

# Chapter 17

## Lived Spaces of Infant-Toddler Education and Care: Implications for Policy?

Frances Press and Linda Mitchell

### 17.1 Introduction

The chapters in this book are indicative of a recent groundswell of research on the experiences of infants and toddlers in formal early childhood environments. This research interest is relatively new in its breadth and foci, and reflects the growing commonality, in many parts of the world, of very young children regularly attending some form of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting. The collection of chapters in this book emanate from a variety of national contexts and collectively utilise a rich array of theoretical frameworks to explore the infant and toddler experience and how this is manifest in, and mediated by, the many *spaces* of the care and education environment. In this chapter we consider the implications of this research, as well as extant literature, to discuss policy for, and its implementation within, infant and toddler education and care.

Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner (1979), we commence with a brief discussion of policy and policy contexts. We then situate the research contained in this book within an understanding of preceding research trends in early childhood education. We note the significance of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) for children's policy, before considering policy implications derived from the studies contained in this book. As there are national differences between the types of qualifications required for adults who work with infants and toddlers in ECEC, we have chosen the terms *educators* and *practitioners* to refer to all staff working directly with infants and toddlers in such programs.

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F. Press (✉)

Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education, Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia  
e-mail: [fpress@csu.edu.au](mailto:fpress@csu.edu.au)

L. Mitchell

Early Years Research Centre, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand  
e-mail: [lindamit@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lindamit@waikato.ac.nz)

## 17.2 Policy Context

The value laden nature of policy (Taylor et al. 1997) is readily discernable in policy related to ECEC, perhaps especially so in relation to policy arrangements concerning infants and toddlers. Debates about the direction of early childhood policy are bound up in questions concerning its primary purpose, including who (or what) is assumed to be its primary beneficiary (for example, parents, the economy, schools, or children themselves), and what types of outcomes are sought from children's participation in early childhood programs. In addition, markedly divergent values are apparent in many debates concerning the desirability or otherwise of government support for infant-toddler ECEC programs.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological model of child development foregrounds the contextual nature of child development and thus provides a useful framework for considering the influence of policy upon infant-toddler ECEC. Bronfenbrenner illustrates the multiplicity of individual and contextual features, both proximal and distal, which impact upon children's development and their interactive nature. Resting in the sphere of the macrosystem, the decisions and actions of government contribute to shaping the spaces within which human development occurs (Bowes et al. 2012; Brooker, Chap. 3, this volume). In relation to infant-toddler care and education, government policy can determine, among other things, ease of access to programs, staffing arrangements, and the curricula shaping pedagogy within these settings.

Around the world, governments address the issue of infant-toddler care and education in diverse ways. In many minority world countries parental leave, followed by informal and/or formal home-based and centre-based care, is a fairly typical arrangement for the very young children of working parents. Nonetheless, there is considerable variation in the amount of parental leave available and its remuneration, as well as the quality and availability of infant-toddler programs. While there has been growing support for the provision of universal access to early education for children over 3 years of age, in many parts of the world, the wisdom of caring for infants outside the home has been contested. Dr Jay Belsky, a child development researcher, has written extensively and, at times, controversially, on the negative impact of child care (Belsky 2001, 2003), although his critiques have tempered somewhat in recent years (e.g., Belsky 2007). Citing Belsky, Australian Dr Peter Cook has published a book entitled *Early Child Care: Infants and Nations at Risk* (Cook 1997). Another Australian writer, Stephen Biddulph, has written scathingly about infant day care in the United Kingdom in *Raising Babies: Should Under 3s go to Nursery?* (2006). Such writings tend to dichotomise the policy debate, arguing for policy frameworks that support parent (usually mother) care and against those that support infant-toddler ECEC. Other researchers and authors, however, have argued that high quality education and care programs can enhance the lives and opportunities for under 2-year-olds. Some of this literature focuses on the value of such programs as a protective factor for *at risk* children, such as the evaluations of the Early Head Start program (Love et al. 2005). Studies such as

those contained in this volume are especially welcome because they enable us to understand more fully children's lives in ECEC. Through their close attention to the lived spaces of infant-toddler early childhood programs, the studies provide rich and nuanced insights into infants' actual experiences in a way that can be informative for early childhood policy and practice.

To date, policy recommendations regarding environments for infants and toddlers have relied upon studies that emphasise the quality of the early childhood program and highlight the need for appropriate structural elements to provide the conditions within which good quality programs are likely to ensue (for example, Dalli et al. 2011; Press 2006). Structural elements include such factors as the content and nature of staff qualifications; numbers of staff to children; stability of staff, including staff continuity; group size; and staff wages and conditions. However, these elements only *contribute* and do not, in themselves, *produce* a high quality program (Wangmann 1995). Of critical importance are children's actual experiences within and through early childhood settings. This book facilitates a fuller understanding of these experiences by illuminating the multiple spaces of infant-toddler education and care and its social, relational, pedagogical and emotional dimensions.

### 17.3 Waves of Research

Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognised the impact of time on children's development through incorporating the chronosystem in his model. In its most immediate sense, the timing of significant life events (for example, the death of a parent) will affect the nature of their potential impact upon a child's development. Significantly for this discussion, the chronosystem has a sociohistorical dimension which recognises that contexts and understandings change over time (Bowes et al. 2012). The sociohistorical aspect of the chronosystem is evident in the body of research within this volume, reflecting as it does the changed realities of children's and families' lives, especially in relation to what E. Jayne White coins as the *new normality* of infant-toddler care and education (Chap. 16, this volume). Further, the capacity of the studies within this book to illuminate the many spaces of such infant-toddler environments in new ways has been facilitated by a legacy of previous research, scholarship and debate.

Wangmann (1995) and Dalli et al. (2011) identify the presence of three waves of research concerning early childhood environments: the first wave was concerned with the question of whether child care harmed children's development; the second, with the identification and measurement of child care quality; and the third, with understanding quality and its impacts in relation to sociocultural contexts, including the interrelated impacts of both the home and the child care setting. The question of whether "child care is bad for children" was prompted by the then emerging trend of increasing numbers of children attending formal early childhood programs. This concern for young children's wellbeing was closely related to the discourse of maternalism which positioned exclusive maternal care as best for children's

development (Wangmann 1995). A number of studies concluded that child care was not inherently harmful to children, and further, that high quality environments could be beneficial. Hence, the second research wave sought to identify the elements of high quality education and care so that policy and practice might better support it. Through such attention to quality and its impact, it became apparent that children's development could never be ascribed to discrete causal factors and thus the third wave of research focused upon the complex interplay of factors impacting upon children's development including the nature of the home and the early childhood education and care setting, the sociocultural context and their interrelationship (Dalli et al. 2011; Wangmann 1995). Subsequent scholarship has pushed us to think about the perspectival nature of quality and its situatedness within the discourse of modernity (for example, Dahlberg et al. 1999) and the cultural specificity of many of the assumptions made about the course and nature of child development (for example, Cannella 1997; Penn 2009; Woodhead 1999). It has also generated an interest in understanding what quality might mean and look like from multiple perspectives (Dalli et al. 2011; Press 2006).

Relatedly, the re-emergence of a discourse of children's rights has generated renewed attention to how children are positioned within early childhood programs, and the constructions and images of children and childhood informing the work of early education and care.

## 17.4 Child Rights

For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning. These requirements can best be planned for within a framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood, including a plan for implementation and independent monitoring... (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child [CRC] 2005)

A significant international development cogent to our reflections on policy is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). The UNCRC is more widely ratified than any other international human rights treaty and is unique amongst human rights treaties in its inclusion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (Department for Education 2013). Having ratified the Convention, governments are expected to review relevant legislation and policy in the light of its Articles. The rights within the Convention are often described as falling within the categories of provision, protection and participation. Initially, the predominant application of rights for children in their earliest years focused upon provision and protection in recognition of their increased vulnerability and dependence. More recently, participation rights have come much more into focus (Alderson 2008) as is evident in the assertion of the CRC (2005) that "young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view" (p. x).

The capacity of even the youngest children to exercise agency, including the assertion of their views and preferences, is evident throughout the book. These chapters also bring into sharp relief the fact that the recognition and facilitation of such preferences is heavily reliant upon the actions of adults. As White asserts in this volume, discourses compete to shape educator approaches to working with infants and young children, who are variously positioned as vulnerable, full of potential, competent, and—in conjunction with families—as service users. In reality, children are all these things. Hence, the CRC (2005) recommends that early childhood spaces should:

... encourage recognition of young children as social actors from the beginning of life, with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, and of requirements for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights. (p. x)

The UNCRC has prompted interest in children's citizenry rights as a goal for policy development in ECEC, both in relation to how we conceptualise children and childhood, and how we envisage the possibilities of early childhood services. Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho (2012) assert that children's construction of knowledge requires "a social and educational context that supports, promotes, facilitates and celebrates participation" (p. 24). Dahlberg et al. (1999) reconceptualise ECEC services as public spaces where adults and children engage together in a variety of projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance. In this respect they become democratic communities where children, families, educators and local community members are offered space for their participation in shaping the nature of provision and contributing to it. Moss (2008) gives examples of values that need to be shared among the early childhood community for democratic and experimental practice to flourish: respect for diversity, recognition of multiple perspectives and paradigms, welcoming curiosity and uncertainty, and critical thinking. The construction of ECEC as a democratic space is supported by Article 29 of the UNCRC which calls for children's education to be concerned with "the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples" (np).

### **17.5 What Do Understandings of the Lived Spaces of Infant-Toddler Early Childhood Education and Care Offer Policy?**

While children are biologically immature, cultures decide how childhood is understood. These understandings are reflected in policy design and pedagogy and have repercussions for the expected roles of children, teachers, families, communities and government, as well as the purposes and outcomes of early childhood education and care (Mitchell 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2001, 2006; Rigby et al. 2007). As Liz Brooker observes, a "whole set of beliefs and practices derived from generations of human activity—informs environments which children experience, and in turn shape" (Chap. 3, this volume).

Through fine grained foci on the lived experiences of infants and toddlers in early childhood settings, this book holds the potential to challenge assumed knowledge about infants' dispositions and capacities. Through directing our attention to the mediations and often intimate connections which surround the infant-toddler experience, the infant-toddler as an agentic being is illuminated; as is the presence and importance of peer friendships; and the complex mediating role of the educator. In the following discussion, we explore the implications of these for policy through discussing the various spaces that open with these understandings: spaces for children's agency; for social relationships; for emotion; and for professional enquiry.

### ***17.5.1 Space for Children's Agency***

Policy usually positions children as passive recipients of its intended outcomes. This positioning of children is at odds with the commitment to children's active participation advocated by UNCRC and challenged by, for example, the social constructionist paradigm of childhood that understands children as "social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances" (James et al. 1998, p. 6). A recent literature review of quality early childhood education for under-2-year-olds (Dalli et al. 2011) emphasised that "research findings over several decades have supported an understanding of infants and toddlers as active and sophisticated participants in the social processes of learning and development, actively seeking emotionally satisfying and engaging relationships" (p. 68). Studies discussed in this book examined children's agency in spheres as diverse as their interactions with adults and peers, their use of physical space, their appropriation of objects, and their abiding influence on adults' perceptions, routines, and physical provision.

Brooker emphasises the *mutually constitutive* nature of the relationship of infants and toddlers with their early childhood settings (Chap. 3, this volume). Both she and Niina Rutanen draw attention to children's active contribution to their early childhood environments through their appropriation of space and resources, and intentional overtures to form relationships with those around them. Further, Rutanen's conceptualisation of lived space as "the space of imagination" reminds us of the power of the imaginative realm for children's re-creation of the physical space of early childhood education and care (Chap. 2, this volume).

According to Brooker, a society's goals for children are reflected in the "spaces, resources, routines, curriculum, pedagogy and practices of early childhood settings" (Chap. 3, this volume). She argues that these are these are the "immediate backdrop to the agency" shown by the children observed in her study. It is evident that the realisation of infant and toddler agency requires thoughtful and responsive adult mediation. As White explains, teachers must simultaneously hold notions of competency and vulnerability in mind as they uphold children's "agentic potential ... through freedom and choice" and, as they recognise vulnerability, act as advocates and nurturers (Chap. 16, this volume). Both Brooker and White illustrate how the capacity of infants and toddlers to forge a sense of belonging in their environments

was facilitated by allocation of a key person (or key worker), who actively observed, responded to, and supported, each child as they sought to establish the space as their own.

### ***17.5.2 Space for Sociability***

The potential of early childhood education and care to be a positive social space for infants and toddlers is evident throughout the book and represents a significant shift from traditional understandings of the quality of the infant-toddler caregiving environments as centering predominantly, upon the dyadic relationship between the infant and adult caregiver. Joy Goodfellow describes early childhood settings as “places of human encounter” (Chap. 15, this volume), while White asserts their capacity to offer a “unique social experience” (Chap. 16, this volume). Shelia Degotardi’s observations of intersubjectivity in toddlers’ interactions with others, including peers, provide an insightful, and at times, joyful, picture of socialisation and sociability within early childhood programs (Chap. 14, this volume).

The research and analyses of Degotardi, Goodfellow, and Rutanen cause us to be attentive to the social capacities of infants and toddlers, and the importance and influence of others in the same age group. Each of their chapters provides closely observed illustrations of toddlers’ overtures to, and interactions with, their peers. If practitioners operate within a paradigm that positions infants and toddlers as too young to form, or be interested in such friendships, than these overtures will be overlooked. Similarly, if the culture of the early childhood services is primarily one of supervision and risk management, than children’s friendship overtures might be interpreted as gestures signalling potential conflict (for example, Rutanen, Chap. 2, this volume).

### ***17.5.3 Space for Emotionality***

Previous research has suggested that practitioners readily recognise that the quality of infant-toddler programs is related to their capacity to provide emotional support to infants (Brownlee et al. 2007). However, the writings of Robyn Dolby et al. and Peter Elfer, E. Jayne White and Jools Page (Chaps. 7, 8, 16, and 9, this volume) underscore the emotionality of the work for educators themselves. Dolby et al. refer to its emotional intensity; White describes the work as both intimate and professional; Elfer discusses the *emotional labour* of infant-toddler pedagogy and highlights the need to recognise and understand “the emotional life of the nursery”; while Page coins the term *professional love* to capture the intellectual understanding that must be brought to the deep encounters of care which are inevitably a part of good quality infant-toddler care and education.

Elfer's chapter draws attention to the need for practitioners to emotionally engage with infants and, simultaneously, be sufficiently detached to reflect upon the details of their interactions. This is difficult work and requires "considerable personal insight and openness" requiring reflection to be facilitated both for individuals and for teams. Fully attuned engagement might be hindered as practitioners experience the emotional impact of repeatedly forming close attachments and experiencing ongoing separations. Further, White and Page both note the discomfort that can arise for infants' teachers and caregivers around their intimate moments with infants, especially in the presence of the parents (Chaps. 16 and 9, this volume).

The challenging pedagogical work required of educators is made more complex by the deep emotional engagement that they need to form with infants and toddlers. The writings of these three authors underscore the need for the intimate and emotional dimensions of this work to be openly acknowledged and discussed, so that its impact can be understood, interrogated and negotiated.

#### ***17.5.4 Space for Pedagogy***

Anne Kultti and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson describe "learning orientated environments of excellent quality" as characterised by child-centred negotiation whereby "teachers' show awareness of and interest in the child's world and thinking" and there is "an additional intention [is] to develop, in an interactive and conscious manner, young children's understanding of the world around them" (Chap. 11, this volume).

The research reported in this book causes us to reflect upon the unique nature of infant-toddler pedagogy. As has been elucidated, infant-toddler programs are characterised by emotional attachment, intimacy, relational pedagogy and inter-subjectivity. Building a sense of belonging and wellbeing, which, as Brooker and Dolby et al. (Chaps. 3 and 7, this volume) portray, is foundational to children's identity formation and requires strong collaborations with children, families, and community.

As James Elicker and his colleagues point out, "...the daily interactions that build relationships, are central to the care and education of children under 3 years" (Chap. 10, this volume). Infants and toddlers need to be able to form attachments with key adults. These strong relationships in turn provide infants with a secure base from which to explore. This security is further fostered when adults expressly address the potential anxieties that face young children. For example, Brooker and Dolby et al. illustrate the value of staff and parents deliberately and explicitly addressing the experience of transition from home to the setting. So too, infant and toddlers reliance upon multimodal means of communicating and making meaning—vocalisations, gesture and body language—necessitates "educators' and parents' collaborative efforts to understand infants' emerging communicative strategies" (McLeod et al., Chap. 13, this volume) lest infants' attempts at communication be overlooked or misinterpreted. For infants to have a sense of belonging and agency, educators need to be attentive to and familiar with each infant and toddler's



communicative repertoire. Claire Vallotton et al. explore the potential of infants' signs "to influence the interactions and routines of their daily lives in child care" (Chap. 12, this volume). Kultti and Pramling Samuelsson examine the strategic use of whole group, small group and peer interactions in selected Swedish preschools to facilitate the participation of children whose first language is not Swedish, as well as to promote language learning.

In an infant-toddler curriculum, educators must balance responsiveness to individual demands and interests with building a sense of community belonging; allowing space for infant-toddler initiated interactions, and the timely provision of educator input. A good quality program involves educators developing close, responsive and reciprocal relationships with infants and toddlers, their families and communities, and displaying a willingness to be uncertain, to learn from families, to engage in shared critical enquiry, and to hold in mind a holistic curriculum focused on community goals.

### *17.5.5 Space for Critical Inquiry*

The studies in this book utilised a rich array of data generation methods that enabled children's experiences to be directly captured and mediated through insights from practitioners, family members, researchers and professional development advisers. Direct observation of interactions between children and between adults and children were commonly used in most of the studies reported in this book. Observations were facilitated through structured rating scales of dimensions of communication, interactions, activities or the environment, or followed a less structured format, using parental interviews or surveys, and staff discussion linked to criteria. While access to technological tools is not necessary for data collection, use of video recordings provided powerful insights in some of the reported studies. These offered the potential to be analysed again and again, and from different perspectives—other practitioners, external advisers and mentors, children and family members.

Critical inquiry emerges as pivotal to better supporting and extending infant-toddler exploration and learning strategies. Thoughtful and analytic examination of the lived experiences of participants within the setting, and the affordances (Kress 2000) of the environment and educator practices, is difficult pedagogical work that is likely to challenge practitioners' own assumptions and practices.

It is often hard to generate critical thinking, defined by Rose (1999) as:

... partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the perceived maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of perceived wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's own experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode the experience and making them stutter. (p. 20)

Drawing on one perspective alone offers a circumscribed and limited understanding, and may not be sufficient to challenge views and practice. Deep critical

inquiry can be encouraged through collaboration with and exposure to the views of others (Meade 2009; Mitchell and Cubey 2003; Ramsey et al. 2006).

Elfer's chapter reinforces the value of expertly facilitated discussion spaces that enable practitioners to engage in deep critical reflection upon their work. Dolby et al. show the power of filming observations as children arrive at and leave child care for use by the educator, family and child and family worker in analysing the life of infants and toddlers "as it is lived". Valloton et al., in an early childhood program attached to a university, use a model of reflective supervision to cultivate the capacity of preservice caregivers to think about children's communicative cues, to gauge their perspective. Elicker et al. adopt a carefully devised observation tool to focus on interactions and relationships in order to understand children's lived experiences in early childhood programs. They argue that increased understanding of daily experiences will "come about most fully when investigated using multiple theoretical and research approaches, firmly grounded in everyday practice" (Chap. 10, this volume).

Many of the practitioners in these studies who were engaged in analysing their own practice had opportunities to work collaboratively in data gathering and analysis with professional development advisers and researchers, and access to theoretical ideas and academic resources. Such informed and guided reflection helps develop new insights into practitioners' interactions with children, family members and colleagues; and upon the cues, perspectives and intents of infants and toddlers.

## 17.6 Policy Implications?

Policy decisions influence the nature of the early childhood education and care environment and hence the context of infant-toddler lived experiences. Although axiomatic, these earliest years are foundational. Danziger and Waldfogel (2000, p. 14) among others (e.g., Heckman 2006) emphasise that what happens in these years lays the groundwork for later development; the impacts are cumulative and compound over time. At the same time, as is starkly evident in the preceding chapters, children's experiences within ECEC determine to a significant extent the quality of their daily lives. Hence the nature of the lived experience of children within infant-toddler programs is extremely important.

Policy may offer more or less facilitating conditions for early childhood provision and practice, which shape the experiences of infants and toddlers. Chapters in this book have emphasised that relationships within the early childhood setting and the interactions amongst participants, infant and toddler peers, educators and families are powerfully influential. It is not surprising that recommendations for supporting high quality infant-toddler early childhood environments typically emphasise measures related to staffing. In group care, infants need adults who understand them, understand child development, and the individual and cultural nuances of such development. Educators need to build strong relationships with children and their families, and have the capacity to reflect upon their work and plan

accordingly. As a result, policy recommendations often focus upon ensuring specialist training and/or qualifications; sufficient numbers of staff to children so that staff are able to give individualised, responsive attention; and limits on group size (Dalli et al. 2011; Press 2006). Specialised training is associated with more positive, higher quality interactions and less detached caregiving (Burchinal et al. 2002; Clarke-Stewart et al. 2002; Fischer and Eheart 1991). The quality of programs offered to infants and toddlers is closely linked to having sufficiently high numbers of staff to children so that educators are more able to interact with children responsively, warmly and supportively and in a way that is more attuned to their individual characteristics (Lally et al. 1994; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] 1996; Phillipsen et al. 1997). The NICHD study (1996) on infant care revealed that the closer the ratio is to 1:1 for infant care, the more sensitive the care offered. The study also further emphasised the role of small groups for positive caregiving. The American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend staff to child ratios of 1:3 and group size of no more than six, for children under 2 years (cited in NICHD 1996). Relatedly, consistency of staffing counts. For these reasons, wages and conditions that appropriately recognise the complexity of working with infants and toddlers are recommended to compensate fairly for specialist qualifications, enhance staff satisfaction in the work space/environment and reduce the likelihood of staff turnover (Goleman et al. 2000; Helburn 1995; Smith 1996).

Policy contributes to conditions that enable or constrain educators' capacity to engage in attuned, responsive interactions with infants and toddlers and their families, and meaningful critical reflection. Specialist knowledge, appropriate numbers of staff to children, small group sizes and consistency of staffing are facilitative; they create the environment in which good quality infant-toddler care and learning can occur. However, it is the actual decisions, actions and interactions that take place within these conditions that ensure a high quality program (see, for instance, Fenech et al. 2010). The official or enacted curriculum will articulate the principles and outcomes that are believed to matter for infants and toddlers. A holistic curriculum reinforces the importance of attending to the sum total of a child's experiences. Key principles within curricula developed in the twenty-first century emphasise early childhood as a space where identities are constructed. Belonging and wellbeing are foundational to identity and are incorporated as principles in a number of curricula, including the New Zealand, Australian, British Columbian and Irish curriculum frameworks.

Through close attention to infants' worlds in early childhood education and care, collectively these studies reveal a sophisticated, complex world that may be unseen, overlooked or unacknowledged. From these we understand that government and site-based policy must create the conditions that make it possible to take into account the agency of infants and toddlers as well as their vulnerability, the important mediating and nurturing relationships they have with adult caregivers, and the significance of their friendships with one another. All children develop in the context of relationships. When key relationships in children's lives are warm, developmentally-attuned and responsive, children are given the opportunity to thrive. Not only must

early childhood practitioners develop such relationships, they must be able to recognise the importance and multiplicity of children's connections with others, within and outside of the early childhood setting. As such, educators must strive to develop collaborative, respectful relationships with parents. In this book, Dolby focuses on how facilitating an attachment relationship with educators functions as a *secure base* for infants. Brooker and White refer to the practice of allocating a *key person* to each infant so that every child and family is provided with the opportunity to develop a close and ongoing relationship with a *special person*. The function of the close attuned relationship is affirmed by Elicker et al. who propose that quality in infant-toddler programs is intrinsically linked to interactions. They identify six observable dimensions of caregiver-child interactions as important: sensitive responsiveness; support for autonomy; positive emotional tone; cognitive/language stimulation; warm, sensitive limit setting; and the promotion of positive peer relationships. White draws attention to the "negotiating role of the teacher" and the need for adults to afford infants and toddlers opportunities to influence how their lives are understood and acted on by others. The writings of Page, White, and Elfer ask us to legitimise the intimacy and emotional dimensions of the teacher-infant relationship, to open up space for the acknowledgement and discussion of emotion in teachers' professional discourse. Degotardi, Rutanen, and Goodfellow, among others, draw our attention to the social capacities and propensities of infants and toddlers.

Educators' capacity to expertly mediate a rich learning environment for infants and toddlers is affected by their expectations, which is in turn, affected by their knowledge base. Deficit assumptions and/or low expectations can prevent educators from understanding and appreciating children's and parents' expertise, experiences and knowledge. A deficit approach to children's development can be associated with family ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, especially when these differ from the practitioners' background, as well as the child's age (Mitchell and Cubey 2003). In turn, this hinders practitioners' ability to support children's sense of belonging, wellbeing and contribution. An early study of Palmerus and Pramling (1991) found practitioners in three Swedish child care centres had a limited understanding of the potential to educate toddlers. This changed, however, when practitioners covered theories and empirical findings about children's development and participated in an intervention program which provided staff with the opportunity to look at and analyse video recordings of their interactions. Kultti and Pramling Samuelsson (Chap. 11, this volume) highlight the powerful role of the teacher in guiding participation and communication. Their study suggests that, in combination, the organisation and structure of preschool activities to enable participation in whole group, small group and peer interaction and use of different communication resources offer a depth of opportunities for language learning.

Infant-toddler pedagogy is complex. A professionally qualified and educated workforce is better able to engage in analysis of theory and their own practice. The content of preservice education for early childhood must cover the infant-toddler years in ways that illuminate the complexity of this developmental period and uncover the sophisticated interactive worlds inhabited by infants and toddlers in early

childhood settings. Previous Australian research, which examined the relationship between child care worker and director's beliefs and quality in infant's care and education environments, stressed the role of appropriate professional learning in improving quality and proposed a focus on deep learning and critical reflection, both in professional preparation courses and through ongoing professional development (Brownlee et al. 2007).

As this volume attests, our understandings of infants and toddlers are being constantly challenged and extended as their experiences are investigated and interrogated from numerous perspectives. This underscores the need for ongoing professional development to support practitioners' understandings of infant-toddler pedagogies and the reasons for them.

... professional development can make significant contributions to enhancing pedagogy in early childhood settings in three key areas: challenging teachers/educators' beliefs and assumptions from a deficit view so that the knowledge and skills of families and children are acknowledged and built on; collecting and analysing data from the participants' own setting; and supporting change in participants' interactions with children and parents. (Mitchell and Cubey 2003, p. viii)

If early childhood settings are to be learning communities for teachers as well as children, parents and others, there need to be opportunities within the work environment for reflection, experimentation, documentation and planning. In several studies, spaces were opened for practitioners to critically analyse their practice within teams and as individuals. These spaces were often externally, and expertly, supported and included Work Discussion Groups; regular release time to analyse video recordings of interactions; training and reflective supervision for preservice educators; and the provision of professional development. This approach is consistent with the findings of other studies. Carr et al. (2000), in a New Zealand study, found that an external facilitator helped "challenge the tendency of staff to want to justify findings that were unfavourable" (p. 34). In an Australian study, staff in early childhood centres externally rated as high quality, identified the existence of an intentional learning community within their centres as an important contributor to the quality of their work (Fenech et al. 2010).

## 17.7 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has analysed policy from a social ecological model, locating policy within the sphere of the macrosystem. Policy influences, and is influenced by, sometimes competing values about concerning the desirability and necessity of infant-toddler care and education outside the home. In turn, policy helps shape the spaces of the early childhood environment, often directly influencing aspects such as access, and the nature of staffing and pedagogy.

In summary, the structural elements of policy for infants and toddlers are important. But their importance lies in their enabling capacities. Infant-toddler research is sharpening our senses to the lived experiences of the very young in the space of

early childhood education, in ways that alert us to its many dimensions. As such, policy also needs to recognise the complexity and sophistication of infant-toddler pedagogy by providing support for informed professional engagement and reflection that recognises its emotional dimension, and challenges limiting views of infant-toddler capacities and dispositions. Additionally, policy must provide space for strong family and community collaborations to be nurtured. A research agenda that makes use of differing theoretical approaches and multiple methods to find out about the experiences of infants, toddlers and their families both broadens and deepens our understandings.

Debates about the image of the child, cultural priorities and desirable outcomes for children feed into relevant policy and pedagogy. Explicit societal goals for early childhood education and care policy matter. A construction of infant care only as a policy objective linked to workforce participation for parents provides a very different focus to one that is based on the citizenship rights of every child, no matter how young. This book provides insights into the infant-toddler experience that allow us to envision early childhood programs which are children's spaces—not just built for children, but spaces imbued with a sense of belonging and a sense of delight.

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