



# Refreshing our work with infants and toddlers: Mantras from theory, research and practice

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Capital thinking. Globally minded.

# Kaupapa/Plan

1. Mantras and teachers' practical knowledge
2. Identifying mantras:
  - rules of practice
  - principles of practice
  - images
3. Sharing mantras
4. What new mantras might arise from emerging shifts in *Te Whāriki* discourse?

# Mantra

- a mystical formula of invocation (see [INVOCATION](#) 2) or [incantation](#) (as in Hinduism)

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mantra>

- a word, phrase or sound that is repeated again and again, especially during prayer or meditation

<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/mantra>

- Words or sounds frequently repeated to aid concentration in meditation.
- <https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/mantras-great-leaders-live-everyday>

# Everyday mantras

- Feel the fear and do it anyway
- Be yourself
- Honesty is the best policy
- Leadership is stewardship
- A circle will keep turning unless you break it

# Teachers' practical knowledge

- **Rule of practice:** “ a brief, clearly formulated statement of what to do or how to do it in a particular situation frequently encountered in practice” (p. 61)
- **Principle of practice:** “a broader more inclusive statement than a rule” and “embodies purpose in a deliberate and reflective way” (p. 61)
- **Images:** “mental pictures held by the teacher about what good practice should look like” (p.61)

Elbaz, F. (1981). The teacher's “practical knowledge”: Report of a case study. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11 (1), 43-71.

# Image

- “Brief metaphoric statement of how teaching should be and marshals experience, theoretical knowledge and school folklore to give substance to those images. Images serve to guide the teacher’s thinking and to organise knowledge in the relevant area. The image is generally imbued with a judgement of value and constitutes a guide to the intuitive realisation of the teacher’s purpose.” (p. 61)

# Identifying and sharing mantras

## **Activity:**

1. Working in groups of 4-5, identify mantras that you use when working with infants and toddlers; keep notes on newsheet (20 mins)
2. Pin up your mantras: circulate to see each group's mantras (10 mins)
3. Plenary debrief (10 mins)

# Three key messages for “my” mantras

Quality early childhood settings for under-2s should be:

1. places where children experience sensitive responsive caregiving;
2. low stress environments that actively avoid toxic stress, including:
  - low adult-child ratios (1:3 or 1:4)
  - small group sizes (6 to 8)
  - calm quiet environment
3. places where environmental conditions and teacher action interact within a broader supportive policy infrastructure

[https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/Quality\\_ECE\\_for\\_under-two-year-olds/executive-summary](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/Quality_ECE_for_under-two-year-olds/executive-summary)



# Mantras for attuned pedagogy:

a personal collection from theory, research and practice

1. Sensitive responsive caregiving
2. Serve- and-return interactions
3. Watch, listen, act and adapt
4. Be an asker
5. See behind the action
6. The task is not caregiving, the task is the child
7. Use your **ISE**: **I**nvoke, **s**uggest, **e**ngage

# Mantras when planning

8. Be a collaborator not a director
9. Who am I doing this for?
10. Create a “yes” environment
11. The Environment is the third teacher
12. Watch for urges and challenges
13. Notice, recognise, respond
14. Eyes wide open for learning

## Sensitive responsive caregiving: the link between science and love and care

The active ingredient in the interactive dynamic between genes and experience is “the **‘serve-and-return’** nature of children’s engagement in relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community” (National Scientific Council for the Developing Child, 2007,p. 1).

“reciprocal relationships with people, places and things”  
( *Te Whāriki*, p.43).

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). *The science of early childhood development. Closing the gap between what we know and what we do*. Harvard University: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child.

# Emotional interaction assists cognition

For infants and toddlers learning is not a case of a binary choice between cognition or emotionality; rather it is the result of both.

EC programmes need to strike a balance between cognition and emotionality

Jack Shonkoff (2010)

# 3-steps to being responsive

## 1. WATCH

- Try and see the world as the child sees it
- Begin by just watching, not rushing in to do things for the baby
- Watch for both verbal and non-verbal cues
- Only by first learning from the child what they are calling for can you choose the right response

## 2. LISTEN and ASK

- what messages is the child sending?
- How can you re-arrange the environment in ways that will assist the child
- what does she / he want?
- Be aware of your own emotional state/ feelings; are they interfering with hearing the child's message

## 3. ACT and ADAPT

- Use your eyes
- Engage the child to discover their preferences
- Adapt your actions to child's desires
- Watch how the child responds
- Modify your actions to the child's response.

# The task is not caregiving: the task is the child

“...when caregiving is a task to be done, rather than an engagement with individual babies in unique contexts, it robs babies of their individuality and caregivers of their agency.”

(E. Elliot, 2007, p.127)



Elliot, E. (2007). *We're not robots. The voices of daycare providers*. New York: State University of New York Press.

# The task is the child



Prepared environment



Asking



Offering

Care moments that enhance agency

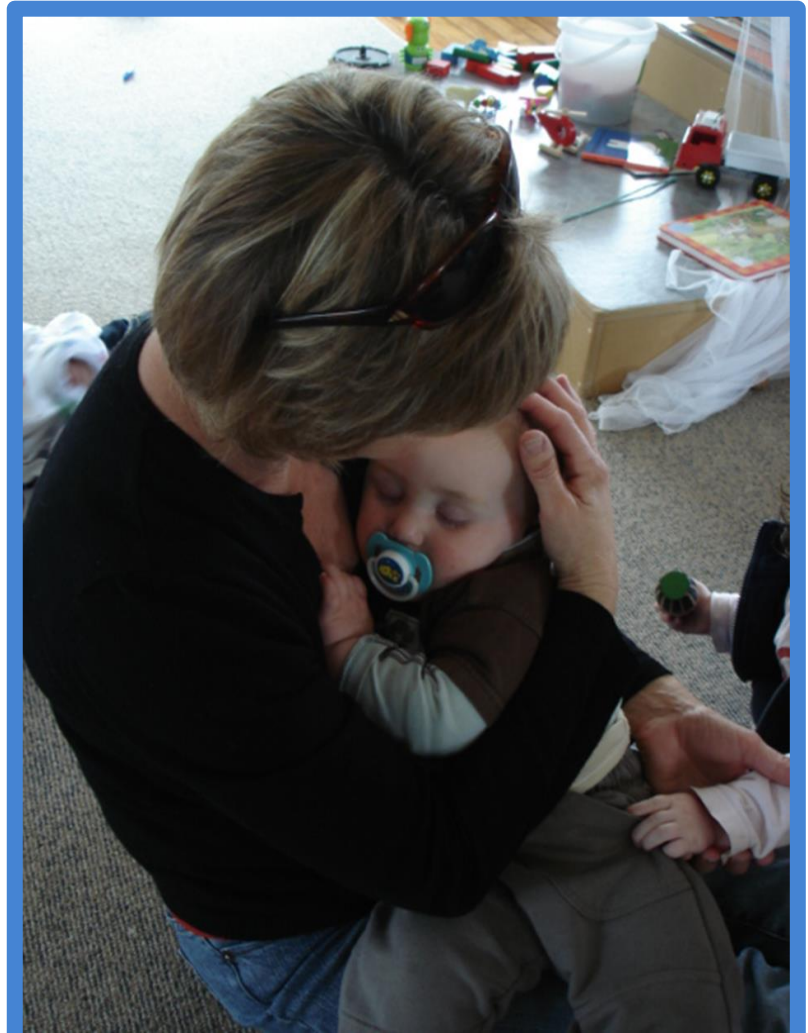
Dalli, et al (2009). The centre of innovation experience at Childspace Ngaio Infants and Toddlers' Centre.



**...and feel cherished**



**Care moments that  
enable a child to follow  
their own rhythm...**





# Use your ISE: invite, suggest, engage

## Through focusing on videoed interactions of care moments:

Teachers identified a pattern in their interaction:

### *Invite, Suggest, Engage (ISE)*

The pattern involves use of:

Gestures

Unhurried time

Being fully present

Being visually available

Sensitivity to child



# Be a collaborator not a director

Who am I  
doing this for?

“We feel it is essential that  
we invest in TIME for  
fully attentive, peaceful  
care-giving

To trust that children will  
let us know what they  
need, when they are  
ready and how they  
would like to do it”



# Create a “YES” environment



# Create a “Yes” environment



Childspace Karori

# The environment as the third teacher

- An environment that encourages movement
- An environment that supports comfort
- An environment that fosters competence
- An environment that encourages a sense of control





# Watch for urges and challenges



# Noticing, recognising, responding

Notice what the child is doing/trying to do-  
learning disposition / behaviours as triggers

Recognise the significance of what you have  
noticed – for the child – in terms of their  
learning: intention, purpose, motivation

Make decisions about responses that will support  
continuity of learning: frequency, longer, wider,  
deeper.

Consolidating, scaffolding, enriching, celebrating

A small proportion of NRR is  
documented. Decide what to document  
– and why

Notice when children are re-visiting  
learning, seize opportunities as they  
arise to revisit, orchestrate  
opportunities to revisit

Noticing



Recognising



Responding

Documenting

Revisiting

In-the-  
moment  
responses  
and future  
possible  
responses

*Noticing, recognising and responding ... relies on **sensitive observations**, understanding the nature of learning for very young children, and knowing the child and the curriculum well. It also requires us to use our intuition and to be open to multiple possibilities and pathways for learning.*



# “Eyes wide open” for learning

...participating in intent observations and narrative discussions of video data proved a surprisingly powerful tool for appreciating infants and toddlers as learners; it enabled them to see that infant and toddler abilities are often so much more than what I give them credit for”, filling them with wonder that ...  
“everything these little people do in a day has a purpose”.

Dalli, C. & Doyle, K. (2011). Eyes wide open: How teachers of infants and toddlers recognise learning. *The First Years*, 13 (2), 15-18.

In the context of the refreshed *Te Whāriki*

What are some possibilities for new  
mantras?

# What changed in *Te Whāriki 2017* ?

- Updated context, language, examples and implementation advice
- Stronger bicultural framing, focus on identity, language and culture and on inclusion of all children
- Fewer, broader learning outcomes (117 to 20)
- Links to *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*
- Streamlined structure - more easily navigated
- New web resources on Te Kete Ipurangi (<http://tewhariki.tki.org.nz/en/the-story-of-te-whariki/>)

# Shifts Ministry wants to see

1. A rich curriculum for each child:
  - Breadth and depth
  - Being intentional about what children might learn “over time and with guidance and encouragement”
2. Focus on learning that matters here:
  - To Child, family/whanau and community
3. Affirming identity, language and culture
4. Parents and whānau engaged in child’s learning
5. Personalised pathways to school and kura

# ACTIVITY

Working in groups of 4-5, consider the question:

What possibilities for new mantras does the shift of discourse suggest?