

# Exploration | Mana Āoturoa

ECE resources

This series of guides on the principles and strands of Te Whāriki offers an overview of the key areas of learning within Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum. Each guide provides links to other resources across our website which can help in the implementation of the curriculum.

**Exploration | mana āoturoa** is a key way in which children learn and make sense of the world through **self-initiated activity** and **play**. Skills in exploration include:

- **Problem-solving** skills, including skills in devising their own problems, imagining alternatives and trying things out
- **Experimenting**, taking **risks** and engaging with challenges
- **Collaborating** with others
- **Persevering**
- Being **curious**
- Being **confident** and having **a strong identity as a learner** and explorer
- Being **resourceful**
- Observing, explaining and **theorising**

Some particular features of practice are significant for enabling children's exploration. These include:

- Environments that support children's **independent exploration** and **manipulation of resources, including natural materials**
- Valuing children's **play** and **experimentation** as an important way in which young children learn
- Providing opportunities for children to **interact** with a range of people and peers and to learn from different perspectives and dialogue
- Supporting children's **discovery and investigation** in areas of interest to children
- Making **natural environments** available to children and helping children to develop respect for **nature** and **natural resources**
- Encouraging children to **create and modify working theories** about their world and how things work, and to listen to and comment on the working theories of others
- Engaging in episodes of **sustained shared thinking**
- Developing **events, excursions, experiences** and longer-term **investigations and inquiries** that extend children's interests in intentional and meaningful ways
- Providing lots of opportunities for **sensory** and **physical exploration** of resources and environments. **Open-ended materials** are particularly important for encouraging children's exploration

- Noticing and talking about children's **strategies** for exploration, setting problems for children, and encouraging them to notice patterns, sort and classify, make guesses, observe, compare, explain and reflect
- Providing opportunities for children to develop and improve their **physical control and skill**
- Providing **risky play opportunities** that are appropriate and supported
- Intentional teaching which draws on subject or domain knowledge to help children progress their understandings or skills in an area
- Encouraging children to **represent** their discoveries in a variety of ways, for example, through the **visual arts** or digital media
- Promoting and **extending children's play** in intentional ways to support well-developed **play repertoires** for learning a range of skills
- Opportunities for kaitiakitanga, conservation, recycling or pet-keeping that help children develop a sense of **responsibility** for the living world and how to care for it

### How might provision vary for children at different stages of development?

The exploratory activity of infants can best be facilitated with a range of **open-ended and sensory materials**. Infants can be offered opportunities to explore materials alongside others. Infants are also developing **locomotive skills** to facilitate their exploration, and **free movement** that enables children to build muscles and co-ordination and develop physical skills and physical confidence at their own pace.

Toddlers require open spaces, lots of opportunities for **active exploration**, and resources that they can move around freely. Materials should be **sensory-rich and open-ended** to encourage toddlers' **creative expression** and **vocabulary development**, and include different colours, textures and shapes as well as opportunities to explore **patterns and sorting**. Toddlers can also be encouraged to develop their ideas and **working theories** about the way the world works.

Older children should be supported to develop their **curiosity** and **sustained interest** in investigating aspects of their world. They should be encouraged to **initiate** purposeful activities to learn about their world, set their own problems, and learn by having a go, trying things out and making mistakes, while teachers show interest and **extend investigations in intentional ways**. Children develop **working theories** about physics, the natural world, social concepts and rules, shape, space and measure. Older children's dispositions for exploration can also be supported when teachers help them to develop **growth mindsets** that enable them to be comfortable with failure or admitting they don't know, as well as dispositions for **resilience**.

PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY



#### Dr Vicki Hargraves

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