

Policy and Pedagogy with Under-three Year Olds:
Cross-disciplinary Insights and Innovations 2

Mikhail Gradovski · Elin Eriksen Ødegaard
Niina Rutanen · Jennifer Sumsion
Carl Mika · E. Jayne White

The First 1000 Days of Early Childhood Becoming



Springer

Policy and Pedagogy with Under-three Year Olds: Cross-disciplinary Insights and Innovations

Volume 2

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Becoming

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ISSN 2509-6680 ISSN 2509-6699 (electronic)
Policy and Pedagogy with Under-three Year Olds: Cross-disciplinary Insights and
Innovations
ISBN 978-981-32-9655-8 ISBN 978-981-32-9656-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9656-5>

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Preface

In this book, contemporary and historical views of becoming that influence the treatment of very young children in early childhood educational contexts are discussed. The authors' perspectives represent their views grounded on their cultural background and experience. The aim of the book is to provide a more critical, theoretical and philosophical understanding of becoming and the concepts as well as practices associated with it in the provision of education and care during the first 1000 days. The scope of topics in this volume include notions of care and education, caregiving and teaching, culture, infant teacher education, infant teacher praxis, role of families and global realities for under 3-year-olds across European Nordic, Russian and Australasian communities today. Becoming together with being and belonging are considered to be central theoretical concepts in early childhood education and care.

Becoming reflects the process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow and emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in a society. Across diverse communities, when it comes to very young children from birth to 3, the process of becoming is of extreme importance for this age group as knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships experienced during these years will lay the foundation for children's further development. As for many parts of the world, becoming and the concepts related to it are an integral part of present-day curricula for early childhood education in several European and Australasian countries.

The authors of this volume provide both description, positive critique and criticism of how becoming and related concepts are understood and applied in practice across early childhood education contexts in New Zealand, Norway, Australia, Finland and Russia. The reason behind the choice of these countries is the fact that for the last 10 years, these countries have influenced one another in various ways when it comes to the development of the early childhood education and care sector. The research generated by Australasian researchers within the early childhood education and care sphere have become the source of reference and inspiration for both the researchers and the officials who make decisions on the development of the sector in the Nordic countries. The development of the sector in Russia has not been

directly influenced by the development of the Australasian early childhood education and care sector. However, the development of the Russia's sector has been informed since the 1990s by the Finnish early childhood education and care sector and since the 2000s by the OECD, the international organisation that still influences the development of the sector in both Australasia and the Nordic countries.

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Bergen, Norway
Jyväskylä, Finland
Albury, NSW, Australia
Hamilton, New Zealand
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

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The original version of this book was revised: This book was published as an Unnumbered Volume under the series “Policy and Pedagogy with Under-three Year Olds: Cross-disciplinary Insights and Innovations” which has been included now. The correction to this book is available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9656-5_9

Chapter 1

Beginning Becoming: The First 1000 Days



E. Jayne White, Elin Eriksen Ødegaard, Niina Rutanen, Jennifer Sumsion, Carl Mika, and Mikhail Gradovski

Abstract Thomas Balmes' (Babies. Studio Canal documentaries, 2010) 'Babies' (Baby(ies) or Bebes) provides a glimpse into the earliest experiences of four infants from four different localities in the world. Although this movie offers no interpretation of what takes place, the discerning viewer is left in no doubt of the significance of these powerful images about infants and their ways of being, doing and knowing in the earliest phases of life. The provocations of 'Babies' offer a useful beginning orienting place for a book – almost 10 years later – that promises to focus on becoming in the first 1000 days across a different set of five countries – this time Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway and Russia. These contemporary locales are constituted at a time and place where the earliest lives of infants not only take place at home (on the farm, in the city apartment or in the wild) but also now coincide with early childhood education and care (hereafter ECEC) institutions which mark out a new normality for earliest experience across the globe. As such we posit a new era of becoming for the first 1000 days, one that much more deeply implicated in the public sphere than ever before – in curriculum, in policy and in pedagogy – and rooted in philosophies and theories that orient their status. Thomas Balmes' (2010) popular documentary 'Babies' (Baby(ies) or Bebes) provides a glimpse into the earliest experiences of four infants as they navigate their

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way through their worlds. In the film we are taken through their everyday lives across diverse geographical spaces from prebirth through to childhood. We are shown an infant in Namibia (Ponijao) exploring the teeth of large dogs and another (Bayar) in Mongolia left alone with only the cat in the house while his parents work outside. Conversely, we see both Japanese (Mari) and US (Hattie) infants in the close proximity of their parents, in a much more coddled existence than their peers with a correspondingly different early experience and set of expectations. The movie offers no interpretation of what takes place (and indeed, for this reason some critics rated it as lacking depth), but the discerning viewer is left in no doubt of the significance of these powerful images in mapping out very different experiences and, by association, in stuttering universal ways of thinking about infants and their ways of being, doing and knowing in the earliest phases of life. From the outset we are presented with a profound sense of the rapid movement that takes place for these infants – portrayed in the series of well-chosen sequences illustrating different paths to formation from birth into childhood. What is particularly interesting are the different routes through which cultural formation in contemplation of each infant plays out – both in the moment and the possibilities for what might be possible for future selves as a consequence.

At first sight we might be forgiven for thinking that this movie is an entertaining display of diverse cultures through the earliest experiences of life. Yet, the rich tapestry of images that weave through each infant's experience sets the scene for a much deeper interpretation concerning their 'becomings' as a series of dialogic events that are socially, politically and culturally implicated. While each infant passes through certain developmental milestones, they hold in common – being born, learning to feed, learning to move and so on – the significance of these events, and their impact on the infant is marked out differently across the spaces between people, places and things. As a consequence, we are invited to think about the various discourses that underpin infant becoming and its location in space, time and axiology (value). The movie therefore provides a useful catalyst for thinking about how these diverse combinations of events might contribute to a richer appreciation of becoming in contemplation of this age group.

For this reason, the provocations of *Bebes* offer a useful beginning orienting place for a book – almost 10 years later – that promises to focus on becoming in the first 1000 days across a different set of five countries – this time Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway and Russia. These contemporary locales are constituted at a time and place where the earliest lives of infants not only take place at home (on the farm, in the city apartment or in the wild) but also now coincide with early childhood education and care (hereafter ECEC) institutions which mark out a new normality for earliest experience across the globe. We consider these locations to be important spaces for understanding the ways infants in 2019 might experience their lives in spaces that exist in-between home and community and, indeed, across communities and cultures in the increasingly globalised worlds that characterise their experiences today. As such we posit a new era of becoming for the first 1000 days, one that much more deeply implicated in the public sphere than ever before – in curriculum, in

policy and in pedagogy – and rooted in philosophies and theories that orient their status.

An International Collaboration

Based on these inspirations, the present book was developed out of an international collaboration with a group of researchers who are deeply engaged with aspects of infant becoming in both local and global contexts. Each brings their own philosophical, theoretical, political and sociocultural interpretations of becoming to the text. Exploring local contemporary and historical views of *Becoming* alongside related concepts such as the German concept of *Bildung*, the Norwegian concept *Danning* and indigenous Māori notions of *Whakapapa and Mauri* alongside dominant constructs located within child development, the authors discuss the shaping features of becoming for infants across national and cultural borders. The aim of the book is firstly to provide more critical and theoretical understanding of *becoming* and the concepts associated with it and secondly to generate rich insights about the educational conditions for infants from selected examples of curriculum and practice internationally where such concepts are played out in real lives. The educational conditions shaping infant becoming are interpreted broadly – nested within in a tight family relation while simultaneously situated within a web of cultural, material, structural, institutional, biological and economic conditions. Special attention is given to various aspects and issues of how early childhood education and care as an international field give conditions for infant lives, their cultural formation and processes of *becoming* human that are heralded in both practice and text. Several of the chapters are written in a dialogic manner with incorporated provocations as an attempt to deal with the cultural complexities that arise as a consequence of such interplays.

Two key questions addressed in the book are:

What does becoming ‘look like’ for an infant living in various cultural, political and material localities? and how is becoming actualised within (and beyond) institutional living and learning in the first 1000 days of life?

In the sections that follow, we unpack the notion of becoming as a contemporary construct in early year’s institutions and then explore why it is an especially important topic for the first 1000 days before introducing the chapters of the book.

Why ‘Becoming’?

Becoming has a philosophical heritage as well as a contemporary enactment. As Bebes reminds us, it also has a biological base in the consideration of the first 1000 days which makes it a unique period in the life span. But during pregnancy and