

Chapter 6

Reconceptualising Shier's Pathways to Participation with Infants



Listening and Responding to the Views of Infants in Their Encounters with Curriculum

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Abstract Much has been written about affording young children (including infants) rights to participate in matters that affect them. In particular, most early childhood curriculum guides that include infants, reflect contemporary images of infants as powerful learners, capable of contributing to their own and others learning. While these strong images of capable children may sit comfortably with curriculum approaches for older preschoolers, there is less clarity about how infants might have their agency and rights to be participants in curriculum honoured. This chapter presents three narratives, developed as part of a case study considering infants' encounters with curriculum. Drawing on the Levinasian idea of encounter (Levinas, *Time and the other*. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1987), these narratives are an attempt to get closer to infants' perspectives and illuminate the ways in which these infants propose their learning agendas and invite others into the encounter. The narratives suggest that infants' contributions and key signals about their interests and ambitions for learning can be easily overlooked. As a way of overcoming these oversights, Shier's (Child Soc 15(2):107–117, 2001) principles of participation are considered as a possible framework for listening to infants and fostering their

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participation rights in curriculum. A reconceptualising of these principles, based on insights gleaned from the narratives, provides new ways of thinking about infants as protagonists and partners in their curriculum encounters. This chapter will invite conversations about hidden, silenced and overlooked aspects of the curriculum experience for infants and provide a framework for considering how infants rights to have a say in curriculum might be honoured.

Keywords Early childhood education · Curriculum · Shier · Infants and toddlers · Participatory learning

The increased participation of infants in non-familial childcare in Australia has been accompanied by an intensification of political and research interest in their childcare experience (Grieshaber & Graham, 2015; Sumsion et al., 2016). Along with this shift to increasing numbers of ever younger children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, there has been a groundswell of interest in young children as rights holders and their right to have a say in matters that affect them, including their education. Among a growing number of international initiatives aimed at enhancing children's life outcomes has been the recent phenomenon of government-initiated curriculum or learning frameworks for ever younger children. These frameworks frequently call on educators to view infants as agentic and capable contributors to their own and others' learning. There is as yet, however, little written about how infants' right to have a say in their learning might be fostered.

This chapter is drawn from a study (Cheeseman, 2017) that examined the experience of infants in an Australian ECEC setting with a view to illuminating how their right to have a say about their learning and to contribute to the curriculum can be realised. The study aimed to better understand, as far as possible from the infants' perspective, how they experienced curriculum. It sought to get close to the experience of three infants – Clare, William and Hugh (aged between 6 and 28 months) – as they encountered curriculum in their childcare setting. Using a critical hermeneutics theoretical frame, this study sought to reveal the potential hidden, silenced or taken-for-granted aspects about curriculum for infants, alongside the use of narratives to reflect the infants' lived experiences.

It was acknowledged from the outset the impossibility of ever being able to claim to *know* what the infant is thinking or indeed desires (Elwick et al., 2014). This work, however, invites consideration of what cannot be completely known or understood about the *Other*. It accepts that errors might be made in assumptions about infants' internal drives and motivations. This work presents a case for an inquiring and speculative stance about what we cannot yet know about infants. Such a stance may afford opportunities for infants that they may not otherwise encounter.

With this in mind, the thinking of the Lithuanian-born French philosopher and phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas (1985), offered the possibility of conceptualising curriculum for infants as *encounter*. Curriculum conceptualised as encounter recognises the infant as more than the object of the curriculum experience. Encounter situates the infant as a subject who influences and has a say in their learning.

Stemming from the broader theorising of encounter, Levinas' also offered the notion of the *benediction*. For Levinas (1999), "All encounters begin with the benediction, contained in the word 'hello'" (p. 98); the benediction is the invitation to encounter. The focus on the lived experience of the infants (their sayings) and the invitations (their benedictions) offered a way to come closer to the experience of the infant in the curriculum encounter.

The encounters represented in this chapter spark questions about how learning and curriculum are conceptualised when working with infants. In particular, these narratives expose the nature of *encounter* for infants – how they both respond to and influence others and share their ideas for play. Drawing on the video footage, still-frame photographs taken from the video footage, and field notes, a description of the context and events is presented along with a selection of the still-frame photographs which reflect the action. The images presented in this chapter are used with permission and taken from that study. The narrative analysis presented in this chapter focuses on how the infants' *benedictions* are indications of their capacity to participate and contribute to curriculum decisions, and to suggest, alter and set the direction of their own and other's learning. To further this work, we draw on Shier's (2001) principles of child participation, to examine how the small moments and subtle suggestions of these infants might be clues to honouring the agency, capabilities and participation rights of very young children.

Participatory Learning

Constructions of infants drawn from the prominent theoretical perspectives of attachment theory have often framed infants as the passive recipients of adults' intents or responses (Elfer, 2014; Trevarthen, 2011). The data presented in this chapter challenge this framing of the infant as passive and reliant on the appropriate actions of the adult to influence and enhance their learning. Instead, the data show multiple and diverse ways that these infants were agentic, opportunistic and sophisticated in suggesting and asserting their capacities as mediators of their learning. They were not merely the objects of adults' plans for their learning (James et al., 1998).

While much has been written about affording young children (including infants) rights to participate in matters that affect them, the narratives presented in this chapter highlight that images of infants as passive and subject to the actions and decisions of their educators may be interrupting the realisation of genuine participatory rights for very young children. As Sumsion et al. (2011) suggest, critical examination of taken-for-granted approaches attempt to "...dislodge us from the certainties of our habitual reference points and enable greater analytic richness..." (p. 117). This criticalist standpoint promotes a deeper understanding of how infants' capacities for participation might become central to the practices of educators working with the youngest children.

Originating from the traditions of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1979), and more recently social constructivist thinking (Rogoff, 2003), participatory learning in the early childhood context highlights the importance of learning that occurs as a shared social process (Edwards, 2009). Moving beyond notions of social learning through observation of a more skilled or experienced other, or the opportunity to actively engage in an adult-directed activity, participatory learning emphasises the child's agency and autonomy – one who is listened to, acknowledged and can lead the learning process. Tomanovic (2003) suggests that participatory learning is characterised by openness and opportunities to express opinions freely, and that a sense of meaning is established through interdependence and reciprocity. Such notions – of openness, opportunity to express opinions, interdependence and reciprocity – may appear cogent and reasonable in the context of contemporary approaches to early childhood curriculum. When considered from the standpoint of infants, however, such notions, premised on a shared and equitable contribution, cannot be taken for granted. If ideals such as reciprocity, openness and interdependence are to be realised for infants, their contributions must be understood, identified and honoured.

In considering the place for participatory learning in the experience of infants and toddlers, Berthelson and Brownlee (2005) drew on the work of Shier (2001) who notes five ordered principles for genuine participation. Shier's principles begin from a premise of genuine child-led participation where the child's capacity and competence to contribute is unquestioned. In the case of infants, the premise of unquestioned competence cannot be taken for granted. Although much contemporary early childhood literature espouses a capable and resourceful child, one with rights and agency, the discourses that surround infants in early childhood settings often present them as vulnerable, with many needs and subject to the decisions and actions of the adults who care for them. The first challenge to participatory curriculum with infants is to see beyond the images of infants that often form the basis for working with them. Beyond this starting point, Shier (2001) suggests that the core principles for participatory approaches are:

- 1) Children are listened to.
- 2) Children are supported to express their views.
- 3) Children's views are taken into account.
- 4) Children are involved in decision-making processes.
- 5) Children share power. (Shier, 2001, p. 110)

Expressed as responsibilities of the adults, these principles are premised on an assumption of a child who is verbal, capable of coherently communicating their views and somewhat adept at negotiating both power and decision making. They equally place responsibility on the adult to *enable* the participation through their actions. Bae (2009), however, suggests terms such as “enhance” or “inhibit” (p. 394) rather than *enable*. Bae's terms may lend themselves more respectfully to fostering participation for very young children and also take the emphasis away from what the adult *does* to place more emphasis on what the adult *notices*. Bae (2009) asserts that an essential premise of participation is the creation of conditions for mutual actions and relational processes. As Woodhead (2005) argues, fostering children's participatory rights “...challenges familiar ways of thinking about adult-child

relationships and demands new role expectations for adults who take care of children" (p. 394). This is particularly pertinent in working with pre-verbal infants where much emphasis has traditionally been placed on the adult to take the lead.

In considering Shier's five principles in relation to infants, and in keeping with a desire to consider participation from the perspectives of the infants, we have reconceptualised Shier's principles and considered them, not from the perspective of what the adult might do, but what the infant might say if they were to communicate verbally. Once again Levinas' ideas about the face-to-face encounter (Levinas, 1987) have been useful in reconsidering these principles with infants in mind. Rather than approaching these principles full of notions of the adult as expert who enables and allows the child's contribution, a Levinasian shift requires the adult to be hesitant, cautious and watch closely for the individual and unexpected ways in which the infant might express their desires. From the perspective of infants, the principles might read more like the following:

1. I can communicate in many ways – you have to know how to listen.
2. I have views and opinions – I show them in many different ways.
3. My views are worth taking into account – if you wait and let me show you.
4. I can make decisions about my own capabilities – give me time and watch carefully what I choose.
5. I want to have a say – you may need to wait and watch carefully.

Understood in the context of what Clark et al. (2005) suggest are democratic and respectful relationships, characterised by an ethic and culture of listening, these five adapted principles offer a way for educators to consider infant participatory learning. As Rinaldi (2001) suggests, listening is "a metaphor for having openness and sensitivity to listen and be listened to—listening not only with our ears, but with all our senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation)" (p. 19). This notion of listening with all the senses is a way of interpreting Shier's principles in relation to infants and honouring the many and diverse ways that they communicate and express their intents.

It is acknowledged that choosing to analyse the data using these principles is but one way of interpreting and reading these narratives and that there are many other possible interpretations and readings. In constructing the narratives, the intent was not to disregard other possibilities, but to sharpen the focus on the infants' participation.

Narrative 1: *The Wheels on the Bus*

[William: 8 months; Clare: 21 months; Helen: 27 months]

It is after lunch and a number of infants and toddlers are preparing for a sleep. Two of the older toddlers, Clare and Helen, are reading a book with their educator. Another educator and two toddlers are close by, but they are not directly involved in



Fig. 6.1 William turns his attention to the singers and raises his arms “up and down”

what unfolds. The book being read to Clare and Helen is a large picture book: *The Wheels on the Bus*. This book reading soon turns to singing of the familiar song of the same title, along with the actions that these children appear to know well. As the children and educator turn the pages, they sing a new verse with different actions.

William (far left in Fig. 6.1) is not directly involved in this game. He is sitting about two metres away and has been given some toys on the mat. He is not yet crawling and so his ability to move around the room is quite limited. It is not long into this singing game that William appears to join in (see Fig. 6.1). He turns his attention to the singers and seems familiar with the song. He begins the actions of raising his arms above his head and lowering them in a rhythmic way as the educator sings “up and down, up and down”.

William’s gaze indicates that he is focused on the singing game and while his actions are often slightly behind that of the toddlers, his rhythm and beat is consistent with that of the singing. The singing goes on for over two minutes, and although William dips in and out of paying attention to this game – often turning his attention to the other educator or to toys on the floor – he consistently comes back to the singing every time the toddlers sing the chorus, “up and down, up and down” (see Figs. 6.2 and 6.3).

Reflections on Narrative 1

This narrative provides an insight into hidden or perhaps taken-for-granted aspects of William’s encounter. The actions and reactions of William during this sequence go completely unnoticed by either of the educators who are close by and focused on the other children in the group. This could suggest that William has learning desires and intents that might be obscured from or overlooked by his educators. He



Fig. 6.2 Sustained concentration to repeat the actions “up and down”



Fig. 6.3 William returns to the actions during the chorus

demonstrates quite extraordinary memory recall and musicality in matching his actions with the rhythms of the singing, and yet it became clear from discussion with educators after viewing this video that none of them have previously noticed William's interest in singing.

William's benediction is clear – if noticed. He is interested in the song and has the capacity to join in. Despite his invitation being overlooked, William shows a capacity to select what he might involve himself in. His learning is not bound by what was intended for him nor is his participation limited because he could not yet crawl over to the singers. Somewhat opportunistically, he takes advantage of the goings-on that are of interest to him.

In this sense, William's face-to-face encounter is supported by the actions of the educator who is singing, but not reliant on the educator to provide a direct response to him. William establishes his own learning agenda. The toys on the floor were the

intended experience for William, but his engagement in the singing activity is vastly different to what was intended for him. While we cannot be certain, he appears unconcerned at the lack of adult attention towards him personally and content to set his own direction for learning and involvement. This event does, however, represent a potential lost opportunity for the educator to follow William's lead and provide the possibility for a more extended involvement in the experience.

Narrative 2: Hugh and William – Cubby Play

[Hugh: 12 months; William: 9 months]

Hugh has been crawling for some time, however William has started crawling just a few weeks earlier. Both infants have been attending this setting for 6 months, so they are familiar with each other. It is rest time for most of the other children and Hugh and William have the playroom to themselves. There are two educators in the room but they are picking up and tidying the environment. Hugh crawls under the home corner table which has a colourful tablecloth that almost reaches the floor. He crawls under and immediately comes out on the other side of the incidental cubby (see Fig. 6.4). He pauses for a moment, sits and turns his body to go back under.

William has noticed this as he is sitting near to where Hugh first entered the area underneath the table. As Hugh reappears from under the table, William moves towards him and squeals. They almost bump heads as William nudges his face towards Hugh, almost like a kiss (see Fig. 6.5).

Once Hugh is outside the cubby, he sits. Hugh looks to the educator, who says from across the room, "Where's Hugh?". He grins widely and continues to engage her (see Fig. 6.6). William also looks to the educator and squeals, even more loudly than Hugh.

William reaches out to touch Hugh but misses. He crawls off away from the table while Hugh re-enters the cubby for the second time, taking exactly the same path as before. Each time he emerges, he looks to the educator, waves, smiles and vocalises.

Fig. 6.4 Hugh initiates a game under the table





Fig. 6.5 William joins in and bumps Hugh

Fig. 6.6 Both infants engage the educator with grins and squeals



William meets him again as he emerges, gently bumping him, also squealing (see Fig. 6.7). William follows many of the actions of Hugh but never goes under the table. I am unsure if this is because he is newer to crawling and this is an unknown space for him, or whether he is enjoying the anticipation of waiting for the moment when Hugh emerges.

William follows Hugh across the room, away from the cubby and they set up a high-pitched squealing that almost sounds like a song (see Fig. 6.8). They continue to crawl away, then turn to face each other, squeal their song and move on.

The episode ends when William seeks out an educator who is standing nearby. He holds her shoes until she picks him up. Hugh soon follows and the educator sits on the floor with an infant on each knee (see Fig. 6.9).

Fig. 6.7 William seeks to physically connect with Hugh each time he emerges from under the table



Fig. 6.8 The infants engage in a squealing exchange, looking towards each other as they take turns



Fig. 6.9 Both infants approach their educator



Reflections on Narrative 2

This narrative reveals these young infants' capacity to encounter each other in a shared game, with very little adult involvement. The infants include the educators only as reference points, from time to time seeking their attention through smiles, glances and vocalisations. Their benedictions in this case are directed to each other as they share subtle physical and verbal gestures that suggest they are playing the same game. Both infants show a desire to involve each other and regularly turn to check that the other is still engaged. Their synchronised vocalisations show a reciprocity and *serve and return* verbal pattern that is often attributed to adult-child interactions, yet these infants initiate and briefly sustain this pattern, without the involvement of an educator.

The sophistication of the collaboration, mimicry, anticipation, reciprocity, sensitivity, shared enjoyment and theorising is striking, but because the action moves so quickly it is easily overlooked. The gentle physical banter that is intentionally initiated by William shows considerable self-regulation, awareness of and sensitivity towards Hugh. In response, Hugh repeats William's actions, possibly encouraging the shared banter. This face-to-face encounter does not rely on an educator's active involvement. These infants show their capacity to initiate, sustain and change the direction of play, with only a little moral support from an adult. The educator's proximal interest and engagement allows the infants to establish their own ideas, suggestions and limits. Her role is important in enabling their agency to set the direction and tone of the encounter. They were clear when they wanted the physical closeness to the educator and signalled their desire to be held by her.

Narrative 3: Hugh's Encounter with the Microphone

[Hugh: 14 months; Clare 24 months]

Hugh is outdoors, sitting on the lap of his educator. They are under the canopy of the sandpit and the educator is singing the song, *There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, to Hugh and Clare. Hugh is listening and smiling at his educator, and while not singing or vocalising, he seems happy to be involved. He is soon distracted by a bird hopping on the canopy above and points and vocalises. The educator stops singing and immediately follows his lead (see Fig. 6.10).

She leans backwards to better see the bird above her and follows Hugh's pointing with her own. She talks with Hugh about the bird and as it flies away she moves her body, pointing to and showing Hugh where the bird has gone as its shadow has disappeared from the canopy (see Fig. 6.11). Hugh begins to vocalise more, and while his language is not always understood by the educator, she stays engaged and continues to follow his lead. He talks and points to other children playing, he notices the bird again and the educator again picks up on his lead. Once the bird has flown away she looks for other prompts to engage him in conversation.

Fig. 6.10 “Look, a bird”



Fig. 6.11 The educator follows Hugh’s lead



The educator invites Hugh to wear a small Bluetooth microphone which is wrapped around his upper arm (see Fig. 6.12). He is taking part in data gathering (as part of this study) and the microphone helps to capture his vocalisations more clearly. The microphone is Bluetooth linked to a video camera that is capturing this episode.

The educator attempts to introduce new topics such as the images on Hugh’s t-shirt. He does not respond to her prompts, but rather becomes interested in the microphone. He touches it and vocalises but the word is not recognisable. To this point his vocalisations have been mostly single syllables – such as “bird”, “fish” and “car”. The educator explains that it is a microphone and talks about it being on his

Fig. 6.12 Talking with Hugh about the microphone



Fig. 6.13 The “bub-in-nar”

arm – he repeats “arm” and after a minute of looking and talking about other things in the playground he touches the microphone again and the educator asks him, “What’s this?”. He vocalises, “bub-in-nar”. She is confident that his three-syllable utterance is “microphone” and repeats the word back to him (see Fig. 6.13). He looks around the playground saying the three-syllable utterance a further two times but is seemingly distracted by other things going on. Perhaps he is re-visiting the sounds and enjoying what he can now say.

Fig. 6.14 “Oh, what’s this? It has a blue flashing light”



After a few minutes, Hugh returns to look more closely at the microphone and the educator removes it from his arm suggesting he has had enough. Having now removed it from his arm, the educator shows it to him. She turns it over and together they notice that it has a flashing light. The educator says, “Oh, what’s this? It has a blue flashing light” (see Fig. 6.14). Immediately, Hugh looks over to the video camera indicating that he realises the microphone and the camera are somehow connected. The educator continues to talk about the camera and the microphone explaining to him that another child is helping to operate the camera.

Reflections on Narrative 3

This narrative, in contrast to the earlier narratives, reports on a series of events that are initiated by the educator. What appears as randomly connected events highlights a relationship where the educator is actively responsive and seeking to follow the lead of the infant. Hugh dips in and out of interest in the many things going on in the playground. The outdoors is busy and the educator shifts her plan for singing to respond to his initial benediction or interest in talking about the bird. The educator not only ceases singing but moves her body in sync with Hugh as he attempts to draw her into his discovery of the bird shadow on the canopy. She physically and intellectually shifts with the infant – abandoning her agenda in order to enable him to take the lead. The interaction is sustained and, despite a shift in focus, Hugh goes on to offer further benedictions. Demonstrating an awareness of and interest in the video camera and microphone, he shifts the conversation. His interest is such that he

vocalises three syllables that reflect the word *microphone*, as a demonstration perhaps of his interest in the technology – a topic that might be considered to be beyond the interest of a child of such a young age. As the educator spoke about the camera and the microphone, her language was authentic and sophisticated – words that would perhaps be considered beyond the mentalising capacity of Hugh, yet clearly engaging him to the point that he attempts to repeat those words.

Discussion

The three narratives presented in this chapter focus on the ways in which these infants express their desires and intents to participate in their learning. Far from being bound by what educators have in mind for them, these infants show that they initiate, extend and sustain encounters for learning. Such a fine-grained consideration of the actions of these infants prompts further questions about infants' benedictions. How might these benedictions contribute to understandings of infants' capacity for participation in curriculum decisions? How might educators make space for *democratic moments* (Bae, 2009) based on the benedictions offered by the infants?

Reading across each of the narratives in this chapter and in light of Shier's adapted principles of participation, there is evidence that these infants have both the capacity and propensity to work in participatory ways. Far from being passive and waiting for the initiations of the educators, the infants communicate their ideas, express views and opinions, make judgements about their capacities and, when possible, take opportunities to lead their educators in a sharing of power.

Communicating

Each of these infants demonstrates effective and diverse ways of communicating with their educators and with others. Hugh and William use high pitched vocalisation during a game with the cubby. This vocalising connects them to each other and within the shared game. It is perhaps a way of saying "we are playing this together". Using no verbal cues, William is clearly showing his interest in the song, *The Wheels on the Bus*. His ongoing engagement, physical connection through the actions, and acknowledgement of the recurrence of the chorus, is an insightful message about his interests and intent to involve himself in this game. Hugh takes the lead in communicating his interests as he shifts his body, eye gaze and focus from a song, to the bird, to the microphone. Across the three narratives, it is the reading of body movements, gestures and vocalisations that form the basis for *listening* to these infants. The communications are brief and the infants rarely repeat their requests, so this listening is very different to the way that listening might be understood in relation to older children.

Having Views and Opinions That Can Be Taken into Account

In much the same way, each of these infants shows that they have views and opinions that can be taken into account. William expresses considerable indifference to the toys placed near him. He expresses a view that he would prefer to be involved in the toddler singing game. The toys meant for him are little more than an occasional distraction; his focus and body actions keep returning to his preferred interest. In the cubby play, William and Hugh show a preference for playing together. They may well have played independently of each other but in this episode they each express a view about a shared play experience. In the conversation that begins about the birds, Hugh shows a capacity to set the direction and lead his educator to understanding his interests and the topics he wishes to share with her. Hugh's interest in the technology and his attempts to copy the language models provided by his educator are an indication that he is capable of expressing views and opinions about his interests. The educator, with careful listening, moves in sync with his suggestions. Once again, the listening to these infants is a thoughtful reading of a range of complex and often subtle cues.

A Capacity to Make Assessments About Their Capabilities and Lead Learning

In each of the episodes, these infants show considerable evidence of their capacity to make assessments about their capabilities. In each case, their behaviours show evidence of moving beyond expected development norms for children of that age. William's recall of the song, *The Wheels on the Bus*, along with his capacity to demonstrate the actions and rhythms of the song, are surprising, against what developmental theory might suggest about the capacities of an 8-month-old infant (see, for example, Martin & Berk, 2007). A singing game with actions had not been planned for William as it had been for the older children. He nonetheless signals that he has this capability and intent to join in. William and Hugh's cubby adventure again shows a partnering in play that developmental theory might suggest is beyond the age/stage of these two infants (see, for example, Martin & Berk, 2007). The initiation of the game, the elaboration of the action and the shared vocalisations demonstrate sophisticated strategies to connect and collaborate. William's gentle nudging of Hugh is also suggestive of a measured approach to the play and evidence of William's capacity for intersubjective reasoning. William's hesitation about going under the table may be a recognition on his behalf that he is not quite ready for that step. He himself determines the extent to which he will involve himself. These infants clearly communicate when they want close physical contact with the adult. They play happily without the intervention of the adult and seem able to connect when they choose. Hugh's expression and vocalisation of the word *microphone*, after hearing it stated just once, is perhaps surprising. The sophistication of his

thinking indicates that he is ready and capable of working with more complex words and ideas than the educator initially offers him.

Concluding Thoughts

What emerges from these fleeting moments is a series of actions and behaviours that can be easily overlooked by these infants' educators. These infants have challenged normative assumptions about infants of their age through expressions of ideas, views and capabilities that were unexpected. The narratives suggest that considerable engagement with learning is happening outside of what these educators planned for or perhaps noticed. In each of these episodes, the infants initiated the experiences and, while conscious of the adults around them, accessed the educators in very different ways. From simply following the actions of an educator, to seeking only eye contact and verbal encouragement, through to engaging the educator in a conversation agenda, these infants have demonstrated an understanding of themselves in relation to their educators. They seemed to accept an educator who sometimes does not notice, and they showed that when they do want a closer proximity to the educator, they had strategies to gain that attention.

These narratives contribute to a broadening awareness of infants' capacities to engage in participatory learning. The narratives provide evidence that these infants' encounters with learning were individual, unique and cannot easily be generalised. They were often fleeting and did not have the sustained engagement that might be seen in the play of older children. Their actions may seem to the uninformed eye as inconsequential – and yet closer examination suggests that these were powerful moments in their learning encounters.

These encounters are also a reminder that learning for an infant is not necessarily linear nor does it always fit neatly within an adult logic. The infant's interest and attention can quickly switch from one topic to another. Seeking an infant's interests, views, opinions and assessment of their capabilities, is not a verbal/auditory experience that follows the logical sequence of the educator's expectations. As Rinaldi (2001) suggests, it is an embodied experience that requires educators to look and listen with all of their senses. Participation in this sense might involve stepping back, observing a little longer and pausing to see how the play might develop.

Importantly, this reading of the infants' cues does not prescribe either a passive or active role for the educator but rather, as Säfström (2003) describes, a *response-able* educator – one who adopts a stance of uncertainty. In each of these episodes, the educators were integral to the resourcing of the environment, the provision of singing and language models, and the acknowledgement of the children's play. While the participation of the educator varies among each of the narratives, it is the moments of hesitation and the tentative nature of the adults' involvement that sensitively responds to the infants' cues and allows them to demonstrate their agency and intent. It is a reminder of the importance of slowing down, of being a conscious observer and looking for the surprising and unexpected.

The question of what remains overlooked, however, provides a dilemma. It must be acknowledged that analysis of these narratives at this level is not possible in the everyday lives of educators as they work alongside infants. The video affords the opportunity to see what the naked eye misses and the possibility of revisiting the episode over several viewings and picking up on what has been previously missed. The narratives do, however, illuminate the overlooked or seemingly inconsequential events that infants are encountering.

This raises questions about the focus of the educators' attention. Is the eye of these educators too tightly fixed on what they expect to see? Do infants need their educators to notice everything? Are educators missing important cues that might give rise to more participatory possibilities for infants within their learning encounters?

If the participation of infants is to be given credence, there is a need to better understand how infants communicate their desires and how the adults around them can be alert to their subtle capabilities and expressions of agency. This may require a shift in the disposition and attitude of educators to view the fleeting *democratic moments* as important in informing their curriculum decisions. Might such a reconsideration of the principles of participation reframe the focus of infant educators and open up possibilities for infants to have a say and influence their own and others' learning?

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