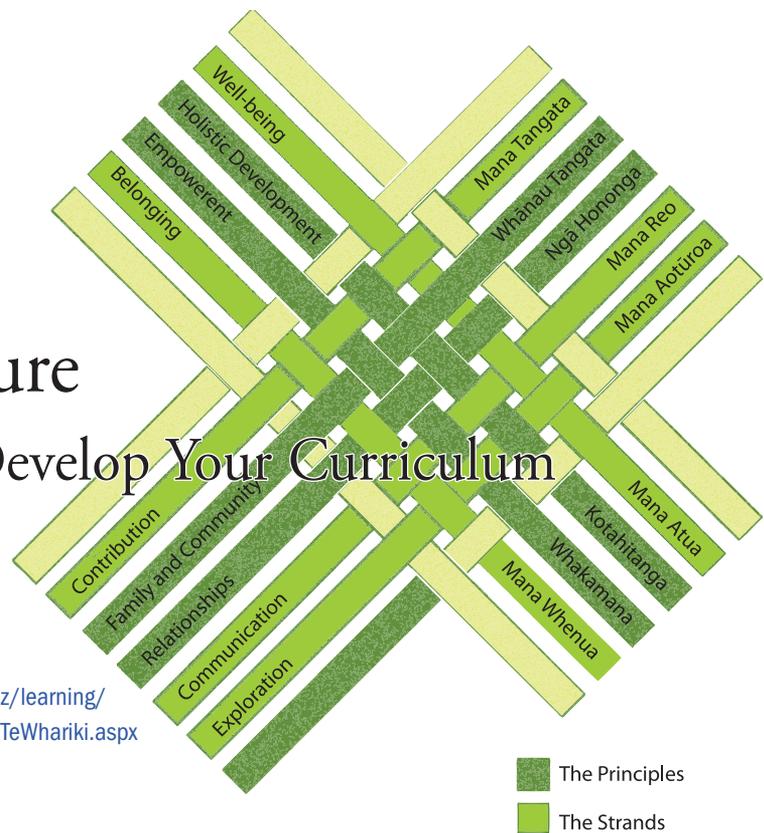


Mindful of Our Past, Optimistic for Our Future

Learning from *Te Whāriki* to Develop Your Curriculum

by Trish Thomas and Saras Pillay



www.educate.ecg.govt.nz/learning/curriculumAndLearning/TeWhariki.aspx

■ The Principles
■ The Strands

Early childhood programs develop from the people and the events of each place. Each country's early childhood education story is unique. Each story reveals what influences our view of the world, how our identities are shaped, and how we are interconnected.

This article delves into *Te Whāriki*, our early childhood curriculum, and briefly outlines Aotearoa New Zealand's story, emphasising the importance of not forgetting where you come from . . . in order to get where you are going to. It provides an explanation of how and why *Te Whāriki* was developed and what influence it still has on our most precious and treasured —

Trish Thomas is a fifth generation Pakeha New Zealander of British ancestry. She is the Curriculum Advisor at New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). Trish has been actively involved in developments of distance education and, more recently, programs of study through NZTC Online. Trish's teaching experience and professional interests include cultural inclusivity, sustainability, advocacy, and mathematics.

Saras Pillay is Academic Dean at New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). She is originally from South Africa, of Indian descent and, more recently, a New Zealand citizen. Saras is responsible for the development, delivery, and review of the various qualifications offered at NZTC. Her interests include socio-cultural theory, how place and culture shape identity and curriculum design.

our *tamariki* (children). It shares messages of perseverance, resilience, inspiration, and hope. It tells a story we can all learn from.

Ma te tiro tōmuri, ka kitea tōmua.
Reflecting on the past to guide the future.

Introduction

“When [indigenous] Māori first arrived in Aotearoa, they encountered a climate that was extreme compared to their homelands in Polynesia. They adapted quickly, utilising their existing twining and weaving skills to produce *korowai* (cloaks) and other practical objects such as *kete* (baskets) and *whāriki* (mats). The most widely used weaving material was (and still is) *harakeke* — otherwise known as New Zealand flax” (Toi — Māori Arts, n.d.).

“For Māori, the art of weaving is full of symbolism and hidden meanings and embodies the spiritual values and beliefs of the Māori people” (Puketapu-Hetet, 1989, p. 2). Imagine yourself sitting on the ground weaving, together with your

family. You are making a mat, a skill passed down from your grandparents and your ancestors. You are focusing on the distinctive design you have visualised. As you work, you talk, connecting comfortably with those around you. United together with a collective vision, your mat evolves into something unique, functional, and beautiful.

Te Whāriki, the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum, takes its name from the Māori word *whāriki* (mat). It was developed in the 1980s and 1990s by dedicated early childhood teachers and advisors. Symbolising a woven mat, it was lovingly crafted for the creation of a curriculum for infants, toddlers, and young children of Aotearoa New Zealand. The resources they used, the pattern they designed, the talk they engaged in, embodied *tikanga Māori* (spiritual values, beliefs, and practices). Through a deeply collaborative process 18 years ago, an enriching vision evolved into a curriculum framework — *Te Whāriki* (the mat) — to be implemented with children in diverse early childhood settings all around the country.

New Zealanders or Kiwis (a native bird and national symbol of Aotearoa New Zealand) are a proud nation. Living in the South Pacific, we revere the beauty of our land and seas and have a well-recognised, strong disposition towards creativity and ingenuity. We are optimistic, we value fairness, and hold robustly to the small but strong 'punching above our weight' outlook that has seen us prosper in sport, the arts, and other international exchanges. It has not always been this way, and we continue to battle on in many facets of our nationhood. Early childhood education has played a significant part in our nation's evolving journey, and continues to do so.

Past

Māori people have prospered on the sacred lands of Aotearoa New Zealand for centuries, and well before European settlers arrived. New migrants arrived gradually at the end of the 1700s and by the mid-1800s the British had outnumbered Māori (Orange, 2004). Immigration was sanctioned through the signing of a Treaty, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* in 1840, between the British Crown and Māori. Unfortunately, over time, generations witnessed breaches of Treaty promises, and the results were heart-rending. Decades of war, mostly over land confiscations, futile attempts at passive resistance, the near loss of a sacred language, educational disparities, and people marginalised and dispersed (Consedine & Consedine, 2012).

The transformative periods of the 1960s and 1970s across the world promulgated human rights, a cultural renaissance, and political reforms here in Aotearoa New Zealand. During this period the Treaty, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, was finally recognised to be "... a founding document ... and the most important document in New Zealand's history" (Cooke, 1990, p. 1). The social, education, and economic reforms of the 1980s directed the development of policy initiatives for

early childhood education (Te One, 2013). There was a call from the government to investigate the purpose, place, and function of early childhood education, and to identify what was best for the children of Aotearoa New Zealand (Lange, New Zealand Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group & New Zealand Department of Education, 1988.) This led to the mobilisation of the early childhood sector and an unprecedented scale of consultation and collaboration within the field and with Māori to produce a curriculum framework that honoured the government's social policy reform themes of the time, including its obligations to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Te One, 2013).

Present

The final version of *Te Whāriki* was published in 1996. The early childhood sector in Aotearoa New Zealand endeavoured to implement a curriculum that aspired for all young children:

"... to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

Te Whāriki honours Māori culture and language and has endeavoured to support the provision of bicultural early childhood education that is inclusive and culturally equitable for all. It is a movement away from a past of colonial education based on dominant Western approaches (May, 2005), to a culturally and socially just education that not only recognises Māori cultural aspirations, but is deliberately founded upon them (Reedy, 2013; Taniwha, 2010).

The foundations of *Te Whāriki* came from Māori holistic and cyclic beliefs that everyone and everything is interconnected through *whakapapa* (genealogy / kin-

ship) and *whanaungatanga* (collaborative and inclusive relationships) (Durie, 1998; Mead, 2003; Reedy, 2013). The principle Māori value of *mana* (respect, prestige) rendered the principles of *Te Whāriki*, namely Empowerment, Holistic Development, Relationships, and Family and Community. The elevation of *mana* highlighted the centrality of the child, through the strands of *Te Whāriki*, namely Well-being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication, and Exploration, in acknowledgement of a child's "... own uniqueness and divine specialness" (Reedy, 2003, p. 68). *Te Whāriki* goes beyond technical aspects of a curriculum by using a theoretical framework of principles, strands, goals, and outcomes.

Te Whāriki is a unique bicultural and bilingual expression of the aspirations the nation of Aotearoa New Zealand has for its infants, toddlers, and young children (Ritchie, 2013). It is underpinned by a strong sociocultural ideology that recognises the importance of holistic development of the child within a social and cultural context. Embracing indigenous Māori values, language, and worldview alongside the work of Bronfenbrenner, Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner, learning is viewed as a social process.

In *Te Whāriki*, curriculum is defined as "the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10).

Te Whāriki does not prescribe content or strategies, but rather, guides early childhood teachers to develop their curriculum *whāriki* (mat), and to make curriculum decisions that effectively support the special character and contexts of their early childhood service, thereby maintaining and actively fostering diversity and cultural inclusion (Alvestad, Duncan & Beige, 2009). It

Reflective Prompts

1. Is your teaching practice empowering to all children whom you work with?
2. How is the holistic development of children acknowledged in your early childhood centre?
3. Does your curriculum value and encourage the contribution of families and communities and their aspirations for their children?
4. How do you establish and build responsive, reciprocal relationships with all stakeholders in your early childhood environment?
5. In what ways do your interactions with children respect their rights and nurture their well being?
6. Does your curriculum foster children's sense of belonging through cultural and environmental sustainability?
7. Do you value and listen to children's contributions when making curriculum decisions?
8. Are children's and parent's voices included in your assessment practices?
9. Does your curriculum value exploration and play as fundamental to children's learning?
10. How do you build and uphold children's *mana* (respect, prestige, esteem, specialness)?
11. What values and beliefs underpin your early childhood practice? Where have they come from and how do they continue to inform you?
12. What are your hopes and dreams for the future of early childhood education in your place?

advocates a shift in curriculum to focus on children's interests, dispositions, and working theories. This presents a challenge to teachers who prefer to follow a curriculum that focuses on predetermined ideas of what, when, and how children need to learn.

"The fundamental purpose of education for the 21st Century, it is argued, is not so much the transmission of particular bodies of knowledge, skill, and understanding as facilitating the development of the capacity and the confidence to engage in lifelong learning. Central to this enterprise is the development of positive learning dispositions, such as

resilience, playfulness, and reciprocity" (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 9).

Future

Te Whāriki is currently undergoing a good deal of debate and discussion on how it translates into quality early childhood practices (Blaiklock, 2013; Smith, 2013). It does, however, remain both an aspiration and a challenge to implement thoughtfully and effectively (New Zealand Education Review Office, 2013; Ritchie, 2013). These discussions and debates will continue to ensure our future decision-making is wise and that the education of our young remains eco-

logically and culturally sustainable for future generations (Ritchie, 2013). We must continue to reflect on the past to guide the future.

Conclusion

Lee, Carr, Soutar, and Mitchell (2013) have identified curriculum documents from a number of other countries that synergise with the principles and pedagogies of *Te Whāriki*, for example Australia, Scotland, British Columbia, Germany, Denmark, and Ireland. Your early childhood curriculum in your place and time reflects the aspirations you have for young children and how the knowledge, skills, and values of their families and communities are respected. Above is a list of reflective prompts arising from principles and pedagogies of *Te Whāriki* that you could re-contextualise for your own unique early childhood pedagogy and early childhood context.

References

- Alvestad, M., Duncan, J., & Beige, A. (2009). New Zealand ECE teachers talk about *Te Whāriki*. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 6(1), 3-19.
- Blaiklock, K. (2013). Yes, we do need evidence to show whether *Te Whāriki* is effective: A reply to Anne Smith's discussion paper, "Does *Te Whāriki* need evidence to show it is effective?" Retrieved from <http://unitec.researchbank.ac.nz>
- Carr, M., & Claxton, G. (2002). Tracking the development of learning dispositions. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 9(1), 9-37.
- Consedine R., & Consedine J. (2012). Healing our history: The challenge of the Treaty of Waitangi (3rd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin Books.
- Cooke, R. B. (1990). Introduction — Special Waitangi edition. *New Zealand Universities Law Review*, 14(1), 1.
- Durie, M. (1998). *Whaiora: Māori health development* (2nd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

PreschoolFirst

Assessment to support children's learning

PreschoolFirst is a research-based, online assessment system that connects developmental progress with educational decision-making.

- Developmental assessment guides learning experiences.
- Available in several versions, including a free edition available to individual teachers.
- Detailed reports document progress for individual children and groups.
- Family involvement features let families participate in their child's development.
- Outstanding value - developed by a non-profit with a 35-year history of educational successes.



From The Source for Learning, Inc., a not-for-profit educational technologies corporation.
www.preschoolfirst.com • call 866-584-2900 for a free tour and trial

Lange, D., New Zealand Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, & New Zealand Department of Education. (1988). *Education to be more. Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group*. Wellington, New Zealand: Government Printer.

Lee, W., Carr, M., Soutar, S., & Mitchell, L. (2013). *Understanding the Te Whariki Approach: Early years education in practice*. New York: Routledge.

May, H. (2005). *School beginnings: A 19th century colonial story*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press.

Mead, H. M. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values*. Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers.

New Zealand Education Review Office. (2013). *Working with Te Whariki*. Wellington, New Zealand: Education Review Office.

New Zealand Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: Te whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa/Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Orange, C. (2004). *An illustrated history of the Treaty of Waitangi*. Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books.

Puketapu-Hetet, E. (1989). *Māori weaving with Erenora Puketapu-Hetet*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pitman Publishing.

Reedy, T. (2003). Tokū rangatiratanga na te mana — Mātauranga: "Knowledge and power set me free . . .". In J. Nuttall (Ed.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (pp. 51-77). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Reedy, T. (2013). Tokū rangatiratanga na te mana — Mātauranga: "Knowledge and power set me free . . .". In J. Nuttall (Ed.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 35-54). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Ritchie, J. (2013). *Te Whāriki and the promise of early childhood care and education grounded in a commitment*

to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In J. Nuttall (Ed.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 141-156). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Smith, A. B. (2013, November 15). *Does Te Whāriki need evidence to show it is effective?* A discussion paper.

Taniwha, R. (2010). *From theory to practice — The bicultural reality: Aspirations, perspectives and the reality for teacher educators towards a bicultural pedagogy*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Te One, S. (2013). *Te Whāriki: Historical accounts and temporary influences 1990-2012*. In J. Nuttall (Ed.), *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 7-34). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Toi – Māori arts. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.newzealand.com/int/feature/maori-arts/