

Policy and Pedagogy with Under-three Year Olds:
Cross-disciplinary Insights and Innovations 6

Gloria Quinones
Andrea Delaune *Editors*

Wellbeing for Infants and Toddlers in Education and Care

International Perspectives

 Springer

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

Volume 6

Series Editors

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The last two decades have witnessed an explosion of research that links traditional child development knowledge on optimal development of very young children to insights from a range of other disciplines, including neurological science, early childhood pedagogy, health studies and critical psychology. At the same time growing numbers of children in the Western world are spending significant periods of their earliest years beyond the traditional domain of the home, creating a new reality of shared education and care that draws across disciplines in expounding a pedagogical encounter with the very young. This series aims to bring together the range of contemporary theoretical, methodological, disciplinary and creative approaches to understanding this new reality for very young children in group-based infant and toddler settings. It will generate texts that incorporate comprehensive state of the art reviews of research to inform policy and pedagogy as well as promote and provoke innovative directions across disciplines. By bringing different disciplines to bear on the educational experience of the very young, this series will showcase new methodologies and theoretical approaches to understanding the very early years of life, pose theoretical challenges as well as opportunities, and assert the importance of multiple and dynamic perspectives.

Gloria Quinones • Andrea Delaune
Editors

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Editors

Gloria Quinones
Faculty of Education
Monash University
Frankston, VIC, Australia

Andrea Delaune
Faculty of Education
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand

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About the Authors

Sara Barros Araújo is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, Portugal. She holds a Ph.D. in Child Studies, and MA and graduate degree in Psychology. She is the Coordinator of the Master Programme in Early Childhood Education and the Convenor of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) SIG “Birth to Three”. Her main research interests include early childhood pedagogy, quality of centre-based services for infants and toddlers, teacher education, and professional development.

Jennifer Boyd is a professional teaching fellow in the School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice at the University of Auckland. Her teaching and research is underpinned by a commitment to more equitable and caring practices for our youngest citizens. Her work utilizes critical theory, new materialism, and posthuman theories. Her recently completed master’s thesis reconceptualized the concept of agency with infants and toddlers.

Benjamin S. Bradley A graduate of Oxford and Edinburgh Universities, Ben S. Bradley began his pioneering work in infancy studies alongside Colwyn Trevarthen. His research led him to Australia, where he serves as Professor Emeritus at Charles Sturt University. Bradley’s significant publications include “Visions of Infancy” (1989) and “Psychology and Experience” (2005), with his research demonstrating infants’ capacities for social interaction, the utility of theatre-based methods for at-risk youth, and providing insights into Darwin’s understanding of natural selection. His recent contributions include “Darwin’s Psychology: The Theatre of Agency” (2020) and his latest book, co-authored in 2024 with Jane Selby and Matthew Stapleton, “Babies in Groups: Expanding Imaginations”.

Maria Cooper Ph.D., is a co-Associate Dean Pacific and associate professor at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Drawing on over 24 years of involvement in early childhood education, Maria researches and lectures on leadership, infant–toddler pedagogies, and early years curriculum, drawing on both Western and Pacific worldviews. She is a former early childhood leader and

teacher, and an experienced mentor for beginning teachers, emerging researchers, and aspiring leaders. She is a co-editor of *The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi NZ Journal of Infant and Toddler Education* and is a founding co-director of the *University of Auckland's Early Childhood Seminar Series*.

Katia de Souza Amorim is a Full Professor at the University of São Paulo (Brazil) and is the coordinator of CINDEDI (Center for Research on Human Development and Early Childhood Education), which is recognized by UNESCO. She conducts investigations considering the interweaving of the fields of Developmental Psychology and Early Childhood Education, and historically she has investigated the development of babies and young children, analysing the processes in different social contexts. She particularly dedicated herself to the issue of the transition of babies within their entry into early childhood education and care (ECEC), being the coordinator of the International Project “Social and emotional experiences in the first year of transition from home to early years settings” (ISSEET) in Brazil. In recent years, she has been focusing on the study of ethnic-racial issues in education and, particularly, in Early Childhood Education.

Andrea Delaune is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, University of Canterbury, with over twenty years of experience working in early childhood settings, most of these with infants and toddlers. Delaune's research explores the influence of moral imagination as the basis of early childhood pedagogy. As the Co-President of OMEP Aotearoa, and Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Early Childhood*, Andrea promotes the rights of the child to be loved within the everyday context of early childhood education.

Sonya Gaches is Pūkeka Matua Senior Lecturer of education at Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka Te Kura Ākau Taitoka | University of Otago College of Education after spending over 25 years as an early childhood educator in the United States. Sonya's research interests include teaching/learning experiences in the early childhood education community, children's rights and how these interact with policies and practice, locally and in international contexts.

Kiri Gould, Ph.D. is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Social Work at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Through her scholarship, she is committed to supporting the well-being and sustainability of an equitable ECE sector. Her work examines problematic discourses of professionalism, ECE teacher and leader identities, and educational policies and seeks to re-envision alternative ways of being and doing in ECE. Kiri is the Programme Director for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies. She is a member of the editors collective for *The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi NZ Journal of Infant and Toddler Education*. She is a core faculty team member at the Centre for Global Childhoods.

Maria's Hatzigianni expertise builds on a rich early childhood career with more than 13 years of teaching experience in the Early Childhood sector in Greece and Australia and more than 10 years as an academic. She is now an assistant professor in the University of West Attica, Athens, Greece and also holds an honorary position

with the University of Melbourne (Australia). Her research area focuses on the implementation of digital technologies in Early Childhood (birth to 8 years). She completed her Ph.D. in the University of Melbourne with full scholarship, investigating the use on new technologies by young children and the impact on their self-esteem. She also completed a master's degree in "ICT in education" (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, National Scholarship) and a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens).

Maria is interested in the association of new technologies with creativity, play, and social-emotional development. She works primarily with children, EC teachers, and parents. She also has extensive experience in professional development of teachers in the use of new technologies and science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM). She uses mixed methodologies and her theoretical framework is mostly influenced by critical and postmodern perspectives and ecological approaches.

Eleni Katsiada has 17 years of experience as an early years educator, specializing in children from birth to six years old. Since February 2020, she has served as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care, University of West Attica, Greece. In her role, she teaches courses centred on infant education and the observation of infants and toddlers. Her research primarily delves into children under the age of three, particularly focusing on their agency and interactions within the early childhood education and care (ECEC) environment, including peers and educators.

Julia Manning-Morton's career in the early childhood field spans 40+ years and diverse roles as a nursery practitioner, adviser, and inspector; mostly in London, UK. She was previously a course leader for Early Childhood Studies at London Metropolitan University and is now an independent consultant, author, lecturer, and trainer, including being an associate trainer for Early Education, a Froebel Travelling Tutor, a committee member of Pikler (UK), and a chairperson for a local playgroup.

For much of her career, Julia's research, writing, and teaching have focused on enabling and enthusing early years educators to develop practice and provision that supports the well-being of children from birth to three years old. She has delivered training and conference presentations nationally and internationally and is the author of many articles and books about babies, toddlers, and 2-year-olds. Her doctorate research focused on physical interactions and care practices in early years settings.

Julia is also committed to the well-being of practitioners, aiming to promote a sense of professionalism in the early years field that embraces all practitioners, all children, and all aspects of care and learning, with a strong emphasis on inclusion and anti-bias.

To support her own well-being, Julia sings, dances, does yoga, gardens, and makes stained glass panels, but probably not as regularly as she likes to think. She lives in East London, UK.

Kaira Neder is currently developing his doctoral thesis in history (UNESP/ Brazil – Capes funding 88887.876887/2023-00) entitled "From the governmentalization of childhood to psychoanalysed childhood: an archaeogenealogy of concepts about childhood propagated by specialized knowledge in England (Eugenics Review and John Bowlby) between 1942 and 1959". She is a psychologist (2019) and earned a master's degree in Psychology (2022) from the Faculty of Science, Letters and Philosophy of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo. She was previously a member of the "Brazilian Centre for the Investigation of Childhood Education and Development" (CINDEDI) (2015–2022) and her master's dissertation integrated the project "Social and emotional experiences in the first year of transition from home to early years settings" (ISSEET) as a research assistant in Brazil. Her interests are located in the fields of "Developmental Psychology", "Philosophy and History of Psychology and Psychoanalysis", and "Contemporary French Philosophy (Foucault)".

Amanda Norman is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Winchester, UK. She is the author of several books and has published works about play, infant care pedagogies, and emotional well-being in academic peer reviewed and professional practice articles. As a practising therapeutic play specialist and lead early years consultant, she continues to support and liaise with early professionals working in the sector, in addition to her academic role.

Justine O'Hara-Gregan, Ph.D. is a professional teaching fellow in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland. Justine's research and teaching interests focus on the well-being of kaiako and tamariki, and early childhood pedagogy and practice. As a fully certified teacher, Justine teaches in early childhood settings alongside her university research and teaching work. She is a member of the editors collective for *The First Years Ngā Tau Tuatahi NZ Journal of Infant and Toddler Education* and a co-facilitator of the *University of Auckland's Early Childhood Seminar Series*.

Gloria Quinones is an Associate Professor in Early Childhood Education at the Faculty of Education, Monash University. Her research focuses on emotions, well-being, and sustainability in early childhood education and care (ECEC), with a particular emphasis on affective and play-based pedagogies that support young children's learning, educator wellbeing, peer relationships, and parenting practices. Gloria's recent work focuses on affective approaches to addressing climate and weather through early childhood education, fostering environmental awareness from the earliest years. She is co-editor of the *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy* (VJEP), where she promotes visual pedagogies as a means to deepen understanding of teaching and learning.

Anne B. Reinertsen is a professor in process philosophy of education, new materialist research methodologies, knowledges of practice and evaluation research. She has worked as teacher, teacher educator, and leader. Her research interests are

subjective professionalism, leadership, materiality of language, new configurations of research methodologies, and slow scholarships. She has been a visiting scholar at Stanford University and the University of Illinois, USA, and Australian Catholic University (ACU) in Australia. Her publications include national and international books, journals, and book chapters and she has guest edited several Special Issue journals.

Jane Selby Jane Selby's academic journey began with her master's programme at St. Andrews, Scotland, focusing on infant studies. She earned her Ph.D. from Cambridge University, researching "Feminine Identity and Contradiction" among female research students. At Charles Sturt University, she collaborated with Ben Bradley to establish an infant laboratory in 1998. Her professional roles have included National Research Fellow at La Trobe University and Senior Research Fellow at James Cook University, where she engaged with Australian indigenous groups. Additionally, Selby has developed clinical psychology practices in both the UK and Australia, and has worked with at-risk youth in New South Wales. Her recent co-authored book with Ben Bradley and Matthew Stapleton, "Babies in Groups: Expanding Imaginations", was published in 2024.

Natália M. S. Costa earned a doctorate degree in Psychology from the Faculty of Science, Letters and Philosophy of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo, in 2021. She was previously a member of the "Brazilian Centre for the Investigation of Childhood Education and Development" (CINDEDI) and contributed to the project "Social and emotional experiences in the first year of transition from home to early years settings" (ISSEET) as a research assistant in Brazil. Her Ph.D. research, developed across such collaboration, was informed by perspectives from cultural-historical theory and Gibsonian ecological psychology. Her work involves infant-toddler movement and motor development, as well as space and transitions in Early Childhood Education and Care. She is currently employed in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway, where she holds a teaching and research position (førsteamanuensis).

Eleni Sotiropoulou is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care, University of West Attica, in the field of study "Pedagogy with emphasis on early childhood education and care". She has completed her Ph.D. thesis at the Aristotle University of Greece, Department of Early Childhood Education, having studied education for citizenship in preschool and middle school age. She holds two master's degrees from the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Western Macedonia: (a) in Education Sciences with a specialization in "Educational Policy and Research" and (b) in Pedagogy with a specialization in "Cultural Studies and New Technologies". She has also completed her studies (BA) as (a) a Kindergarten Teacher (for children aged 4–6 years) at the University of Western Macedonia and (b) as an Early Childhood Educator (for children aged 0–4 years) at the Alexandrio Technological Educational Institute (present International Hellenic University of Greece).

Her research interests, among others, focus on early childhood education and care issues, the pedagogy of care, the child's well-being, the education for citizenship, pedagogical programmes/good pedagogical practices, inclusion and multicultural education, educational interventions for children of immigrants/refugees and vulnerable groups, international/European/national educational policy and strategy in early childhood education and care and professional development of educators. She has participated in research projects as a researcher and in various educational projects as (a) a coordinator, (b) an expert, (c) a syllabus and curriculum editor, and (d) an author of educational textbooks. Her articles have been published in international journals, as chapters in books and in conference proceedings.

Matthew Stapleton combines his design expertise with his commitment to advancing education for adults and young children. With over 25 years of experience in the field, he has made significant contributions to both early childhood and adult education. Since 2008, as CEO of Centre Support, Matthew has developed tools that assist educators and managers in meeting regulatory standards and enhancing practices in early childhood services across Australia. He also operates and teaches in two high-quality educational centres. His recent academic work includes a paper on "risky play" published in *Contemporary Issues in Early Education* and the co-authored 2024 book with Ben Bradley and Jane Selby, titled "Babies in Groups: Expanding Imaginations".

Marek Tesar is a Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Education at University of Melbourne. He previously served as Head of School, Associate Dean, and Director of the Centre for Global Childhoods at the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. His scholarship is focused on the philosophy of education, early childhood education, and childhood studies. He holds leadership roles in two major learned societies in his fields: he chairs the Steering Committee of Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) and is Fellow and Past President of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA). He also edits two seminal journals in his field- *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Taylor & Francis) and *Policy Futures in Education* (Sage).

Marisa von Dentz earned her doctorate degree in Psychology from the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of Ribeirão Preto at the University of São Paulo, in 2022. Previously, she was a member of the "Brazilian Center for Research on Education and Child Development" (CINDEDI) and contributed to the "Social and Emotional Experiences in the First Year of Transition from Home to Early Years" (ISSEET) project as a research assistant. Her doctoral work was based on the ISEET project and was grounded in the theoretical-methodological perspectives of the cultural-historical theory. The work involves the interactions between babies during the transition from home to early childhood education institution in the first year of life. She is currently an Assistant Professor I at the La Salle University Center (Unilasalle/Lucas) teaching in the Psychology, Pedagogy, and Physical Education courses. She is also a Collaborating Professor at Atenas University (UniAtenas/Sorriso) Medical School for the subject of Medical Psychology.

Chapter 1

Interdependencies and Possibilities for Infant-Toddler Wellbeing in Early Childhood Education



Gloria Quinones and Andrea Delaune

Abstract In this chapter, we introduce the work of the contributing scholars who offer international research with infant-toddlers. We discuss fresh approaches to infant-toddler wellbeing. These diverse perspectives offer a meaningful way to think more about infant-toddlers, agentic, curious and joyful beings, as we speculate about their interdependency with humans, non-humans, time and space situated in early childhood settings across the globe. Wellbeing is a complex and contemporary concept; this book provides fresh and vibrant research narratives that lead forward infant-toddler education, pedagogy and what matters to infant-toddler engagement with the world.

Introduction

Wellbeing is a central concept explored in this book, focusing on younger children we refer to as ‘infant-toddlers’. The discussion of wellbeing is set within early childhood settings across the globe, presenting diverse theoretical, philosophical and methodological perspectives on the wellbeing of infants, toddlers and educators.

Wellbeing is a complex and multifaceted construct that requires us to understand it from the point of view of children and their everyday lives (Casas & Frønes, 2020). Gibbons et al. (2017) argue for bringing complexity to the concept of wellbeing, which needs to be considered in relation to infants, families, teachers and their

G. Quinones (✉)

Faculty of Education, Monash University, Frankston, VIC, Australia
e-mail: gloria.quinones@monash.edu

A. Delaune

Faculty of Education, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
e-mail: andrea.delaune@canterbury.ac.nz

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communities to support better understandings of wellbeing. Wellbeing related to the concept of the ‘good life’ has a significant connection to the ways in which they [people] know they are being well. These ways of being also correspond to the communities infants live in (Gibbons et al., 2017).

Our focus is on infant-toddlers, the relationships they form in early childhood settings with educators, teachers and peers in early childhood settings, and how these relationships are situated within the flow of time and place. A key stimulus for the project started from a conversation between the editors about the following sentence from *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017), which states that ‘the wellbeing of each child is interdependent with the wellbeing of their kaiako, parents, and whānau’ (p. 20). When wellbeing is situated as an interdependent concept, each individual’s wellbeing is connected and interdependent with others. This situates interdependencies at the heart of reciprocal and collaborative relationships, fostering opportunities for connection with people, places and things. It also prioritises the need to attend to the wellbeing of all involved in the setting owing to these connections. The chapters within this book explore these connections in various ways to enhance current understandings of wellbeing in infant-toddler early childhood contexts.

The chapter authors bring research findings from various regions, exploring local understandings of wellbeing and offering opportunities to meaningfully reconsider the fleeting nature of the lives of the youngest citizens in societies like Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Estola et al. (2014) remind us that children’s wellbeing requires adults to play key roles in validating their experiences, ‘provide opportunities for children to be heard, and promote both their interpretation and their lived experience of well-being’ (p. 939). From the chapter authors, we hear of multiple moments of lived experiences of wellbeing through connectivity between adults and infant-toddlers. These moments of connectivity between adults and infant-toddlers are grounded within everyday experiences ranging from providing food and supporting transitions to fostering a sense of belonging and love. However, we recognise the wider political landscape in which infants are situated that implicates their experiences of wellbeing. We turn to this landscape for further consideration of wellbeing, focusing on policy and curriculum documents within our own contextual settings—Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand—in the next section.

Early Childhood Wellbeing: Policy and Curriculum Landscapes

A stronger focus was placed on the wellbeing of children during the pandemic, and financial investment in improving children’s and families’ wellbeing was a strong focus in policy and pedagogy (Campbell et al., 2021). In the policy landscape,

wellbeing has received strong attention in early childhood education. In the first instance, the sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015, goal three refers to good health and wellbeing, which will *ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages*. In their report, good health and wellbeing with reference to improving the health of young children, including increasing childhood vaccinations and promoting countries investing in health systems to improve the health of young children, preventing diseases (United Nations, 2021). A focal point is on young children's health and discussions offered around how COVID-19 has affected access to treatment, such as for tuberculosis, to mention some. Overall, children paying attention to their health, in turn, improves their wellbeing.

Casas and Frønes (2020) discuss how the Convention on the Rights of Children, Article 29, focuses on the evolving child and wellbeing and reaching their full potential. Placing the child at the centre, their agentic self and an image of the child with talents and mental and physical abilities will aid the flourishing of their wellbeing.

Early childhood education in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand emphasises children's wellbeing as a learning outcome (Bone, 2019). Early childhood is a significant moment in children's lives for their learning, development and wellbeing (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2022). The *Belonging, Being and Becoming, Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (AGDE, 2022) describes wellbeing as a learning outcome where children develop a strong sense of wellbeing. This takes place in relationships with children's families and educators in connection to their communities.

In the learning outcome, children have a strong sense of wellbeing. Children's bodies are at the centre, including their physical health, wellbeing, holistic development and learning. As children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing, it is suggested that they will be confident interacting with others, communicate their physical and emotional needs to others, and explore the world accepting and taking challenges, to mention some. The role of the educator in promoting holistic wellbeing is to provide a responsive and supportive approach to valuing children's initiatives (AGDE, 2022).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, 'Mana Atua | Wellbeing' is one of the five strands of the national early childhood curriculum document *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education [NZMoE], 2017, hereafter *Te Whāriki*). Akin to the UNESCO SGD focus where health leads to wellbeing, *Te Whāriki* positions a focus on health for wellbeing, including self-care for healthy living. The learning outcomes are related to keeping themselves healthy, self-care and keeping themselves and others safe from harm. However, in light of the precedence given to children's holistic development and te ao Māori (Māori world views) on interconnectedness, wellbeing is also more important than physical health, including emotional wellbeing, as infants and toddlers are supported to learn how to manage and express their feelings and needs, including 'a sense of personal worth and cultural identity' (NZMoE, 2017, p. 27).

Furthermore, wellbeing is identified as a key element within one of the principles of *Te Whāriki*, ‘Whānau tangata | Family and Community’. In this principle, wellbeing is conceptualised as an interdependent phenomenon through the statement, ‘The wellbeing of each child is interdependent with the wellbeing of their kaiako, parents and whānau’ (NZMoE, 2017, p.20). This principle brings the concept of wellbeing beyond the infant and toddler into the broader relationships that affect the life of the infant and toddler. In this way, wellbeing cannot be solely located within the individual and needs to be acknowledged as part of a wider network of interconnected interdependence that influences the ‘good life’ for infants and toddlers.

The scope of policy and curriculum landscape is broadened within the book to examine a wider range of contexts beyond the Australasian area. This expanded focus provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse contexts for infant and toddler wellbeing from various international perspectives. Collectively, we contribute new insights into the global conversation on wellbeing, carefully considering how it is constituted and where it can be enhanced. In the next section, we explore the theoretical and methodological approaches that have been prominent in our collective inquiry into the wellbeing of infants and toddlers.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Infant-Toddler Wellbeing

In early childhood education, examining the concept of wellbeing depends on the perspective one adopts, such as psychological or philosophical (Lewis, 2019). Lewis (2019) suggests that children’s wellbeing, no matter what discipline, needs to account for young children as ‘social actors and agents of change’ (p. 306).

The book covers a range of theoretical and philosophical perspectives, and debates grand theories that early childhood education that have predominately shaped early childhood education. For instance, attachment theory is challenged by Neder, Santos de Sosta and von Dent (Chap. 2), who argue that traditional attachment approaches rarely consider the dynamic of group settings in early childhood education. In their discussion of attachment, Neder et al. (Chap. 2) focus on a dyadic relationship rather than thinking of a collective approach to developing sensitive relationships with young children. Further, they suggest that attachment theory focuses on the attachment figure and the child’s ‘secure base as a reliable person’. When the child develops an insecure attachment figure, it leads to an insecure attachment and possible dysfunctional relationships. As this discourse became familiar in early childhood education, expectations about educators taking a substitutive maternal role were expected, without a consideration that early childhood settings are situated in a group and relationships are built in a collective environment. A proposed cultural-historical perspective is presented to understand the complex social worlds of infants, focusing on their interactions, as engagement and their emotional wellbeing, as their positive affects such as enjoyment, relaxation, vitality

and openness and they engage with people, space and using communicative bodily resources.

Norman focuses on Winnicott's object theory psychology. She explains that for Winnicott, the infant is connected with the mother as one. As the infant develops into a toddler, their interest in objects and people around them changes. The object supports the transition all infants take from 'merged with the mother' to 'in relation with mother'. Infants may select an object that feels special to them, which supports the inevitable separation from their mother or main carer. The transitional object is chosen by the infant during their first 6 months of life, and this object possesses 'sensory qualities reminiscent of the mother, such as the smell or touch of the object'.

New and established philosophers in education feature within the book, shedding new light on the centrality of infant and toddler wellbeing and bringing it to the fore. Manning-Morton revisits Pikler and Goldschmied to draw attention to the long-standing consideration these thinkers have brought to a careful pedagogy that ensures infant and toddler wellbeing is brought to the fore. This pedagogical focus places emphasis on the experiences of care that comprise the infant and toddlers' everyday lives, particularly the significance that these events can have for enhancing wellbeing. Through focused and consistent attention in these routines, choreographed by Pikler and endorsed by the 'key teacher approach' of Goldschmied, the quality of the adults' interactions with the infant or toddler is enhanced to promote close connection, thereby enhancing wellbeing. Manning-Morton's focus on careful and respectful interactions has much in common with Delaune's reading of Murdochian love.

Delaune brings the moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch to bear upon the nature of wellbeing for infants and toddlers by extending the conceptualisation of wellbeing as an interdependent concept. In Murdochian philosophy, love is key to how we come to know and understand others in the world, with subsequent impact on our interactions with them in the future. Love is particularly relevant within relationships with infants and toddlers and has been an area of growing consideration internationally in early childhood education. Manning-Morton and Delaune agree that attention is of critical importance in the care of infants and toddlers. Delaune draws from the Murdochian philosophical concept of *attention* to bring focus to the role of the teacher's thoughts about their pedagogical practices with infants and toddlers and how love can serve as a connecting link between the educator and infant/toddler to enhance practice and mutual feelings of wellbeing.

Quinones, Boyd, Tesar and Reinertsen examine the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of the concept of wellbeing, including time and space; dynamic interdependence between human, non-human and more-than-human entities; and immanence. Quinones discusses how post-human approaches invite us to think about the intra-actions between the human and non-human that are active and entangled in the world. She focuses on time fluctuations and the interdependency of wellbeing connected to materials, time and space in an infant-toddler room. Boyd and Tesar's chapter discusses intra-connected using Barad's concept of intra-activity to show how wellbeing is a complex construct that involves 'agential relations that

manifest in fluid actions, modalities, emotions, and events'. Through sharing narratives from their research with infant-toddlers, they demonstrate infants' intra-connectivity with objects, emotions, places and space, letting go, being open-minded and curious, to seeing more how wellbeing is interdependent of everything. In the last chapter, Reinertsen enhances our view of wellbeing by 'valuing the possibilities that openness can bring' and questioning how, when we enter researching in early childhood education, we take a position of not knowing or yet to know; this also enables us to flourish wellbeing. Together, these three chapters invite us to consider wellbeing as being and becoming, in a more fluid, existential way.

Methodologies Employed to Study Infant-Toddler Wellbeing

To examine wellbeing, a range of methodologies are employed, from quantitative, survey methods to qualitative and post-qualitative video observation approaches, for example, to understand Greek educators' views on how toys enhance children's wellbeing. The use of video observations has been a useful visual methodology to understand infant-toddlers' learning and wellbeing, Ridgway, Quinones, and Li (2020) explain visual methodology using video data to capture moments of infant-toddlers change and transformation, revealing the relational nature of infant-toddler pedagogy. Neder et al.'s use of video observations provided an observational form to study infants' first year in the early childhood setting. Video observations can be used to study and describe infants' locomotion, exploration and peer interactions in detail. Stapleton et al. suggest that video offers an opportunity for readers to explore infant-toddlers' peer interactions in naturalistic environments.

We introduce the interdependencies of wellbeing, developed in three sections: (a) interdependencies with people, places and things; (b) interdependencies of wellbeing and its relation to infant-toddler pedagogy; and (c) wellbeing manifested through infant-toddlers flourishing into the future.

How Is Wellbeing Manifested through Interdependencies with People, Places and Things?

Wellbeing is improved through a caring relationship (Tronto, 2013). In referring to young children, Tronto reminds us that caring for young children requires skills but, at the same time, different types of care work. Therefore, caring is a complex process. In early childhood settings, infant-toddler wellbeing is facilitated by group interactions and relationships with objects and environments. Infant-toddler wellbeing is expressed in playful exchange, happiness and shared care for peers (Ridgway, Li, & Quinones, 2020).

The first section of this book focuses on the interdependence between infant-toddlers and educators in the early childhood setting, and with significant objects and environments and their relationship with wellbeing. In Chap. 2, Neder et al. focus on infant's wellbeing connected to their socio-emotional development as they transition from home to the early childhood setting. In this chapter, wellbeing is expanded beyond the infant/teacher dyad to highlight the interdependence of wellbeing between the infant, the teacher and the other infants in the environment, focusing on the interactive engagement of infants as they participate in a group with peers and teachers. Neder et al. suggest that an infant's bodily expressions make visible an infant's competence and are manifestations of their emotional wellbeing.

The pedagogical elements of the teacher are how she also develops a pedagogical environment for infants to explore. The teacher is a 'mediator who will structure an interactive field that will allow the infants to explore the environment (and to integrate into it), handle toys, and interact with other babies'. Infants found wellbeing in their connections with other infants in the setting, building peer relationships that enhanced their demonstrable feelings of wellbeing. In this sense, the role of the teacher is important in providing emotional security and further reflecting on the wellbeing manifestations of babies and infants. But all of the teacher's strategies were beyond a dyadic relationship between infant and educator, instead highlighting a collectivised logic that reflects the group dynamics inherent in early childhood experiences. The teachers were clearly committed to fostering the infant's sense of wellbeing and their feelings in the group. They worked with and alongside each other to achieve this. They changed what they did to bring feelings of belonging and wellbeing to the infant, relying upon extended communication with each other and the wider family to facilitate the wellbeing of the infant. The quality of the interactions among many individuals in early childhood settings is important for creating the socio-emotional wellbeing of infants.

Adopting a group-based approach to illustrate infants' sociability, Stapleton et al. present a discussion on how, in Australia, policy guidelines like the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2023) promote attachment theory, providing educators with forming attachments with children. However, their chapter proposes an important focus on peer interactions and a more fluid approach to attachment theory, where relationships between babies might also offer a 'deeper interrogation of the dynamics of child development and the multifaceted nature of babies in groups'.

This approach shifts the focus for wellbeing to examine connections and relationships between infants within mealtimes through the rearrangement of the mealtime routine to allow for enhanced infant-infant interaction. Stapleton et al. (Chap. 3) explore the concept of infant wellbeing within group dynamics in early childhood settings, highlighting how infants display social behaviours and emotional wellbeing when interacting in small groups. It examines the significance of shared intentionality, cooperation, and collaborative meaning-making in infant groups, especially during mealtimes. Through ethnographic case studies, the chapter reveals how infants engage in playful, cooperative activities and demonstrates the role of educators in facilitating these group dynamics while managing infant distress and wellbeing.

Moving to a focus on things and objects, Norman (Chap. 4) and Sotiropoulou, Katsiada and Hatzigianni (Chap. 5) offer a discussion on how toys promote infant-toddler wellbeing. Both Sotiropoulou et al.'s (Chap. 5) and Norman's (Chap. 4) argument for the importance of the transitional object allows for some of the intricate complexities of wellbeing to be considered. For Sotiropoulou et al., the physical environment is a source of meaningful interaction, stimulating connection between the infants and the teachers to expand relational connections between them. For Norman (Chap. 4), the infant's wellbeing is interdependent with the transitional object. Norman proposes a model of wellbeing where transitional objects foster the creativity of the infant and a sense of wellbeing. However, the teacher is also part of this wellbeing relationship through the reliance that the infant has upon the teacher to 'allow' the infant access to the transitional object (tensions on time and decisions reliant on the teacher, such as *only at sleep times? Not at all? Whenever the infant requests?*).

Norman's identification of this tension illustrates the complex interconnectedness of wellbeing between the infant. The object and the teacher are further complexified in the landscape of a post-pandemic policy field where lingering views of transition objects as sites of potential virus transmission affect current practices. Here, issues of wellbeing are part of a broader conversation about health, with tensions in the push-pull of determining solutions in these complexities. Norman's work in bringing these to the fore supports an expanded understanding of wellbeing as multilayered within global and local concerns, raising attention to these challenges to support everyday practices.

Both Sotiropoulou et al. and Norman's chapters consider wellbeing in terms of emotional bonds and connections. For Sotiropoulou et al., carefully selected objects are conduits in stimulating cooperation with others and fostering friendship, illustrating the ways in which wellbeing *between* teachers and infants and infants and infants is connected to the objects. This is more of a passing involvement with the object. For Norman's conceptualisation of the transitional object, there is also a more significant interdependence between the infant and object that illustrates a more active relationship between the infant-toddler and the 'more-than-human'. Here, there are insights into the intricate complexity of wellbeing as a multifaceted, multidirectional concept with 'more-than-human' nuances that need to be attended to.

How Is Wellbeing Manifested through Interdependencies of Wellbeing and its Relation to Infant-Toddler Pedagogy?

In studying wellbeing and its relationships to pedagogy, the chapters within this section support new or expanded pedagogical understandings through understandings of love (Delaune, Chap. 6), the concept of the 'key person' (Manning-Morton, Chap. 7), and the notion of 'juggling' (Gaches, Chap. 8), dynamic teamwork

(Barros, Chap. 9), and the pedagogical impact of teacher's self-practices of wellbeing (O'Hara-Gregan et al., Chap. 10).

Delaune expands the theorisation of wellbeing by understanding love as a bridge between the self and others and a 'powerful force' for pedagogy. Love is a metaphysical connection between humans (teacher/infant/parent/family) that involves being 'necessarily and willingly bound' to others. Situated in Aotearoa New Zealand context, love is identified as infants feeling 'worthy of love', which is then aligned to everyday caregiving practices. Delaune proposes wellbeing as an interdependent phenomenon where the educators' emotional responsivity also expands with the notion of love in pedagogy. Iris Murdoch's philosophy expands these ideas with the concept of attention, appreciation, love and attentiveness in pedagogical relationships with infants. Delaune suggests that an 'understanding of love supports a re-imagination and reinvigoration of the role of love to enhance wellbeing for infants', inviting us to a deeper appreciation of how love becomes part of pedagogy.

The concept of the key person, foregrounded by Elinor Goldschmied, suggests that this person is a key person who cares for young children. Manning-Morton (Chap. 7) draws from Pikler and Goldschmied to expand upon the importance of strong, reciprocal relationships between a key caregiver and the infant to enhance the wellbeing of the infant. In this chapter, Manning-Morton argues for attentive teachers, who do everything 'with' the infant, inviting participation from the infant in a cooperative sensing 'dialogue' that develops a rhythm of reciprocity between teacher and infant as they come to read, understand and come to predict each other's cues in a connected synchronicity of mutual dependence. In doing so, Manning-Morton extends the notion of the 'key teacher' to highlight their role in sensitivity through the communicative dimensions of touch for the infant. Touch generates feeling, whether positive or negative. Here, in Manning-Morton's work, we are alerted to a further nuance of the interdependence of wellbeing—the teacher must be carefully aware of how their tensions and stresses may be sensed by the infant through this communicative touch. This is akin to the 'flows of energy' later identified by O'Hara-Gregan et al. (Chap. 10), discussed in the next section. Through Manning-Morton's explanation of the Pikler approach, an account of doing things with the child rather than to them is an important pedagogical element in responding, waiting and recognising them. In this point, Manning-Morton highlights the need to attend to the teacher's wellbeing as part of the dynamics of wellbeing for the infant. As Manning-Morton's characterisation of the key person is one who does everything 'with' the infant, the teacher must remain carefully attentive to their own wellbeing for the ways in which the infant's wellbeing is connected and mutually dependent upon them.

Wellbeing and its complex interdependence are explored by Gaches. In Chap. 8, Gaches captures the frenetic energy of an early childhood context with a frank and raw examination of teachers' experiences of wellbeing within their work environment, characterised through the metaphor of 'juggling in three dimensions'. Giving strong emphasis to the need for teacher's own, unfiltered voices on this important topic, Gaches thematically arranges the narratives to offer a view of the multifaceted and complex lives of early childhood teachers, with insights into the ripple effects