again it's like that intergenerational trauma with education and for a lot of us that were raised in kōhanga reo and then you get put into a Pākehā system when you're 5 ... so you go from basically being with your nannies to being with one teacher that does not hug you, that does not support you ... and I think that's quite a challenge for children and sort of sets them on a stage to fail. (Kaiako Māori)

In building trust with parents and whānau around stories, kaiako sometimes talked about the way they positioned themselves as learners who were sensitive to finding out about the cultural knowledge and expertise held by each family:

> We're very open to the fact that we don't know, and we don't want to culturally tread on toes. Most of them will tell you, once you've built that relationship, they're quite willing to share their stories in that way. I think it's often more of a fear on our side, because you don't want to be insensitive. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Kaiako recognised that it was possible to ask further questions and learn more from parents once they had established trusting relationships with them.

Building connections with other whānau members

Learning about stories at home not only involved kaiako building connections with parents but could also extend to building relationships with other whānau members such as aunties, uncles, and grandparents who were actively involved in tamariki's lives.

In some kindergartens, it was grandparents who had the most contact with kaiako if they were the main caregiver(s) while parents were at work. Many grandparents had English as an additional language, plus their own experiences of education, literacy, and stories in their countries of origin. Kaiako described their efforts to connect with grandparents by greeting them warmly and inviting them into kindergarten, while sometimes also learning key words or phrases in their home language(s) to foster a welcoming sense of belonging. Kaiako recognised the importance of building relationships and "awhi-ing" grandparents and other whānau members who were navigating the sharing of stories with and about their mokopuna:

> Our teams provide huge support to whānau, particularly in those circumstances where they're awhi-ing the grandparents, telling them they're doing a good job but also supporting them in any way they can through knowing *their* story. (Leader)

Each child's extended whānau and culture were different, calling for kaiako to take a flexible, diverse approach to building relationships that would support story sharing in unique ways for every tamariki in their kindergartens.

Celebrating intergenerational stories

One of the benefits of having grandparents involved in kindergartens was the potential to learn from their knowledge and experiences in ways that supported story sharing with tamariki. Intergenerational storytelling was recognised as being a powerful aspect of cultural literacy learning in children's lives. There were many ways that parents, grandparents, and other family members shared their stories at home and in the kindergarten setting. Sometimes stories were shared through actions, such as helping with seemingly simple everyday activities, including routines, outings, or baking. At other times, stories were shared through verbal means, such as language, songs, and rhymes:

> We used to have a Samoan grandmother who used to come in and share dances and food. (Leader)

Intergenerational stories were embedded in cultural and historical ways of being and doing that surrounded tamariki. The following example from a kaiako Māori shows how their teaching team made efforts to situate their observations of children's actions and talents at kindergarten within their iwi and hapū, as well as historically and geographically. Kaiako had noticed tamariki expressing their talents in a range of ways like singing and dancing, and so they used a book called *Kia Kaha* to facilitate conversations with whānau about stories of tangata rongonui (or famous people) of iwi and hapū.

> We reached out to the whānau and said, 'Your daughter's really good at kapa haka … is this what you guys do back at home?' … 'Are there any tūpuna in your whānau that she can relate to?' … and so she related to some famous people in their home, from Ngāti Porou in Tairawhiti on the East Coast. So, we drew upon that and created this story for her … so that's how we weaved our [observation] into her Learning Story … And so, like if there was a singer—'cos Stan Walker's in there too—and the person was from Tuhoe, so we'd see it was a talent from Tuhoe. So, we were trying to bring in the iwi as well as their hapū … even if they have passed on, we were able to draw upon that because of their whānau coming in to say, 'Oh yeah, xx's grandfather or great grandfather was like a kaitātaki in a kapa haka group.' So, we try to go back that far to make those connections with this tamaiti. (Kaiako Māori)

Kaiako made efforts to find out about the range of views and aspirations held by families around stories as an aspect of early literacy development. In some families and cultures, there was a desire for a greater emphasis on academic aspects of literacy to prepare children for starting school. For some parents and whānau, learning to read and write were therefore prioritised as highly valued skills for their children to learn about at kindergarten:

> Lots of parents will say in their aspirations that they want them to read, write … and particularly in those cultures they see the academic side as the most important and not the social, whereas from our perspective if a child can socially engage well and be confident in themselves, then all those things fall into place. (Leader)

Learning about the views and aspirations of whānau was critical for kaiako to understand the ways in which stories might be shared at home, and to discuss similarities and differences in how stories might be shared at kindergarten. These discussions were a starting point for recognising what mattered to whānau, while also providing an opportunity for kaiako to explain how stories, literacy, and learning were intertwined with relationships, play, and social skills in kindergartens.

Drawing on the cultural and linguistic strengths of kaiako

One of the strengths of HCK was the cultural and linguistic diversity of its kaiako including a leadership group (Cultural Group) that was especially created to focus on supporting diversity across the organisation.

In this example, we describe how one kaiako's cultural and linguistic knowledge was evident on the day we visited Pukeatua Kindergarten on the celebration of Raksha Bandhan—a celebration of sisterly and brotherly love. Traditionally, a sister would wrap a red and gold rakhi (bracelet) around her brother's wrist, say a prayer for his wellbeing, and mark his forehead with red powder. She may also give him sweets, such as coconut burfi.

Earlier in the week, the kaiako had been sharing the story of Raksha Bandhan with the kindergarten children using a book she had created for all kaiako across the Kindergarten Association to use. The children had also made bracelets for Raksha Bandhan by gluing decorative beads onto strips of coloured ribbon. When we arrived at Pukeatua Kindergarten, a group of children were helping the kaiako sort the bracelets. A little later in the morning, a group of three Indian children gravitated towards her and she chatted with them about the languages they spoke at home, what words they knew, and the food they shared. The kaiako knew that one of the children was Christian and one was Hindi and negotiated conversations about the similarities and differences in their home experiences with sensitivity. An example was when the Christian child asked about the red powdered dot on her friend's forehead:

> 'What is that?' (Child)
>
> 'It's for a special festival' (Kaiako)
>
> 'Can I have one?' (Child)
>
> 'You can if you go and ask your Mummy' (Kaiako)

In this way, the kaiako affirmed the identities and sense of belonging for both children.

At mat time, the kaiako revisited the Raksha Bandhan story and handed out the rakhi (bracelets) the children had made. She brought out a tray with three bowls—rice (good luck), red powder (for forehead), turmeric (always present at festivals). The kaiako had also made coconut burfi sweets to share with the tamariki.

Mat time ended, the way it always did at this kindergarten, with one of the children taking their turn to sit on the couch with the kaiako and recite their pepeha with the kaiako in te reo Māori and in English. This kaiako's ability to move seamlessly across three languages and cultures within one mat session demonstrates her commitment and skill to include children from a wide range of backgrounds.

Kaiako who shared the same cultural backgrounds as tamariki and whānau were invaluable for supporting the communication of stories in this way, in part through their efforts towards sustaining the home languages of tamariki in stories shared across kindergarten settings:

> There's quite a few of us that speak other languages, which is really helpful ... so like Maria, she's the Filipino kaiako in our team and we have a lot of Filipino children ... they will be implementing Tagalog in their everyday conversations. So Maria's able to pick it up and we learn from her. (Leader)

Kaiako actively worked to support and sustain home languages and whānau literacy practices in the kindergarten settings. Whether kaiako were from the same cultural backgrounds as tamariki or not, they often positioned themselves as learners who made efforts to listen and share their observations with parents and whānau wherever possible:

> So, we have to have conversations with the parents to see what words they're using so that we can understand for the next time they express themselves … in their own language. Because we have great relationships with our whānau, it's easy for us to make that connection and be like, 'Oh your child used this word today, are you able to give us the meaning for it so we can continue having these conversations?' (Leader)

In our observations of story interactions in kindergartens, it was common to see kaiako making efforts to use multiple languages as they moved around the floor, as in the following example from Epuni Kindergarten:

> Outside on the deck, Liz (Kaiako/Headteacher) greets a mum who has just arrived at kindergarten with her child Omar and a younger baby in the pushchair. Liz welcomes the mum and child, 'Salaam, salaam Omar', and then spends a few minutes talking to them. Soon afterwards, another child rushes up to Liz and wants to tell her something urgently, talking quickly about something that has happened. Liz says, 'Can you kōrero mai? I don't understand what you said … Come and show me, haere mai …' (Observation, Epuni Kindergarten)

Drawing on shared social and cultural understandings, kaiako made efforts to support and weave whānau aspirations and home story practices into their own practices in the kindergarten setting. Kaiako recognised that stories were fundamental to supporting children's identity, belonging, and learning in the kindergarten setting:

> Stories are about identity and that's the most important thing for our children to know—their culture … Stories can give that to children. Kindergarten is their place to learn … like their second home. (Leader)

These examples illuminate the sensitivity and flexibility demonstrated by kaiako in noticing, recognising, and responding to the home language(s) of tamariki in everday conversations and stories at kindergarten. In doing so, kaiako also showed that they valued the expertise of parents and whānau in the stories they shared, strongly aligning with the principles of ngā hononga (relationships) and whakamana (empowerment) in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Strengthening story connections across home and kindergarten

Kaiako described stories as being integral to building relationships across family homes and kindergartens, with the idea that stories "travelled" backwards and forwards across settings. As well as learning about children and their families, kaiako made intentional efforts to continually strengthen story relationships across homes and kindergarten in several ways, including: 1) fostering a sense of place and belonging; 2) making opportunities to learn from whānau and community knowledge; and 3) creating learning stories.

Fostering a sense of place and belonging

Kaiako actively drew on their knowledge about tamariki, whānau, and home life experiences as they endeavoured to bring home stories into the kindergarten environment. In this way, stories about familiar people, places, and things were social or cultural tools that helped to create a sense of place and belonging for tamariki in their kindergartens:

> I see stories as a real connection between the home and kindergarten … Teachers use family stories to settle. 'Hey, you were telling me about your brother yesterday and how he's got a new uniform' … you know, those things to make the connection and to settle … they're really helpful tools to make that connection. (Leader)

Kaiako also made efforts to foster and extend stories that were strongly linked to familiar local places or environments for tamariki—or their tūrangawaewae—thus giving tamariki a deeper sense of connection and wellbeing to their homes, kindergarten, communities, and the world around them:

> On our mural, it has the Tararua ranges, and Te Awakairangi, and the tūī bird. We always get the tūī bird around the tūī season … using these landmarks [is important] for tūrangawaewae … we try our best to bring in what we can see into what we do. Haimana [or he goes by Simon] at the kura … he took us down to the river and told us stories. (Leader)

At times when tamariki needed extra support, kaiako sometimes increased their efforts to understand how to create a sense of belonging and place for them. Often, this involved finding out from parents and whānau about the stories of their home and cultures so that they could ensure those elements of familiarity were also present at kindergarten. The following quote illustrates how a kaiako learnt about the significance of sand to instilling a sense of "home" for one tamariki:

> So, we had this little boy, and he was really shy to communicate. He felt really uncomfortable in the kindy and he felt really connected to the sandpit because he would go home to the East Coast and spend time at the beach. [He] felt comfortable in the sand; it reminded him of home. Now that he's more comfortable, he's moved away from the sandpit, more interactive with his mates … When we gained that information, we were able to talk about his home with him. (Leader)

Kaiako learnt valuable insights about tamariki through engaging in stories with whānau about their culture, learning, and belonging at home.

Making opportunities to learn from whānau and community knowledge

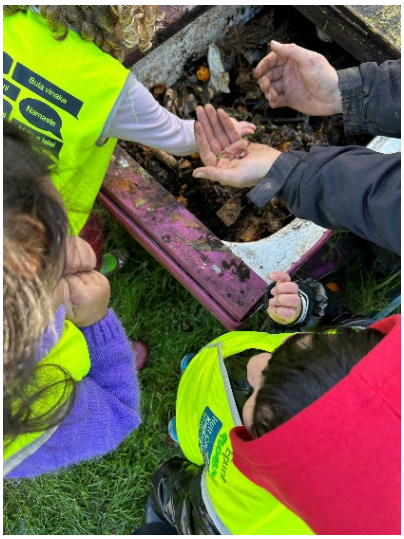
Kaiako also intentionally facilitated the sharing of stories across settings by creating opportunities for whānau and community members to share their linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Kaiako invited parents and whānau into kindergarten to take part in anything that was culturally significant for families or "close to their hearts" (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten), such as music, dance, art, or food. Each of the kindergartens held cultural or community events where families were invited to come and participate in the celebrations (e.g., Matariki disco night, Hannukah, Diwali). Kaiako reported that most children loved it when their parents or whānau came into kindergarten, and there was often a sense of pride and mana for the child to have their family member present and involved. Kaiako and leaders also reported that whānau were also excited to be invited to share their knowledge too:

> When they [kaiako] don't know about a culture, they will seek whānau assistance to come in and share … and so for the child's mana, that's huge … having your parent there to make dumplings, or talk about the year of the Dragon … that's another story to tell … That's certainly changed over time—whānau actually being asked about those things. For them it's like, 'Oh I've never been asked before' and so they're really excited to be able to share their culture … (Leader)

In addition to whānau visiting kindergartens, there were also many opportunities for tamariki to build relationships with people in the wider community, such as visits to the local school, library, gardens, or festivals like HuttFest where the children performed on stage. Figure 2 is a photo taken during a visit by Epuni Kindergarten to their local community gardens where they heard stories from the gardener about the worm farm.

FIGURE 2 **Learning about the worm farm at the local community gardens**



The efforts of kaiako to strengthen relationships with whānau and communities were beneficial to tamariki who experienced a wider range of story topics and partners connecting them with their local environment with a greater sense of tūrangawaewae.

Creating learning stories about tamariki

Learning stories about tamariki were also critical to strengthening bonds between home and kindergarten settings. Learning stories were created by kaiako, weaving together the voices of the tamariki, parents/whānau, and kaiako in a story format. Learning stories were embedded in the assessment and communication of tamariki's progress across all of the kindergartens, and a critical way for kaiako to share and discuss a child's strengths, interests, and dispositions with parents and whānau. Kaiako also talked about learning stories as an important way of supporting the aspirations of parents and whānau for their tamariki at kindergarten:

> I think a well-written learning story that highlights a successful moment for the child—or a progression—can really get whānau on board with what we're trying to do at kindergarten and seeing the benefits of what free play brings … and it can weave in things that are already happening at home that are part of that process of growth and development. (Leader)

One parent, Gaby, described how her daughter Isabella's learning stories provided valuable insights into what she did at kindergarten. Gaby received the stories posted electronically by the teaching team, with photos and pictures of Isabella's interests and progress. Gaby described how seeing these stories created opportunities for sharing further conversational stories at home. Gaby also gained an awareness of the way in which Isabella's stories enacted through play involved friendships at kindergarten, something that was different from the kinds of stories she would share at home.

Documenting aspects of learning in learning stories was critical to building shared understandings between parents/whānau and kaiako about the central role of stories in tamariki's early literacy development. Learning stories were available both in electronic and hard copy formats, providing access to children, peers, whānau, and kaiako in both the home and kindergarten environments. Kaiako created stories in a multimodal format, including written words, pictures, and photos.

Photos of tamariki and their friends were a key feature of learning stories, with one kaiako telling us that "photos prompt stories". Children loved to see themselves and their friends depicted in their own learning stories, as well as displayed on the walls around the kindergarten (e.g., on Whānau, Kura, or Hapori walls). Tamariki liked to look out for themselves and their friends in the photos, and to find points of similarity and difference. Photos provided visual reminders of past experiences at kindergarten, and they were helpful in supporting children as they told and revisited their stories with others.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:
What are the enablers and challenges for kaiako in sharing stories with tamariki in equity-funded kindergartens?

This section focuses on the challenges and enablers for story sharing experienced by the kindergarten leaders and teachers we spoke with.

Challenges to story sharing at kindergarten

The leaders and teachers we spoke with described a range of challenges to story sharing that impacted on their work with tamariki. These included challenges they had experienced or observed at kindergarten, in homes, and in initial teacher education.

Greater demands on teacher time

Leaders and teachers identified high tamariki-to-teacher ratios as one of the main challenges for story sharing at kindergarten:

> Our ratio is quite high (1–10) and the best learning is with small groups. And a lot of the time you can't do that. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

> We have high attendance … so it's more like managing 'fire control' rather than quality time. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

> Group size is a challenge … if you have the traditional, everyone listening to the story, because you still have to look at what else is going on … the dynamics of the group. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

This challenge was exacerbated by an increased number of 2–3-year-olds, and of tamariki with additional learning needs, attending kindergarten. At one kindergarten, for example, teachers considered that 29 of the 45 tamariki attending needed some form of additional support:

> There are a lot more neurodiverse tamariki now, whereas about 10 years ago there would only be like one child. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

> I think teachers find it more challenging with 2–5-year-olds in a group of 40, it is really challenging. (Pouako, HCK)

> There used to only be 3- and 4-year-old, toilet-trained children at Kindy. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

The combination of high tamariki to teacher ratios and increasing numbers of 2–3-year-olds and tamariki with additional needs made traditional story sharing at mat time more challenging. The teachers at Avalon Kindergarten discussed these challenges at length:

> If you're trying to read a book and there's a kid flying through, pulling someone's hair …

> There are more distractions. I think there has been an increase in neurodiverse kids.

> If you're sitting there, trying to read them a story, and you can see one kid annoying another, it's a vicious cycle.
>
> Even if they *want* to read a book it's difficult … If a kid grabs a book because they love it so much …

Teachers needed to cater for a wider range of attention spans, and this impacted on the type and length of stories they could share during mat time:

> Maybe with the younger children you're focusing on the picture and what the picture means. Whereas as they get older, you're talking about the language and more comprehension involved in the stories. Your conversations get a little more complex. (Pouako, HCK)

One response to this challenge was careful book selection, so that books for mat time could be used to engage a wider age range and to "meet the needs at either end":

> You have to meet the needs at either end … but there are books that do it seamlessly, and the older ones and younger ones will be getting something out of it. (Pouako, HCK)

Teachers also introduced more interactive and physical activities into story-sharing time or chose shorter or more lively stories to keep all tamariki engaged. For example, several kindergartens made use of costumes and props so that tamariki could act out the story as it was being told. Teachers described how they adapted story sharing at mat time to meet the needs of neurodiverse tamariki by using movement, music, and stories with repetition that tamariki could participate actively in. Teachers observed that these tamariki seemed more engaged in storytelling that involved sound as well as moving images, such as CD books:

> Through props and stuff now, because we are finding they aren't as engaged … There's only so much we can do with a story which is why we have to make it fun … A while ago the focus was to sit there … and now the focus is more creative. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)
>
> Sometimes we will play *Pete the Cat* on the TV and you do get a higher engagement because there's movement, it's fast, there's colours, there's music. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)
>
> The children love the CD books—they are more drawn to that because of the music. That is more popular than us reading, they will start to dwindle away. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

One Pukeatua Kindergarten teacher described how a non-verbal tamariki who did not usually engage in story sharing began to participate by standing at the back of the mat when stories were played on the television. That tamariki subsequently joined in more fully and was now taking part in mat time, even when stories were read aloud or told by teachers.

At several kindergartens, teachers addressed the challenge of different attention spans by reducing the length and frequency of mat time, by reducing the amount of story sharing during mat time, or by making mat time optional for tamariki:

> Some of our kindergartens don't have a mat time any longer because of the mixed aged setting. (Pouako, HCKA)
>
> We used to have two mat times, but we've gone down to one. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)
>
> I think there's less storytelling at mat time, not just books—like magnetic board stories. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> Children join in mat time from wherever they are. It's optional which supports our diverse learners too—they don't feel like they have to come to mat time. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

As one teacher observed, these changes meant that tamariki now had fewer opportunities at mat time to interact with longer, slower, or more complex stories than in the past. There were still

opportunities to engage in these types of stories with individuals or small groups of tamariki during other times in the day. However, the increase in tamariki with additional needs also meant there were fewer opportunities to engage in one-to-one or small-group story sharing. This was because at least one of the teachers was fully occupied supporting these tamariki:

> We have children that need teacher support, but don't have teacher support, and that makes it challenging. That impacts on story time—how we can find time to read stories. That impacts it hugely. (Kaiako, Cultural Group)

The additional work involved in Kids Can meals also took teachers away from working with Tamariki:

> Because we are KidsCan, in the morning it takes a teacher away to get the kai ready. Or putting all the groceries away. There's a lot of factors. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

One of the ways that kindergartens responded to these demands on teacher time was by using their equity funding for employing staff to support tamariki with additional learning needs. Teachers at some kindergartens described how they tended to focus on story sharing during the days that support staff were present, because they knew this may not be possible on the other days.

Impact of work pressures, time pressures, and technology on whānau

The more experienced teachers we spoke with observed that tamariki seemed to be arriving at kindergarten having had less story sharing (and especially book sharing) experiences at home and in the wider community than had been evident earlier in their careers. These teachers observed that, in general, tamariki tended to demonstrate less familiarity with the books shared at kindergarten, had less ability to sustain attention when listening to stories, were less curious about the story and what might happen next, and showed less sustained engagement in talk about the story, with lower recollection and recall of stories shared:

> Children used to say, 'Hey, I've got that book at home.' I wouldn't have heard that for the last 3–5 years. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

> I remember a time when we would sit down and read a full story book two to three times a day, and they'd all be interested, and you'd be able to have a conversation about the book afterwards. But we haven't been able to do that with a big group for a long time. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

> You could sit in the book corner and read five stories. [Now], you'll be reading the book, and their focus goes really quickly, and you're almost reading it to yourself. And you might ask a simple question, like 'Can you find the ...?' and they'll just look at you blankly. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Some teachers had also observed, over time, a general drop in creative thinking around books by tamariki on entry to kindergarten and put this down to "being told the answers", rather than being asked for their viewpoints:

> And they're losing that ability to [predict] ... 'What do you think is going to happen?' ... It's the lack of creative thinking. [It's] the attention span and the need to be told the answer. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Some observed that, in general, when beginning kindergarten, tamariki seemed less capable of sharing their own stories with others than in times past:

> Often you see children with a line of animals, and you can tell there is a story in their mind, but they can't articulate it. The same is true about their drawings and paintings. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

Some teachers put these changing story-sharing behaviours down to fewer opportunities for tamariki

to spend extended periods of time with parents, grandparents, and other whānau due to increasing work commitments, and with whānau more scattered than in previous generations:

> A lot of parents are working all hours, like night shifts, so there's not much time to read stories or go to the library. There are a lot of house pressures. (Kaiako, Cultural Group)
>
> Parents had a lot more time [in the past], so kids coming in were much better at expressing themselves … They used to have someone at home. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)
>
> Extended families are living in different areas, different parts of the country or world. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

Other teachers observed that, when there is time pressure, story sharing can become rushed with fewer opportunities to engage in talk about the story:

> That fast pace—you might get books read but you might get books read *at* you, not *to* you. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)
>
> Usually, you'd sit around and share stories, but now, it's not as shared. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

Teachers also observed that, in the past, when dropping their tamariki at kindergarten, parents tended to stay to settle their tamariki, often by reading them a story, before heading off for work or other activities. Other tamariki sometimes listened in and benefited from these extra story-sharing times. Some teachers observed that this practice had died away, due to time pressures:

> Families used to have a bit more time in the mornings so they would be on the couch with the books … Now both parents are working. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)
>
> Parents used to stay and read a story to settle their children when they dropped them off. We used to have a lot of parents who would stay and help. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

There were obviously many exceptions to this general trend. The six parents we spoke with all described being involved in many and extended story-sharing experiences with their tamariki at home. However, they were aware that not all parents had the time to do so, and several commented on sometimes finding it difficult to make the time for story sharing themselves:

> Making the time for it—the time just goes. My life is quite busy. (Whānau, Naenae Kindergarten)

Other teachers wondered about the amount of time spent on screens by both adults and tamariki and the impact this had on opportunities for story sharing:

> Generally, kids talk less. People will be out, and the kid is on their phone. Or someone has their earphone on. I think it makes the difference, because children's language skills have gotten worse. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> Technology stifles the imagination. There is not as much role playing, creative play, like with loose parts … You hear more children saying, I'm bored I want to go home—I want to go on my device. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Some teachers wondered if the solitary nature of much technology use in homes may also be reducing opportunities for tamariki to engage in meaningful talk about texts:

> I think kids have access to a personal device in a *solitary* way. Like in comparison to my kids watching TV *together* … It's that individual experience, it's not necessarily a shared experience. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> A lot of children have a TV in their room. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)
>
> Kids might be looking more at devices than have a book being read to them, more solitary. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

There were, of course, also examples of new technologies being used in kindergartens and in homes to support story sharing. Leaders described a variety of ways in which they had seen technologies, such as use of the interactive whiteboard, used in their kindergartens in the service of story sharing:

> We try and use technology for shared experience such as dancing and music. Something they can share together. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

> I would see different settings using screens in different ways … Lots of them would use a big Mimio interactive whiteboard … *Going on a Moa Hunt* was projected up onto the screen and children would act it out. So, the basis of it was the story. The children were singing along … and they had to look for things in certain parts of the picture … so it was employing lots of different skills. (Pouako, HCK)

Teachers and parents also described story-based creative play that emerged from movies, television, and digital games, where tamariki took on roles based on characters from popular culture:

> When he tells stories he will use characters from the TV. Half an hour walk is a long story involving characters from different TV programmes—Monster Krampus being buddies with characters from Elf the movie. The kids at kindy make up games with characters from movies or video games. (Whānau, Avalon Kindergarten)

> She has got a big imagination. She does a lot of imaginative play from the programme she watches and tries to play it at home. (Whānau, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Impact of changes in initial teacher education

The leaders spoke at length about the impact of changing approaches to initial teacher education, since they had trained as teachers. They expressed concern about the reduced amount of time it took to train to be a kindergarten teacher and the reduced focus on literacy. This meant that new graduates were often coming out not really knowing how to engage tamariki in story sharing:

> It's also that training that is lacking so hugely … I think when it became the degree [things began to change] … I went to Wellington College of Education, and that was when we had art, literacy, child development, music and movement … We had literacy teachers … Child development and brain development was very much part of it. So that training accounts for a lot of the lack of skills that teachers are coming out with. (Pouako, HCK)

> They do too much theory and not enough practical. I mean, I did a degree at Wellington College of Education, and we did modules on how to make playdough, how to make clay, how to tell a story … they don't do any of that now … They have theory, theory and theory and if you're an 18-year-old straight from school and have never worked with a child before … It's what we're noticing the most and particularly in the grad programme because there's only one year where they do two practicums and if they're bad practicums … (Pouako, HCK)

The teachers we spoke with made similar observations:

> I feel the teacher training has changed. Trainees are not getting the opportunity to learn how to do those things, like 25 years ago. Like music and movement—it was a literacy subject, and I don't think it's being taught anymore. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

> [We learnt] how to hold a book, how to avoid the glare from the light on the book, or the angle of it being presented to the kids. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

Impact of expectations about literacy learning at kindergarten

Teachers talked about the pressure they sometimes felt to ensure tamariki were "ready" for school, especially in relation to the more traditional literacies of reading and writing. However, they noted

that, over time, there had been growing awareness of the importance of play and multimodal story sharing as literacy activities:

> I often think there's a gap between early childhood education and primary school … I know primary schools are changing. We were on the site of Pukeatua Primary School and they were working really hard with us, especially for the first 2 years, to build that play-based approach to teaching so that the children weren't just coming and it was like, 'Right—now you have to sit down and you have to read and write.' You know it's that actually there's a lot of learning that happens through play, and through conversation and relationships being built. (Pouako, HCK)

Leaders and teachers also observed that some parents wanted a more formal focus on learning reading and writing at kindergarten to prepare their tamariki for school:

> Lots of parents will say that they want them to read [and] write … and particularly in those cultures where they see the academic side as the most important. (Pouako, HCK)
>
> Parents who want a literacy and numeracy focus. For Samoan, Chinese, and Indian families school readiness is important—the need to get ready for school. (Pouako, HCK)

It could be difficult for some parents to understand how art activities, dance, music, and play enable tamariki to develop more traditional literacy capabilities such as reading and writing, as well as being legitimate forms for sharing stories in and of themselves:

> There's a lack of understanding that playing in the sandpit *is* literacy and numeracy. (Pouako, HCK)

The Pouako at HCK described how teachers addressed this challenge of parents understanding using learning stories:

> They use parent aspirations—this is how we are teaching your child to learn how to read. Relationship building—practical, informal discussions with parents—storying around the child's development.
>
> I think using the parents' aspirations … so if a parent says their aspiration is for a child to read, then showing that within that Learning Story too … This is the way we are supporting your child to learn how to read.
>
> I think the Learning Stories are key in … translating for parents why this learning in the kindergarten is beneficial to their child. I think a well-written Learning Story that highlights a successful moment for the child—or a progression—can really get whānau on board with what we're trying to do at kindergarten and seeing the benefits of what free play brings.

Interestingly, the parents we spoke with all saw play—at home and at kindergarten—as a form of story sharing, using words like "script", "story", "direct", "characters", and "narrative" when talking about their tamariki's play:

> At Kindy he [child] directs the narrative play. Someone else tried to change the narrative and [child] said, 'I'm not doing that'. At kindy he's made an ice cream shop, and all the other kids have come to buy ice creams. (Whānau, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> We have to follow his lead, it's not free play, it's what he says. He's already got a story we have to follow. (Whānau, Pencarrow Kindergarten)

One parent described the stories his son made up, based on characters from movies or video games as "young fan fiction". These stories were often long and complex:

> He started talking about how he was sent from another planet to come and understand the ways of the humans, he named their race and everything. (Whānau, Avalon Kindergarten)

What enabled story sharing at kindergarten?

Teachers reflected on the opportunities they provided tamariki at kindergarten that enabled their deepening engagement with story sharing over time. These included opportunities to engage in story-centred approaches and activities, to share stories in a range of language modes, to engage in culturally, linguistically, and neuro-diverse groups, to share ideas and build on the ideas of others, to revisit stories over extended periods of time, to keep records of their story sharing, and to amplify their passion for story sharing through positive feedback loops.

Opportunities to share stories in a range of modes

Tamariki arrived at kindergarten with a wide range of strengths and needs. In terms of language, for example, some were bi- or multilingual, some spoke only English, some were in the process of learning English as an additional language, some used New Zealand Sign Language, and some were non-verbal.

The kindergartens provided all these tamariki with opportunities to work in a wide range of modes—visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and linguistic. Tamariki could move freely between stations to paint, draw, write, construct, build, dig, read, listen, talk, run, climb, act, sing, and dance. Tamariki shared stories through these activities, often in collaboration with others and through play.

The judicious balance of choice with some teacher encouragement or direction meant that tamariki could communicate in the modes in which they felt most comfortable, extend this range over time, and innovate by combining modes in new ways to meet their purposes.

The story-sharing choices offered to tamariki also included those associated with more traditional literacies, such as reading and writing. Teachers described the many ways in which they saw tamariki engaged in story sharing through reading and writing activities:

> Children like books here—they will sit and flick through the pages or ask you to read them. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

> They take their book, and they get their friends, and they turn the pages, and they tell the story. And sometimes they line up all the animals and read the story to them. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

During our visits we, too, saw many examples of individuals, pairs, and small groups of tamariki selecting books, looking at the pictures, retelling the story, or making up their own version. These tamariki chose to read in all sorts of places, both inside and out. We saw one tamariki who arrived at kindergarten early select a book and go to sit in a small indoor tent to read on his own, another tamariki lying on the floor in front of the bookshelf with a pile of books, two friends sitting side by side each with their own picture book retelling their separate stories in parallel out loud, two tamariki sharing one picture book across both their knees, and one tamariki being the teacher and holding up a book while two others listened to the story.

Informal time with books during kindergarten provided opportunities for tamariki to share with each other their knowledge of letters, sounds, words, illustrations, authors, and story more generally if this was of interest to them. Teachers also highlighted concepts about print, features of books, and the nature of story:

> Teachers are teaching about the name of the book, and the author and the illustrator and using words like that to build children's literacy knowledge, but also that these are taonga and we need to look after them. (Leader)

The teachers also promoted tamariki's agency as readers and writers:

> Sometimes they'll come and ask us to read, and we don't always have time so we say, 'You can read it,' and they'll say, 'I can't read.' So, we will say, 'Well you look at the pictures, the pictures are telling the story as well.' So, they are encouraged to then take the time to look at the pictures. So, then you can come along and go, 'So what was the book about, and tell me where you're up to' … So, it's encouraging them that they can sit down and look at the pictures and 'read' … They don't need someone to do it for them. And that's just an imagination thing as well—being able to sit down and create the story for themselves—tell it. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

The parents we spoke with also had experienced kindergarten as a place where there were opportunities for their tamariki to engage in all the language modes, including reading and writing:

> [He] shows interest in print, speech bubbles, text at the end of books for parents. What does that say? [Teacher] at kindy taught him the bird beak—how to hold a pen. At kindy they have a word activity table. He will want to make a story. He will draw the pictures and tell us what to write. He got a story from the library with the pictures made from lego and he wanted to make his own one. He uses lego to make characters. (Whānau, Avalon Kindergarten)

Access to books

The kindergartens we visited had books accessible to tamariki and supplemented their collection by buying new books or borrowing from the public library. Access to books was important in terms of equity for tamariki who did not have as many opportunities for story sharing in book form at home:

> If they're lacking stories at home, they also really gravitate towards the books. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

Teachers described how they would let tamariki borrow a kindergarten book they were especially attached to so they could share it with their family. And, conversely, some tamariki would bring books from home to share at kindergarten:

> We took the Knuffle Bunny Books to Kindy and Jasmine read it 'and I got to sit on the couch, and I got to hold the book'. (Tamariki, Naenae Kindergarten)

During one of our visits, we joined a group of tamariki on their walk to the library. At this kindergarten, a small group of tamariki visited the library each week to choose a selection of books and to return the books borrowed the previous week. Each tamariki was responsible for choosing one book for the kindergarten with help from a teacher or the librarian and for issuing the book using the library scanner. These visits were important for familiarising tamariki with the library, helping them develop skills in browsing and choosing books, and in explaining why they made the choices they did. The tamariki demonstrated a sense of ownership and pride in the book they had chosen when they returned to the kindergarten, and there was a noticeable buzz in the book corner as the tamariki shared their book choices and read their books with others.

Story-centred approaches

The six kindergartens we visited were story centred. This story-centred approach played out differently in different contexts, and included spontaneous free play, activity stations, and more teacher-directed theme-based programmes. However, all approaches involved a degree of agency and choice for tamariki and an active role for teachers, even if that role was asking open-ended questions, or simply listening:

> Having open-ended questions. Presenting kids with more ideas. Like here, having those loose parts and having construction things where they can do what they like, no prescriptive kind of thing. I think it supports children story sharing and they can be more creative and in charge of their own story … it's

> inclusive and expandable place. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> It's child led—just creating imaginary play. It empowers them—embracing themselves through storytelling. And that there's no right or wrong in storytelling. (Kaiako, Pencarrow Kindergarten)
>
> Sometimes we plan stuff but a lot of the time the children drive it. Sometimes we plan things, but they don't go to plan. We go with the flow. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)
>
> It's such a fine line because you can so easily crush the creativity. We'll get them all the props they need to keep it going. We find that sometimes as adults when you try to come into their world you kind of stuff it up. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

What follows are two examples of story-centred approaches; the first involving spontaneous, tamariki-led play, and the other a more teacher-directed theme-based approach. Each approach illustrates tamariki having agency over story sharing, and teachers taking an active role in enabling story sharing to deepen.

Encouraging story through spontaneous, tamariki-led play at Pencarrow Kindergarten

The teachers at Pencarrow Kindergarten described their kindergarten as a place where a lot of imaginative play happened, something they said reliever teachers coming into their kindergarten had also noticed. According to these teachers, one of the best ways of enabling tamariki to engage in this form of storytelling was providing them with "open" resources, time, and space:

> I think it's because of the natural environment—it's more open. It's very open-ended. We don't set things up to be played with in a particular way. We just put things out and see what they do. You could put just a box out. It's just a box but it becomes all sorts of things … We have lots of natural materials that they create their own stories from.

Enabling this type of storytelling required teachers skilled at knowing when to intervene and when to simply listen. It required teachers willing to let the story wander into unexpected directions, as illustrated in the following teacher discussion:

> There is no right or wrong when telling a story. It embraces their creativity, it deepens the story, it makes it more special to them.
>
> I think as a teacher, sometimes it's just important to listen, rather than ask questions like we sometimes do.
>
> And the story can kind of just keep going on and on and on, because there's no limitations.

One teacher described dramatic play as "the most authentic form of storytelling" and the teachers had many examples of rich storytelling that had emerged through play when these conditions were present:

> We have a net swing, and I was swinging four kids in it. I just happened to be singing row, row, row your boat—and next minute they started to pretend they were in a boat and the other children were running around being sharks. That's a story they made up themselves. And then they came back to me and asked if I could push them on the swing and sing again so that they could reinitiate that story. They repeated it a couple of times. It was allowing *their* voices to come through.
>
> It's like that day when they made a little rocket ship and there was a whole story about flying to the moon and being the first person on the moon. And then [child] found a big box and sat in it—maybe because he wanted to feel what it was like to be enclosed in a rocket. I was trying to work it out because he was in the box going, '5, 4, 3, 2, 1'. And when he got to 1 all the kids were allowed to go and play on the swings.

> The wooden ladders and bridges were out. Just having the props and letting them tell the story in their own way, allowing the children to have their say, putting their unique spin on it. They were just creating their own Three Billy Goats Gruff. It's about not over-directing it because then you take away their imagination.

During our observations we also saw storytelling through play using the materials at hand. For example, when we arrived at Pencarrow Kindergarten, one boy was lying on his back under a trailer with his legs sticking out like a mechanic. As we approached, he slid out and said, "There's a problem—it needs fixing." He then pointed to a small puddle of water under the trailer, and said, "There's a leak" and proceeded to look for some tools to fix it. He later came up to inform us that "A lot of dinosaurs are buried around here" and to show the dinosaur horn (wooden stick) he had found on the bank. He then proceeded to lead a walking tour around the grounds, indicating all the places that dinosaurs were buried, and where their different body parts lay. At one point he lay down to indicate the position in which the T-Rex was buried. He also described how he found a baby dinosaur out in the jungle that a pterodactyl would have eaten if he hadn't rescued it. He also provided information about how the dinosaurs had died out when we were monkeys, but that he didn't know how. A bit later he came back over with a dinosaur tooth (large white stone) that he had found.

Using a shared book to unpack emergent areas of interest at Sun Valley Kindergarten

Sun Valley Kindergarten ran a 5–6-week block of activities based around a shared picture book every term to unpack an emergent area of interest, such as superheroes or floating and sinking:

> If there is an interest—like it was about superheroes last year—we'll source a book about that for the opening of the programme. So, this one was about sinking and floating and working theories and maths and science, so we used *Who Sank the Boat*. So, guessing who sank the boat and doing the role play. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

The programme usually included some whole-group activities along with small-group activities based on topics of interest that emerged from the story, as illustrated in the examples below:

> [With the story *Kevin and the Kauri Tree*] we built the kauri tree and the cave and the taniwha that was in it and it stood in the middle of the room and the children did project work all around that, which brought in heaps of conversation and heaps of buy in. But it also built a huge amount of passion for that book and to this day if that book comes out they've got that same enthusiasm, as if it was in the room yesterday … They also built heaps of knowledge about that book as well—and they pull out that knowledge way later on.
>
> At Christmas we read a book *Santa's Workshop* about a boy who was worried about how Santa was going to find him. And we talked about children who don't always get what they want off their list but how there's the power to make what you want. So they all brought their wrappers and boxes from home and they made the scooter in the book, and then they made the dinosaur and the robot. And we hung them from the ceiling. There was a theme about giving back so we gave them to the hospice. And a group of children went on the excursion to donate …

The teachers at Sun Valley Kindergarten described how they used these integrated units to focus on the strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017):

> If you look at a child's book and you look at *Te Whāriki*, every theme in that book will link with one of those strands. If you hunt deep enough there will be an emotion that someone felt in that book which will bring out the wellbeing, there's usually a connection that will bring in belonging. There's a chance to act it out or an element that you can recreate and make yourself. So that's how we bring in all the strands of *Te Whāriki*. So, we use that book and pull out all the themes. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Diversity—in all its forms

The diversity in kindergartens—in all its forms—enabled rich story sharing. There were two main reasons for this. The first reason related to there being a greater diversity in the stories children shared, and the ways in which they shared them. The second reason was that tamariki brought a greater variety of prior experiences to the interpretation of stories, resulting in greater variety and depth of individual and collective responses to the stories shared:

> A lot of kids may have had different experiences of going back to their homeland, going around the world. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> They might bring their own cultural experiences into their stories. Or they might have the ability to make comparisons to what they have experienced. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)
>
> Our Indian kids are so interested in te ao Māori because they are so interested in their own culture. (Kaiako, Ropu Maōri)

Teachers from Avalon Kindergarten described how tamariki with different first languages played together drawing on their common experiences of domestic life in different cultural contexts. These tamariki used a combination of English (the language they were all learning, and so had in common), facial expressions, and gestures:

> There's a group of girls that do a lot of role-playing ... going shopping, looking after babies, going to bed. There's a lot of language there but there's a lot of non-verbal cues as well. Each of them having experienced it in their own homes: Chinese, Thai, Portuguese, Tamil.
>
> The common thread is food.
>
> Babies, shelter, what to do, when to do it, when not to do it ... 'This will be good food for the babies ...'
>
> It's [a] common interest they all have in it.
>
> There's a core of about 3 of them, who will revisit that daily ... Their imagination, once it starts ...

Sometimes tamariki would combine aspects of different cultural stories together in new ways. For example, one teacher described how, after telling the story of the demon with 10 heads for Diwali, a group of boys took this story into their play and adapted it to become a new story about showing your power through muscles (rather than 10 heads). These tamariki had taken the theme of power from the story and created a cross-cultural hybrid "mash up" of a traditional story about a powerful Indian god and Western superhero stories.

A related enabler was the linguistic and cultural diversity among the kindergarten staff. Teachers within each kindergarten brought with them a variety of stories and story-sharing strengths and interests. This diversity among staff ensured tamariki were exposed to a wide range of story-sharing experiences. For example, at Pukeatua Kindergarten, there were teachers who could speak Hindi, te reo Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language. Each teacher was known by the tamariki for their different approaches to story sharing at mat time. One tended to focus on te reo, rakau, poi, waiata, and Māori stories; one on movement using props such as scarves and rakau; one on sign language and stories using magnetic and wooden characters; and another on music and songs. These teachers' use of language was responsive to the tamariki attending at any given time. For example, they described using a lot of te reo Māori, especially with a previous cohort of tamariki who spoke te reo Maōri at home:

> We had a group that had a lot of te reo at home, so we could go quite in depth. There were whole sentences that they knew and understood. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

Opportunities for sharing and building on each other's ideas

Teachers provided tamariki with opportunities to make connections between stories shared and their own lives:

> They relate it [the story] to things they've done so then they talk about what they might see. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)
>
> When they can get involved, or at mat time if they find something relatable, they will pop out stories of home or their weekend. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)
>
> I feel like every story you tell they will make some sort of connection with it. (Kaiako, Pencarrow Kindergarten)

Teachers also gave tamariki agency in making meaning of stories which meant providing space for children to have "a big part in the story". The teachers at Sun Valley Kindergarten had an extended conversation about how they facilitated this student agency. An excerpt of their conversation is provided below:

> Even when it comes to simply reading a story book, I can see the difference in the way it's read here. [What do you notice?] The enthusiasm, the animation, the open-endedness. I'm not reading it *to* you. I am reading it *with* you. Here it's interactive, we're doing it together. [What does that look like?] It looks like the child having a big part in that story.
>
> It's reading to engage them in the book. It's not just to read the words in it and convey the message to the child. It's about conveying *story* out of the story.
>
> It's more than just language. It's imagination.
>
> Sharing a book—sometimes you just pause to let the children come up with the next line or to guess what's going to happen—just listening to what *they* say.
>
> We use a lot of open-ended questions if needed. It depends on the moment.
>
> It's reading the room too. We've all got the knack of seeing when the kids lose focus.

Teachers were proactive in ensuring tamariki's diverse ideas were shared with others. One of the ways they did this is through the physical environment. For example, the teachers at Pukeatua Kindergarten set up "small pockets of play" (i.e., areas for small groups of tamariki to interact).

Teachers provided tamariki with opportunities, not just to interact with the ideas in the story, but to share their ideas about the story with each other, combine them in new ways and build on them over time. For example, when reading a shared picture book, teachers invited tamariki to respond—not just to the story, but to each other's responses to the story, enabling collective meaning-making:

> Often if you have a group and kids will often make comments, and the conversation will bounce off each other. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

Teachers also set up systems to promote these idea-sharing interactions around story. For example, at Sun Valley Kindergarten, teachers set up a range of story-related activities that small groups of tamariki could opt in to. The products of these activities and the ideas connected to them were then shared back with the larger group, feeding into the collective exploration of a theme or a story. Because there was a choice of activities based on the interests emerging from the group, tamariki could work to their diverse sets of knowledge, strengths, and interests. Because the groups were flexible, tamariki could mix with a range of tamariki and their ideas.

Opportunities to revisit stories over time

Teachers enabled tamariki's story sharing and meaning-making to deepen by re-reading or re-telling the same story many times:

> If you think about the book *Trevor and the Kauri Tree*—we read that for a full term nearly every second mat time and their buy in never changed. They just got more involved. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

> It just evolved and changed and became their own thing. When it's repetition, they just start to take the lead. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Story-related activities also enabled tamariki to revisit the story, and to continue thinking and talking about it:

> The Rangi and Papa song, that's how they learnt the story. And then it went to them to create the masks. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

> When we have sets of hats, like for *The Three Little Pigs*. So, when we have those out, the kids re-enact them or change it up a bit. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

There were also opportunities for tamariki to revisit their own stories over time and to extend on and deepen them. For example, a teacher from Avalon Kindergarten described a tamariki who made buildings and cities with loose parts including "tall towers and swimming pools" 10 minutes before the end of kindergarten on a Friday and then came back on the Monday and re-enacted it all because, "It was something he wanted to revisit or perfect". Sometimes these stories would travel between home and kindergarten, as illustrated by the following example from Epuni Kindergarten:

> One child will go home, have a picture he wants to design using the hot glue gun and then in the mornings he will come straight in with his mum and do what he said he was going to do … It's quite big as well, he will keep adding on to his story, and he will take it home and bring it back and add on to it sometimes. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

The kaiako from Sun Valley Kindergarten described how, after reading a story about a taniwha at mat time, one of their tamariki made a cage at home to catch his own taniwha. His Nani and Koro helped him take it down to their local river and for 3 days they put different kinds of food in it, checking each time to see if they had caught a taniwha.

In a similar example, the mother of the tamariki we met with an interest in dinosaurs described how, at home, he had set up a dinosaur museum and engaged in dinosaur play non-stop for 3 weeks:

> Dinosaur play for 3 weeks. He set up a dinosaur museum and we were not allowed to take it down at the end of the day … And the stories … like the dinosaur, there was a dinosaur at kindy. The dinosaur comes inside while we were eating our lunch … and it becomes created into a big thing. Then he comes home and tells dad at night around the table … If it's dinosaurs at home, it's dinosaurs at kindy. (Whānau, Pencarrow Kindergarten)

Opportunities to create records of story sharing

Teachers strengthened opportunities for sustained meaning-making by creating records of the tamariki's evolving interpretations. These records were often visual, such as photographs, or story-related works of art and craft that tamariki had created:

> Photos is another way they share their stories. Also, we've got the whānau wall, photos of the whānau. This is another way the children share stories because they often sit here having kai, and they go 'Hey look there's Eva!' and another one says, 'What's she doing?' Then another might say 'I can do the monkey bars.' They look at these images and remember when they visited Epuni School. Lots of sharing with photos. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

> Photos of memories—we celebrate cultural days here and they talk about how they celebrated and what they did that day. (Kaiako, Epuni Kindergarten)

Sometimes they were added to cumulatively over time. Records were sometimes kept in the form of artefacts such as props, masks, or costumes that tamariki associated with a story. An example is the tree built by the tamariki at Sun Valley Kindergarten as part of their focus on the picture book *Trevor and the Kauri Tree*.

The teachers at Sun Valley Kindergarten kept the visual displays from each programme on the walls for at least 5 weeks after it had ended and kept the story books associated with the theme in circulation. They did this intentionally, to enable tamariki to revisit and add to their story sharing:

> With the programme we generally do it for the last 5–6 weeks of term and it stays up [on the walls] for the first 5–6 weeks of the next term. Those books stay in rotation. Then we switch over [to the next programme].

A shared passion for story

Another likely enabler was a passion for story sharing which was amplified through positive feedback loops between the head teachers, teachers, and tamariki. The head teachers described the historic and ongoing importance of story sharing in their kindergartens:

> Storytelling is an everyday focus—let's try and get as much into them during the day when they are with us. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)

> Storytelling is quite embedded in everything here … It just naturally comes … we're inspired. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

Teachers also commented on the importance of having head teachers with a passion for story, and of having a team who shared this:

> We've had head teachers who have loved literacy, and we have a good [book] collection. I mean there's always good books coming out. (Kaiako, Avalon Kindergarten)

> It's that consistency within the team. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

This commitment to story sharing played out in many ways. Teachers described the ways in which they supported each other during story-sharing times:

> Sometimes the others [teachers] will jump in if you're doing a survey to keep it moving along or to pose a question which helps you as well—to think that is a place maybe should ask a question or open it up to the children. (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

> It's also having others support those diverse learners who aren't … Sometimes with those diverse learners you might need to have one of them on your knee to engage them in the story like say, 'Oh did you hear that?' (Kaiako, Sun Valley Kindergarten)

It is likely that the positive feedback loops operating at each of the kindergartens included the input of the leaders of Hutt City Kindergartens who were also clearly passionate about story sharing and had a long history of and reputation for promoting literacy across the association.

Importance of equity funding in supporting story-sharing opportunities

The kindergartens used their equity funding to employ extra staff to support tamariki with additional learning needs and disabilities. These support staff freed the teachers up to provide story-sharing opportunities for the whole group, small groups, and individuals more frequently and in greater depth than they could have if attending to these tamariki themselves.

> We use equity funding on teacher support for diverse learners which allows us time to work with other children, whereas when she is not here then some of us have to be doing that. We find it really beneficial to have that extra person. Otherwise, we're run off our feet making sure that child is safe and all the rest of the children are safe. (Kaiako, Pukeatua Kindergarten)
>
> We use equity funding to employ support staff which means more time for us to spend with individual children. Without that we wouldn't have those interactions. (Kaiako, Pencarrow Kindergarten)

Importantly, the support staff also enabled the tamariki they worked with to access the stories being shared by working closely and individually with them.

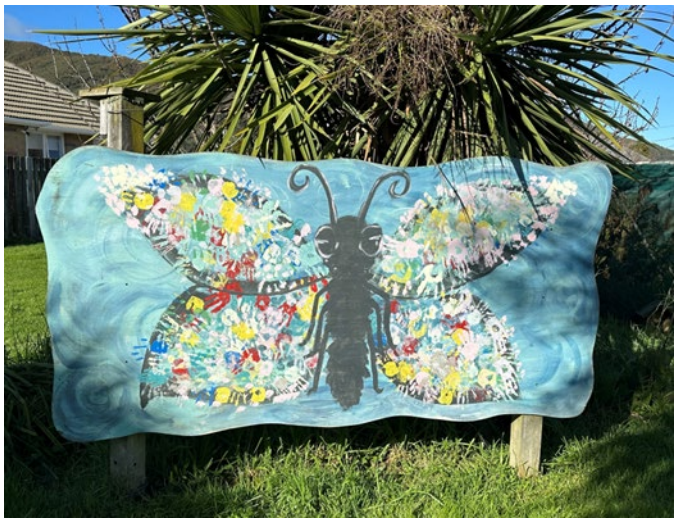
The kindergartens also used equity funding to support story sharing by creating packs of books to send home with tamariki who were not able to attend kindergarten frequently, and by providing food for tamariki who needed it, so that they could concentrate for longer periods of time:

> We have children who do not attend daily. They may only come once or twice a term because of the family issues there. We send resource packs home. We have all these spare books and so if they are not attending, we make up resource packs and send them home. This idea came about in Covid times, and it's continued. (Kaiako, Cultural Group)
>
> Things that help is that we feed the children good food—KidsCan. If they have a good morning tea, they can probably sit nicely for mat time. (Kaiako, Naenae Kindergarten)

Some kindergartens also gave their children books for Christmas.

In these ways, equity funding enabled kindergartens to provide the opportunities needed for rich, deep, and extended story sharing over time. These kindergartens were story-centred, with teachers who took an active role in enabling tamariki to have choice and agency in story sharing. Cultural and linguistic diversity amongst tamariki and teachers provided a rich pool of story-sharing resources to draw from. Teachers set up systems to enable these resources to be shared and used to extend and deepen story sharing. Teachers provided tamariki with opportunities to revisit the same story many times and worked with tamariki to record their story-sharing ideas in the form of photographs, props, art works, and other artefacts that could be added to over time.

4. He matapaki | Discussion



We start this section with a summary of key findings in response to each of our three research questions, followed by a discussion of patterns or themes that were evident across the whole dataset. We then return to sociocultural and multimodal theoretical perspectives and literature to make sense of those themes in relation to current understandings of stories and literacy in diverse home and ECE contexts. We conclude this report with key messages about story sharing for parents, whānau, kaiako, and leaders in the ECE sector, based on evidence from this research project.

Addressing the research questions

1. In what ways do kaiako and tamariki share stories together in equity-funded kindergartens?

Stories were diverse, multimodal, and embedded in multiple relationships that spanned home and kindergarten contexts. Stories were shared between tamariki, kaiako, and whānau in a range of ways including play, books and printed texts, visual stories, music, waiata, and dance. Stories varied according to individual children, and in relation to their local communities and environments. Stories were also shared for a variety of different purposes, such as learning about the world, supporting whakawhanaungatanga and friendships, wellbeing, and connecting languages, identity, culture, and place.

2. How do kaiako employ knowledge about tamariki home story interactions in their everyday practices?

Kaiako employed their knowledge of home story interactions to foster story interactions at kindergarten. Kaiako learnt about and from tamariki by paying attention to their stories from home; by noticing the stories shared by tamariki during everyday play and routines; and through

the objects tamariki brought into kindergarten from home. Kaiako also learnt about home story interactions through building trusting relationships with parents and whānau; by celebrating intergenerational stories; and by drawing on the cultural and linguistic strengths of kaiako in HCK to support and sustain home languages and literacy practices. Kaiako made ongoing efforts to strengthen connections across home and kindergarten by fostering a sense of belonging; by creating opportunities to learn from whānau and their communities; and through creating learning stories for all tamariki in their kindergartens.

3. What are the enablers and challenges for kaiako in sharing stories with tamariki in equity-funded kindergartens?

Leaders and kaiako identified several enablers of story-sharing interactions with tamariki in kindergartens. Kaiako used story-centred approaches across a range of modes (visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and linguistic), including books and a wide range of other texts. Kaiako engaged with diversity in all its forms, and with culturally, linguistically, and neurologically diverse learners. Kaiako also enabled story interactions by providing opportunities for tamariki to share and build on the ideas of others, as well as revisiting stories by reading or telling them many times. A shared passion for story sharing was evident throughout HCK, amplified via positive feedback loops between leaders, headteachers, teachers, and tamariki. Challenges in sharing stories included increased demands on teacher time; the impact of work pressures, time pressures, and technology on whānau; changes in initial teacher education; and changing expectations around literacy learning in kindergarten settings.

Key themes

In considering the data generated in response to our research questions, we found evidence of three clear themes:

1. Stories are diverse and multimodal.
2. Story sharing is embedded in cultural contexts.
3. Story sharing takes place within multiple social relationships.

Each theme is discussed here in relation to literature mentioned in the Introduction to this report.

1. Stories are diverse and multimodal

One key theme revealed in this study was that stories were as diverse as the communities served by the six kindergartens, and that tamariki engaged in stories with others using multiple modes (oral, visual, audio gestural, spatial, and linguistic). This pattern aligns with both sociocultural (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978) and multimodal (Jewitt & Kress, 2003) perspectives of literacy, or "literacies" (plural) to reflect the many kinds of stories that exist, as well as the multiple ways that meaning can be constructed and communicated within and across kindergarten and home settings (Kalantzis et al., 2016). While books and print-rich environments were highly valued aspects of literacy across HCK, they could also be enjoyed by tamariki in visual, spoken, or embodied ways via oral stories, play, waiata, dance, art, and construction.

Our finding that there is no "one size fits all" mirrors the small number of other studies of story sharing in culturally diverse ECE settings in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g., Mitchell & Bateman, 2018; White & Padtoc, 2021; White et al., 2021). The diverse and multimodal nature of story sharing shown in our findings supports broad and inclusive definitions of literacy(-ies) and stories. These definitions ensure that tamariki have opportunities to explore making meaning in a wide range of ways, and

using their whole bodies (Taylor & Leung, 2020). Some scholars (e.g., Lim et al., 2022) have further argued that recognising the diverse and multimodal nature of literacies is a matter of educational justice, to ensure that the diverse life worlds of all tamariki are valued and resourced in their educational settings.

2. Story sharing is embedded in cultural contexts

A second theme in this study was that story sharing was embedded in cultural contexts across home and kindergartens. Tamariki shared stories with others by drawing on their home experiences, while also learning about the experiences of others in their kindergarten settings. Findings showed that tamariki brought different experiences of story sharing from home, as shaped by their home languages and cultures. Story sharing at kindergarten therefore reflected a range of cultural experiences such as the role play of a tangihanga, making bracelets for Raksha Bandhan, having a teddy bears' picnic, participating in Samoan dance and food with grandparents, or making a dinosaur museum. Story sharing was a dynamic and cultural process that "travelled" with tamariki across the contexts of their homes and kindergartens. In turn, kaiako drew on their knowledge of home story practices, including their own strengths as a culturally and linguistically diverse team, to support and sustain tamariki's home languages and storying at kindergarten. Again, this theme reinforces sociocultural and multimodal perspectives of literacy that recognise diversity in the ways people construct and communicate meaning in their social and cultural contexts (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013; Lim et al., 2022).

The central importance of language and culture in shaping story practices is consistent with the findings of other ECE studies in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018; White et al., 2021). Hetaraka et al. (2023) have argued for the recognition of culture and context as essential for equity, as well as for upholding the mana and competencies of tamariki in educational settings. Hetaraka et al. also cautioned around judging academic ability on Western literacy norms of reading and writing. These norms may position tamariki Māori in specific, deficit ways by failing to recognise their rich, cultural literacies for learning, such as oral and visual stories of whakapapa. Recognition of literacies as being inherently rooted in whānau culture (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020) is a vital starting point for validating the mana and competencies of all tamariki in New Zealand's increasingly superdiverse communities (Jacobs et al., 2021).

3. Story sharing takes place within multiple social relationships

The third theme highlighted in this study was that story sharing took place within multiple social relationships spanning family homes and kindergartens. Story sharing was embedded in spontaneous, naturalistic interactions between tamariki and their peers (including tuakana–teina dynamics) in the kindergarten group setting, as well as between tamariki and kaiako, and with their whānau. In these relationships, both tamariki and adults (kaiako and whānau) have important roles in co-constructing meaning through sharing stories together.

The finding that story sharing took place in the context of multiple social relationships, within and across homes and kindergartens, has also been demonstrated in other studies in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g., White, 2024; Williamson et al., 2023a). White (2024) illustrated the way in which 1-year-old children were central sharers or "navigators" of stories within and across their homes and ECE centres, often sharing their stories multimodally during everyday routines like eating their kai or pick up and drop off times. Williamson et al. (2023b) emphasised the importance of kaiako drawing on both their professional knowledge of how tamariki learn as well as their understandings of relational pedagogy

to promote positive story interactions in ECE settings. Taking a view of story sharing as interwoven with relationships within and across kindergarten, home, and community settings provides a more holistic picture of how tamariki are central and active in navigating their learning within multiple contexts that extend well beyond the narrow view of adult–child story dyads.

Strengths of HCK

Finally, we reflect on the strengths of HCK in relation to story sharing, based on our observations and interviews with whānau, kaiako, and leaders across the organisation. Findings of this study illuminated many characteristics and conditions that facilitated positive experiences of story sharing across the equity-funded kindergartens we visited. Here, we highlight three features of a strong story-sharing culture in HCK, including: 1) the valuing of story across all layers of the association; 2) the willingness of kaiako and leaders to learn from tamariki and whānau; and 3) the cultural and linguistic diversity and expertise of HCK staff.

Valuing story sharing across all layers of the association

One key strength of HCK was the passion for sharing stories across all layers of the organisation. Leaders, kaiako, and tamariki all played a vital role in ensuring stories were a highly valued literacy practice across the kindergartens as stories were read, told, and enacted in diverse and multimodal ways. Findings of this study illustrated that story sharing in HCK was a regular activity that was integrated into the everyday routines and interactions in kindergartens. Story sharing was enabled across the organisation because of strong leadership and a well-articulated vision of why story sharing was important for tamariki in HCK. This vision was guided by the *Te Whāriki* curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017) but also informed by the cultural and historical understandings of leaders and kaiako as to their view of best practices for stories as an aspect of literacy in their local kindergartens. Planning, discussion, and positive feedback loops between leaders, kaiako, and tamariki across the kindergartens further reinforced and inspired positive story-sharing practices across the HCK organisation.

Learning from tamariki and whānau

Another clear strength of HCK was that kaiako and leaders often positioned themselves as learners who valued the knowledge and experiences of tamariki and whānau as they shared stories in diverse and multimodal ways. In this report, we have presented many examples from our data that illustrate how kaiako and leaders made efforts to learn from tamariki, parents, and whānau about cultural ways of knowing, being, and doing that underpinned story-sharing interactions at home. Kaiako and leaders recognised the need to build trusting relationships with tamariki and whānau as a foundation for stories to be shared. Kaiako also made efforts to learn as much as possible about each tamariki and whānau so that their cultures and languages could be sustained and extended in the kindergarten settings. These actions were critical to building relationships across homes which allowed for regular, open communication, which in turn facilitated the development of shared understandings around story practices in consistent and holistic ways.

Cultural and linguistic diversity and expertise within HCK

A third strong feature of HCK was the cultural and linguistic diversity of their kaiako, adding a critical layer of expertise in supporting story sharing across the organisation. In the six participating kindergartens, we met many kaiako who shared the same cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds

with tamariki in their kindergartens. This provided wide-ranging benefits for all across HCK, leading to the development of resources to support kaiako no matter if they shared the same culture or language as their tamariki or not. A key driver of this support was the Cultural Group and Te Rōpū Māori who created and shared cultural and linguistic knowledge and materials across all kindergarten teams within HCK. Drawing on the cultural diversity and strengths of kaiako across the association contributed positively to the building of shared social and cultural relationships and understandings. Those relationships and understandings underpinned positive story-sharing interactions because they supported tamariki to make and share meaning with others using everyday, familiar resources from their homes and communities.

Key messages

Evidence from this research project gives rise to new insights about the value of story sharing as a vital literacy practice in equity-funded, diverse ECE settings. We offer three "takeaway" messages for parents, whānau, kaiako, leaders, and policymakers in the hope that they might help to shape further conversations about story sharing as a vital pedagogical practice contributing to positive literacy outcomes and relationships for tamariki. The aim of these messages is to spur further thought and discussion around aspects of story sharing as a literacy practice in diverse settings, adding to critical understandings around: 1) conceptualisations of literacy(ies) as being multimodal; 2) creating space for whānau expertise; and 3) respecting kaiako as agentic curriculum makers in increasingly diverse ECE settings.

1. Conceptualisations of literacy(ies) as being multimodal

Findings from this study reinforce the rich and complex nature of literacy in the early years. Starting with a definition of literacy as encompassing the process through which we represent meaning for ourselves, as well as communicate meaning with others (Kalantzis et al., 2016), our research reinforces the assertion that young tamariki make and share meaning with others in multimodal, multisensory ways. Young children are hands-on learners who develop understandings of literacy through movement, touch, and play as well as language. Our findings, therefore, underscore the importance of taking a broad view of literacy—or rather, literacies (*plural)*—that includes written and spoken language alongside other modes of meaning-making that are not only cognitive or linguistic, but also visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. A multimodal conceptualisation of literacies contests a narrow view of literacy as solely encompassing print-based texts such as books. This framing also encourages us to move beyond binary, "either–or" arguments around literacy learning opportunities (e.g., a focus on book reading and writing over oral storytelling, play, and music), towards embracing an "and–and" view of literacies as involving multiple, diverse avenues for tamariki to explore ways to engage meaningfully with a wide range of texts.

2. Creating space for whānau expertise

Viewing literacies as diverse and multimodal also encourages us to consider family homes as highly literate cultural spaces where parents and whānau have expertise in understanding their own tamariki and how they learn. Our evidence affirms sociocultural perspectives of literacy where multimodal literacies are grounded in culturally and linguistically diverse literacy practices and traditions passed down in families, over generations. We wonder how an expanded view of literacy learning might support *all* parents and whānau to feel confident in their efforts to provide home contexts for their tamariki that are rich in a variety of modes and media grounded in culture, including oral stories,

books and print, music, dance, and other art forms. Our findings also showed that, when kaiako built relationships with whānau and made efforts to invite them into kindergartens, the story relationships surrounding each child were strengthened, whilst diverse knowledges from home could be validated, celebrated, and sustained as an ongoing literacy resource.

3. Kaiako as agentic curriculum makers in diverse ECE settings

Findings of our study also call for the recognition of kaiako who demonstrated agency as curriculum makers in culturally and linguistically diverse ECE settings. Our observations suggest that kaikao agency starts with the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, with learning outcomes underpinned strongly by sociocultural and Mātauranga Māori frameworks. Under curriculum guidance, kaiako make efforts to support and sustain story-sharing relationships, ensuring opportunities for tamariki to experience the stories of their own and other cultures in multimodal ways. We found that school-based literacies, like reading and writing, were seamlessly interwoven into everyday activities in kindergartens as children enacted their stories through play in the family corner, made shopping lists, or drew pictures of their whānau and pets. The skills of kaiako in supporting stories in this way is a rich and complex literacy practice that cannot be underestimated. In addition, the culturally and linguistically rich mix of staff was also critical for many tamariki and whānau who spoke language(s) other than English at home, and also a highly valued literacy resource or taonga. Kaiako across the HCK organisation were afforded agency as curriculum makers by systemic supports (e.g., a leadership team, Te Rōpu Māori, and Cultural leadership group) strongly committed to positive literacy outcomes for tamariki.

5. He kupu whakakapi | Conclusions

A strong foundation of literacy skills in early childhood is associated with positive trajectories in learning and development. This study explored story sharing, one critical aspect of early literacy development. We studied the naturalistic story interactions of tamariki aged 2–5 years, kaiako, and whānau within six equity-funded kindergarten settings and family homes. Key themes evident in our findings were that stories are diverse and multimodal; story sharing is embedded in cultural contexts; and story sharing takes place within multiple social relationships across settings. Together these insights highlight the need to understand and sustain diverse and multimodal story-sharing practices within multiple social relationships across the cultural contexts of home and home and ECE. Findings from this study contribute to our understandings of how tamariki experience story sharing in kindergarten communities that are becoming superdiverse. Findings also add critical insights to the importance of drawing on diverse, multimodal conceptualisations of literacy(ies), creating space for whānau expertise, and respecting the agency of kaiako as curriculum makers in ways that promote positive learning outcomes for tamariki. It is a matter of mana, equity and educational justice to ensure that tamariki see their cultures, languages, and experiences reflected in their ECE settings, providing opportunities for them to fully learn how to create and share meaning from their earliest educational interactions.

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He kupu | Key words

Awhi	To embrace, hug
Hapori	Community
Hapū	Sub-tribe, kinsman group
Iwi	Tribe, kinsman group
Kai	Food
Kaiako	Teacher
Kairangahau	Researcher
Kaitiaki	Caregiver
Kanikani	To dance, dancing
Kapa haka	Māori performing group
Kura	School
Mana	Power, influence
Oriori	Lullaby
Pouako	Lead teacher
Tamariki/tamaiti	Child, children
Tangata rongonui	Famous/well-known person or people
Tangihanga	Funeral
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Tuakana–teina	A Māori concept referring to an older sibling and younger sibling relationship, or a mentoring relationship
Tūpuna	Ancestors
Tūrangawaewae	A place where one belongs, a sense of belonging
Waiata	To sing, song
Whakamā	To be ashamed, embarrassed
Whakawhanaungatanga	Establishing relationships, relating to others
Whānau	Family

Appendices

APPENDIX A **Parent–whānau information poster in te reo Māori**

NZCER
Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa

He kaupapa rangahau mō ngā pūrākau:
He mōhiotanga mā ngā ākonga, mā ngā mātua me ngā whānau

Tēna koutou katoa, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Kia orana, Taloha ni, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Bula vinaaka, As-salaam ʻalaykum, Ni hao, Namaste, Konnichiwa, Mabuhay, Hola, Bonjour – warm greetings to everyone

Ko wai mā mātou?

- He kairangahau mātou nō Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa (NZCER).
- E kawea ana e mātou tētahi kaupapa rangahau mō ngā pūrākau i tō koutou kindergarten, ā, ko te hiahia kia whai wāhi mai koe.


Sue McDowall


Georgia Palmer


Renee Tuifagalele


Amanda White

He aha te kaupapa o tēnei mahi?

- **E hiahia ana mātou ki te ako i te āhua o te rongo a te tamariki i tēnei mea te pūrākau i ō rātou kindergarten me ō rātou kāinga.**
- **E hiahia ana mātou ki te uiui i a koe mō ngā pūrākau ka rangona i tō koutou kāinga.**
- **I ngā marama tuatahi o tēnei tau i peka atu mātou ki ētahi kindergarten ki te tirotiro he pēhea te āhua o te kōrero pūrākau i reira, ā, i pātai hoki mātou ki ngā kaiako mō tēnei mea te pūrākau.**

He aha tā mātou tono ki a koe?

Tēnā whakakīa te puka whakaae hei whakamōhio mai mehemea ka taea e koe te whakauru mai ki ēnei rangahau. Me kōrero mai hoki mehemea...

1. **...e whakaae ana koe ki te kōrero mai mō ngā pūrākau ka kōrerotia e koutou i tō kāinga**
2. **...e tukua mai ana e koe tō whakaaetanga kia hopukina aua kōrerorero ki te mīhini**
3. **...e hiahia ana koe kia whakamahia te ingoa tūturu, te ingoa muna rānei e mātou mō tō tamaiti/ō tamariki i roto i ētahi pūrongo, whakaputanga rānei mō tēnei kaupapa.**

Mehemea he pātai āu, e hiahia ana rānei koe ki te kōrerorero mō te rangahau, tēnā whakapā mai ki a Amanda White (Kaihautū kaupapa): amanda.white@nzcer.org.nz or ph. (04) 802 1436.

Thank you!

NZCER
Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa

Ko ētahi atu mea e tika ana kia mārama ki a koe....

- Tokorua ngā kairangahau mai i tō mātou tira o Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa ka hui tahi me koe ki te kōrero mō ngā tikanga whakaputa pūrākau i tō kāinga.
- Ka haere pea ā tātou kōrero mō te kotahi hāora. Ka hopukina e mātou ki tētahi mīhini hopu reo iti. Ka tuhia hoki pea e mātou ētahi kupu kia pai ai tā mātou maumahara ki ngā kōrero i puta.
- Ka taea e mātou te hui tahi me koe i tētahi wāhi māhorahora ki a koe (hei tauira, i te kindergarten, i tō kāinga rānei)
- He pai noa iho mehemea ka uia tētahi tangata kotahi, neke atu, nō tō whānau, i taua wā tonu, ā, he pai noa ki te noho mai ō tamariki i taua wā anō.
- Mā mātou e hora kai, e tuku koha hoki (tīkiti mō te hokomaha) hei whakaaro ki a koe mōu i whai wāhi mai.
- I muri i te hui ka noho mātou ki te pānui i ngā tuhinga, ki te whakarongo hoki ki te rīpene i hopukina, hei āwhina i tā mātou tuhi pūrongo mō ō whakaaro, me ngā whakaaro o ngā kaiako o te kindergarten.
- He rawe ki a mātou kia whai wāhi mai koe ki ēnei rangahau, engari ehara i te mea me whai wāhi mai koe. He pai noa iho ki te huri ō whakaaro i muri, me te kōwhiri kia wehe atu i te rangahau taea noatia te rua wiki i muri i te hui.
- E mihi ana ki a koe mōu i whai wāhi mai ki ēnei rangahau!

APPENDIX B **Parent–whānau information poster in English**

NZCER
Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa

Kaupapa Rangahau | Research project on stories: Information for parents and whānau

Tēna koutou katoa, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Kia orana, Taloha ni, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Bula vinaaka, As-salaam 'alaykum, Ni hao, Namaste, Konnichiwa, Mabuhay, Hola, Bonjour – warm greetings to everyone

Who are we?

- We are researchers from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)| Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
- We are carrying out a research project on stories in your kindergarten, and would like to invite you to take part.


Sue McDowall


Georgia Palmer


Renee Tuifagalele


Amanda White

What is this project about?

- We want to learn about how children experience stories in their kindergartens and at home.
- We would like to ask you about stories you share at home.
- Earlier this year, we visited kindergartens to observe how stories are shared there and we asked teachers about stories too.

What are we inviting you to do?

Please fill in the consent form, letting us know if you are able to be part of this research. Also tell us if...

1. ...you agree talk to us about the stories you share at home
2. ...you give permission for us to record this conversation
3. ...you would like us to use real or pretend names for your child(ren) in any reports or presentations about this project.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the research, please contact **Amanda White** (Project leader): amanda.white@nzcer.org.nz or ph. (04) 802 1436.

Thank you!

NZCER
Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa

Other things you need to know....

- Two researchers from our NZCER team will meet with you to talk about the ways you share stories at home.
- Our talk could take around an hour. We will record it using a small device. We might also take some notes to help us remember what was said.
- We can meet with you in a place where you feel comfortable (e.g., at the kindergarten, or at your home).
- We can interview one or more people from your family/whānau at the same time, and your children are welcome to be there too.
- We will provide kai, and give you a koha (supermarket voucher) to thank you for taking part.
- After the meeting, we will read through the notes and listen to the recording to help us write a report about your views, as well as those of the kindergarten teachers.
- We would love to include you in this research, but you do not have to take part. You can also change your mind and withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the meeting.
- Thank you for considering taking part in this research!

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Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa

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