

Aotearoa New Zealand

Early childhood music education in Aotearoa New Zealand is dependent on the expertise and enthusiasm of individuals and the location (rural/urban) and socio-economic status of families (Bodkin-Allen, 2009). Although early childhood education (ECE) is not compulsory, most children attend some form of ECE before they start school at around 5 years of age (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Early learning services are fully regulated and partially funded by the Ministry of Education. The ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), is a holistic curriculum that is intended as a basis from which ECE providers develop their own local curriculum. Although *Te Whāriki* contains references to music supporting learning outcomes, there is no specific requirement to include music in ECE.

In addition to the music offered within early learning services, children and families in some areas can access private early childhood music classes or classes offered through not-for-profit, church, or community organisations. Private, user-paid ECE music classes tend to be limited to the major cities. Private instrumental lessons are offered in most areas, although availability can be limited in smaller towns and rural areas.

The first case of COVID-19 in New Zealand was reported on February 28, 2020. On March 19, the border was closed to everyone except New Zealand citizens. Two days later the Government announced an alert level system and on March 26 placed the country in a full-scale lockdown. During this lockdown the entire population was required to self-isolate at home with only essential services, such as supermarkets, urgent medical services, pharmacies and petrol stations allowed to operate. The full lockdown was kept in place until April 28, when it was eased slightly. Schools and ECE services initially re-opened for the children of essential workers only, and fully re-opened on May 14. In August, a community outbreak led to further restrictions, including a two-week closure of schools and ECE centres

in Auckland, the country's largest city and home to one third of the population. At the time of writing in December 2020, the borders remained closed to all but a limited few, and new arrivals were required to spend two weeks in Government-managed isolation. Due to these stringent measures, the COVID-19 virus was not active in the community and there were no restrictions on daily life.

During the pandemic, the response from music educators, musicians, and music organisations demonstrated a commitment to providing accessible music experiences for young children and their families. Music and the arts did not, however, feature strongly in the Ministry of Education's COVID response. After lockdown, the Ministry of Education moved quickly to provide support for schools and families, particularly those who did not have access to the internet. The Government launched two free-to-air educational television channels. Home Learning TV | Papa Kāinga TV was a joint initiative between the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, Te Kura (the correspondence school), and TVNZ (Television New Zealand) and was part of a wider Ministry of Education response to the lockdown (Bunting, 2020). Broadcasts aimed at 5- to 8-year-olds covered literacy, maths, science, movement and health, and a small amount of *te reo Māori* (Māori language). There was no programming relating specifically to the arts. The daily broadcasts included a short segment for preschool children hosted by early childhood teacher, actor, and musician Karen O'Leary. *Karen's House* covered a wide range of topics and Karen skilfully incorporated music - singing and accompanying herself on guitar - in a way reflective of a holistic approach to early childhood education.

The ways in which ECE services connected with children and families varied greatly during lockdown (Mitchell et al., 2020). Although music was largely absent from the Ministry of Education's response, a survey of managers in the ECE sector shows that 57% reported including singing time in their online provision for children during lockdown

(Mitchell et al., 2020). Private and community early childhood music educators report moving their teaching online. Many of these educators offered free sessions, motivated by a desire to help families cope and reduce feelings of isolation. Some even took the opportunity presented by online provision to expand their programmes to offer classes or short posts every day (MENZA, 2020).

The two largest orchestras, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (APO), both included young children and families in their COVID-19 response. APO staff prepared two sets of online resources aimed at pre-school and primary-aged children, posted to their website each week. *APO Make and Do* contained activities for children such as ‘Listen and Draw’, and ‘Make your own percussion instrument’. *APO and Whoa! Guide to the O!* was a series of short video interviews between APO musicians and a puppet, introducing children to the instruments of the orchestra (McKenzie, 2020; Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, 2020).

The NZSO created *NZSO Storytime*, aimed specifically at young children. Composer Claire Cowan was commissioned to write incidental music to accompany four well-loved children’s picture books. The stories were read by well-known New Zealanders with accompanying music performed by a small ensemble of NZSO musicians. Four stories were recorded in July, when the musicians were allowed to rehearse together, but restrictions on public gatherings remained. A further story was recorded for *Te Wiki o te Reo Māori* (Māori language week), in September. The recordings were freely available via the NZSO’s website and YouTube channel. The success of *NZSO Storytime* as digital events encouraged the NZSO to perform the stories to live audiences after audience restrictions were lifted (L. Colominas, personal communication, December 7, 2020; New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, 2020).

The provision of early childhood music education is inequitable in Aotearoa New Zealand. Access to music education is not explicitly required within the early childhood curriculum framework and depends on the priorities and interests of ECE centres and their staff. The availability and accessibility of music education opportunities also varies in relation to how rural or urban a region is and the socio-economic status of the population. Although socio-economic barriers remain for children and families with no access to the Internet, providing music education experiences that can be accessed from children's homes potentially removes barriers associated with location. For example, during and since lockdown, children residing outside our two largest cities, Auckland and Wellington, have had access to education content produced by the APO and NZSO for the first time. One of the benefits of the COVID-19 lockdown has been the production of resources that remain available beyond the time of lockdown. There is potential for this to have a lasting impact on the ways organisations provide musical experiences for young children and their families, the ways children, families and ECE centres access these experiences, and how ECE services develop music education programmes.

Cut version

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