

*Ko te reo o te tamaiti te tāonga o tōna ao.*  
The language of the child is the treasure of their world.

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## Early Oral Language/s and Communication in Families

**Goal:** As part of the strategic partnership with *Talking Matters*, the Marie Clay Research Centre is conducting a comprehensive, online search of assessments (formal and informal) and progress indicators of early oral language and communication. No comprehensive review or inventory is available, so this work will provide a strong foundation for the future.

### Search Parameters:

**Age ranges:** 0-3, 4-5, 6-8

**Multiple perspectives:** Child development, developmental psychology, family systems, early childhood, home language/s, speech-language, early language/s and literacy

**Wide net:** Go beyond library databases by tapping into the websites of universities, foundations and agencies that are focused on oral language development

**Empirical studies:** Inventory of empirical studies of assessments and indicators (ie., name, source/developer, country of origin, purpose/function, age range, time, cost, training requirements, measurement indices, and any documented use (eg., published studies), comments (eg., strengths, weaknesses, concerns, etc.) with references

### Underpinning Principles:

- Alignment with the unique context of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Broad view of language as communication to include observable behaviours and social-emotional indices in interactions (eg., gestures, eye gaze, facial expressions, pointing and mutual attention)
- View of language use (receptive/expressive; verbal and nonverbal) as children making sense of their worlds.
- Focus on attributes or indicators of high quality interactions within families, which vary across cultures, ethnicities, languages and families
- Children's developing control over language/s vary from one another across a range of indices (ie., they take individual pathways)
- Focus on capturing children's expanding linguistic competencies over time in any language/s
- Congruent with *Te Whariki* (2017) "children are positioned as confident and competent learners from birth. They learn by engaging in meaningful interactions with people, places and things – a process that continues throughout their lifetimes" (p. 12).

| Databases Searched | RefWorks Organisational Categories |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google Scholar</li> <li>• Education Research Complete</li> <li>• ProQuest Education Journals</li> <li>• ERIC</li> <li>• Index New Zealand (INNZ)</li> <li>• NZCER Journals</li> <li>• nzresearch.org.nz</li> <li>• A Plus Education</li> <li>• Trove (National Library of Australia)</li> <li>• SAGE Full-Text Journal Collection – Education</li> <li>• Handbooks</li> <li>• Reviews of literature</li> <li>• Ministry of Education publications</li> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• Websites (University &amp; Agency)</li> <li>• Unpublished theses</li> <li>• Mining source references</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oral language assessment</li> <li>• oral language teaching</li> <li>• oral language progressions</li> <li>• ECE</li> <li>• diversity</li> <li>• language development practices</li> <li>• English as second language</li> <li>• speech-language therapy</li> <li>• interventions</li> <li>• parent influence</li> <li>• infant/toddler</li> <li>• interactions</li> <li>• positive factors/measures/indicators</li> <li>• culture</li> <li>• primary school</li> <li>• parent-child interaction</li> <li>• teacher-child interaction</li> <li>• Literature reviews</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Preliminary Findings</b></p>   |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Standardised measures of oral language, administered in English, were the dominant assessments with a strong emphasis on vocabulary (expressive and receptive).</li> <li>2. Speech-language was the dominant perspective.</li> <li>3. Identification of speech-language difficulties was the primary purpose.</li> <li>4. A small set of studies of parent and teacher behaviours that promote oral language.</li> <li>5. Limited emphasis on adult’s responsiveness to children’s expressions of interest.</li> <li>6. Few studies allowed for children to demonstrate the meaning they were making and understanding through any means (verbal or non-verbal).</li> <li>7. Use of indicators to document children’s oral-language progress was infrequent.</li> <li>8. Few studies included the youngest children (0-2 years).</li> <li>9. Scant studies of young children who speak languages other than English.</li> <li>10. Studies conducted in natural contexts can highlight what children “<i>are able to do with language</i>” (Peterson, 2017, p. 42). The challenge is to go beyond what is easy to measure.</li> </ol> |

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| <p><b>What are the next steps?</b></p>  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convene individuals and groups with varying perspectives and expertise to engage in analysis and interpretations of studies.</li> </ol> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Use recommendations of individuals and groups to engage in iterative revisions.</li> </ol>  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Prepare a Draft Executive Summary for review by Talking Matters Working Group</li> </ol>  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Prepare an Executive Summary for dissemination.</li> </ol>  |

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| <p><b>Why is this review important?</b></p>  |
| <p>The value of this review is to provide a resource for moving forward in our collective work and individual projects. We will have a comprehensive database that draws from the unique bicultural and bilingual context of Aotearoa New Zealand and is international in breadth. The analysis and interpretation of the inventory of studies will allow us to engage in conversations that are aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi   the Treaty of Waitangi, promote children’s use of their heritage language resources and value the interconnections of social and emotional development and language and communication of young children. The aim is for the review to help us identify or</p> |

design assessments that measure outcomes of communicative interactions and that accurately describe indicators of progress.