**[Karen Hope]:** Some educators might be caught up in the idea, this is something that I feel quite strongly about, this idea of planning for activities rather than planning for learning. I'm probably still surprised somewhat in 2021 that we have activities being put out as discrete things on tables, and for people listening tonight, you'll know what I'm talking about. I'm wondering whether you can provide us with perhaps a different lens through which we might be able to differentiate the difference between those two ways of thinking activities and planning for learning, and maybe some examples of how this might look in practice.

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** Yeah, look, it's one of those things I think we've been really ... that's part of our learning to be educators, is we're very much programmed into the intentional teaching and the programmed activity. I guess I haven't used the word activity for a really long time because I see them as experiences for children. So I think if we can get rid of the word activity and think about experiences, then we'll start to think about it very differently because it's not a discrete activity that's on a discrete table or set for X number of children. I guess I don't want to say that planning is not important because planning for children's learning is really important, but it is this real difference between what is a discreet activity and what is a learning experience. I think it comes from the way we look at what we're intending for children, whether it's about activity and doing, or whether it's about the intellectual activity that's going on in the child's brain about what they're learning about.

So the lens that I found so useful was drawn from the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, and he talked about the idea of encounter, encounter between humans. But I borrowed on this idea around encounter to think about the infants' encounter with curriculum or the infants' encounter with learning. So the lens that I really used there was another lovely idea of Levinas, which was around the benediction. He drew on the Christian tradition of the benediction as the call in church at the end of church, to go out into your parish and to be a witness of your faith. He called it the benediction and we translate that as the invitation. So if I think about infants encountering curriculum, and then I think about their invitations, then that's a whole new lens for looking about learning as opposed to the activities that are my agenda to set up.

So this idea that we could enter into an encounter with an infant with much greater wisdom if we're open to what they're inviting us into, rather than what we're inviting them into. So when we become skilled at noticing, we see invitations almost constantly. So once you see the first invitation a child makes to you, you can never stop seeing them, they just keep coming. But to do that, we have to put our glasses, our lenses, on and the lenses ... I've chosen this analogy of our guest glasses as opposed to our host glasses. So you're hosting a dinner party. You decide on the menu, you decide on the wines, you decide on the music, even the colour of the napkins. You've hosted the dinner party and the activity, and you've invited your friends to come along.

But if we flip that and say that the child is the host and we wait for their invitation and we wait for them to tell us what the menu is, what the wine's going to be, what colour the napkins will be, then we behave very differently. So we don't go into that with our own intention. We wait for the child to tell us, and then we work with the child. So I think that really helps to differentiate between the adults setting up an activity and then the adult really being invited into the child's learning and being responsive in that learning environment. So if we situate ourselves as guests in the infant's invitation, it will really shift the role we play and the way that we see ourselves as educators.

**[Karen Hope]:** Wow. I was just thinking when you were speaking then that if I was working in early learning tomorrow, where I was going into it and into an early childhood space, I would be writing all this down madly right now and go in with quite some enthusiasm tomorrow. Because what you've done is ... I know that the word provocation is quite a big one that we use a lot and I've even used in one of my questions tonight, but there's probably some issues with that word somewhere along the line. The word invitation, though, an invitation from the educator and an invitation from the child, if you were to even do a bit of an audit of your room and walked around in the morning and looked at the things, and you perhaps could say something like, "Is this an invitation? What does this invite from children and staff and parents?", it might really shape what actually goes out in those spaces in the morning.

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** Absolutely. I think it's a really hard thing to shift and change because I think we are programmed to be the responsible ones who set up the environment and we take responsibility for making sure that there's enough around for children, that it's stimulating enough, but not too stimulating. But I think if we think about the most simple experience and how we are really programmed to take control of those agendas, then we can start to see how we can pull back. So for example, I think just about jack-in-the-box and a six month, seven month old baby, and we want to share this experience with the child so we hand the jack-in-the-box over to the child and they look at it, they take it with two hands, they have a look, they put it in their mouth and yeah, that's lovely. But we want them to notice the wheel on the side that opens it, but they haven't noticed that.

So we're so tempted, we have to point that out to them and we either show them or we get their hand and help them to manipulate it, and we've lost it. We've taken completely over. We've come in with our agenda. We want them to know what the jack-in-the-box does rather than giving them the object and then waiting for them to discover and to explore. I can only liken this to when I am told by one of my adult children to get a new app on my phone and I get the app and then they're hanging over my shoulder. They're trying to tell me how to quickly hurry up and do it because they know how it works and they want me to get the thrill out of the app and I'm really annoyed and I put it down and I walk away.

This is what happens with the jack-in-the-box. The child just gets bored with what our agenda is, pushes it away and finds something else to play with. So it takes a great deal of patience and a great deal of changing our mindset of how we're going to work with babies if we're truly going to let them discover what the jack-in-the-box is about. Sometimes we just want to show them and we'll be up front and we'll say, "Here's a jack-in-the-box. This is what it does", pop, great. But that's where we can be intentional. That's where we can think about, "Well, how are we introducing this object to the child, and how do we want to allow them to make this discovery?".

**[Karen Hope]:** How do you think you get to know a baby if you're an educator in an early learning centre and you're listening tonight and you think, " I know they're capable of so much more." In the few minutes we've been talking, I know babies are capable as theory makers. What would be your advice to an educator who wants to get to know a baby and their thinking?

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** I think it's around time and patience and allowing that baby to take the lead, and closeness ... I mean, I think we haven't talked a lot about relationships and attachments, but they absolutely underpin the baby being able to freely explore, the baby being curious. So much attention has to be given to the quality of the relationship and the attachment relationship and how that baby is relating within the room with other children and other staff. So I think it's about just really focusing attention, taking time, allowing that child ... If you feel the need to say something, just wait 10 seconds longer and see what happens. If we wait that little bit longer, the baby will offer something that invites us into a conversation or an experience that we probably weren't expecting. So I think it's about patience.

[Copyright Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Footer/Pages/Copyright.aspx) 2021