

International Perspectives on
Early Childhood Education and Development 20

Liang Li
Gloria Quiñones
Avis Ridgway *Editors*

Studying Babies and Toddlers

Relationships in Cultural Contexts

 Springer

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 20

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Editors

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Relationships in Cultural Contexts

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Chapter 1

A Wholeness Approach to Babies’ and Toddlers’ Learning and Development

Liang Li, Gloria Quiñones, and Avis Ridgway

Abstract In this chapter the three co-authors and editors, from varied cultural backgrounds, choose a ‘wholeness approach’ to bring coherence to the work of contributing scholars who offer local and international research in their studies of babies and toddlers. Through these collaborations, a new model for thinking about studying babies and toddlers was generated. The potentialities of an adapted wholeness approach for uniting the diverse ideas into a meaningful whole are an exciting challenge for researchers studying babies and toddlers in the field of early childhood.

Keywords Wholeness approach • Babies and toddlers • Relationships • Cultural contexts • Theoretical model

1.1 Introduction: Wholeness Approach for Creating Coherence

Current research is brought together to create new understandings of the affective, cognitive and cultural dynamics present in babies and toddlers’ learning and development. We draw on a wholeness approach (see Sect. 1.5 in this chapter). Initially, this approach was conceptualised by Mariane Hedegaard (2008) and adapted here, to highlight the relational complexity and uncertainty involved when studying babies and toddlers across their lived experiences in family, community and child-care (institutional) settings. In taking a wholeness approach to babies’ learning and development, the study of their relationships in cultural contexts may be united through considering the joint efforts of researchers investigating young children across different societies such as Australia, Bangladesh, the USA, China, New Zealand, Finland and Sweden.

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The varied research studies are all related in one way or another, to babies' and toddlers' relationships and cultural contexts. This may be viewed as an unparalleled opportunity to conceptualise the use of a wholeness approach for studying our youngest citizens. The wholeness approach provides one way of creating coherence within the breadth of the research studies presented in the chapters that follow.

1.2 Valuing Relationships

When studying babies and toddlers, giving value to relationships in cultural contexts has been seen as an important and respectful way to approach deeper understanding of their learning and development through interactions. Emde in the Foreword to *Bambini* (2001, p. vii) writes:

There is an atmosphere of respect in which everyone is involved in continuous learning and reflection. Relationships are not taken for granted or considered static.

In any relational space, babies' and toddlers' perspectives, motives, emotions, thinking, sensibilities, well-being and interests may become evident to researchers in that lived experience of shaping and being shaped by the 'dialectic between person and practice or culture' (Edwards 2015, p.1). Experienced researcher and observer of toddlers, Gunvor Lokken (2011) reminds us to be researchers who are 'perceptively attentive on all levels of interpretative analysis throughout the research process' (p. 162). The immediacy of any relationship with a very young child is wholly lived through the sights, sounds, feelings, actions and imaginative energy that babies and toddlers bring to those studying them. Reflecting on what babies and toddlers' responsive actions might mean for their cultural learning and development is at the heart of much research presented in this book. For example, Eva Johansson's work (Chap. 2) gives perspective on the entangled relationships that babies and toddlers share and notes the intrinsic nature of taken-for-granted, value-laden, ambiguous and ever-changing lifeworlds being inhabited. Using a wholeness approach brings into a clear view those entangled relationships involving needs, values, feelings and concerns for both objects and persons in the lives of very young children. All these are present in different institutions such as family, community and centre, with their own values, traditions, moral dimensions and situations that today form part of the very young child's cultural life experience (Hedegaard 2012).

The very young child's development occurs from social to individual functions in their particular world, and in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of this development, a knowledge of the relations with and within their cultural world is required. When theorising cultural development, Vygotsky (1981, p.163), suggests: 'Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then, on the psychological plane; First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of

volition'. Therefore, the importance of focusing on the everyday activities that babies and toddlers and adult/carers experience is of primary importance when studying babies and toddlers.

In order to explore the babies' and toddlers' world as a whole, researchers in this volume have examined home, childcare centres, family day care and the various community and care situations in which families, educators and babies may participate and relate to in their daily life activity. Taking a holistic view, and oriented by Hedegaard's (2008) model of children's learning and development through participation across institutional practices, brings together the rich ontological concepts needed for generating new appreciation, awareness, practice ideas and curiosity about babies' and toddlers' learning and development.

Vygotskian scholars bring the idea that the development of the child is a complex dialectical process that initially begins as a social form of interaction and later is transferred to internal, intra-psychological functions which constitute the dynamic process of change (from intermental to intramental function). In this change process, young babies develop through their engagement in collective activities as they are being involved in active relationships with peers and adults with varying levels of skill, knowledge and ability (Holzman 2009). The Vygotskian (Vygotsky 1987) perspective that young children's development is in essence a social process, rather than an individual phenomenon, helps explain why the chapters co-written by editors of this book investigate, in particular, babies' and toddlers' worlds and their relationships to the cultural world using a wholeness approach. The research on babies and toddlers within recent decades has focused on important areas including infant health, movement, attachment and intersubjectivity with additional perspectives emerging from brain research, neuroscience and psychobiology (Trevarthen 2001, 2011; Selby and Bradley 2003; Bigelow et al. 2010). However, there is little research on babies and toddlers that pays full attention to social interactions in their play and in particular relationships in their cultural contexts which form an important role in development as argued by Vygotsky (1997), further discussed by Ridgway et al. (2015) and in the three chapters (3, 10, 12) by the editors of this book.

1.3 Dynamic Dialectics

From a wholeness perspective, the wide variations of research studies shared across the chapters lead to the development of a dynamic, dialectical dialogue that can open readers to considering their own theoretical approaches for making sense of the many concepts and ideas worked through by researchers who have authored chapters. For example, Johansson (Chap. 2) conceptualised the concept of shared worlds using philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity 'where the body is central for communication and understanding of others'. A cultural-historical approach to studying babies and toddlers is used by Li et al. (Chap. 3), Quiñones et al. (Chap. 12), Ridgway et al. (Chap. 10) and Sikder

(Chap. 13). Li et al. build ways to understand babies' creative acts with the concept of *perezhivanie* foregrounded through analysis of how adults emotionally support babies in their musical creative acts. Two chapters that use a cultural-historical approach and conceptualise significant moments are provided by Quiñones et al. and Sikder. Affective moments of action (Quiñones et al.; Vygotsky 1966) are theorised through visual and textual analysis of an example of toddler's peer play as they welcome and acknowledge each other's play. The concept of small science is used by Sikder to examine toddler's understandings of everyday science in a Bangladeshi family. The cultural dynamics of affective fatherhood and the notion of conceptual reciprocity are also brought into the cultural-historical research mix (Ridgway et al.). These are just some examples of the theoretical work researchers are undertaking when studying relationships of babies and toddlers in cultural contexts.

New ways to understand the complex cultural worlds in which babies and toddlers live have been researched across the chapters of this book.

1.4 Complex Cultural Worlds

As part of using a wholeness approach, researchers' contributions have come from baby and toddler studies undertaken in many countries. Their enormously varied and fascinating research into babies' and toddlers' relations to their different worlds provide opportunity for building deeper insight across national and cultural boundaries.

Authors work with their own theories and perspectives, and in taking a wholeness approach to encompass this body of research, it makes sense, as it can be understood that there is simply no one way to adequately study babies and toddlers.

The following examples exemplify the rich dynamic complexity that a wholeness approach to writing and conceptualising can bring to broaden the research on babies and toddlers and their cultural worlds. Studies come from Dutch childcare centres (Chap. 14), US family childcare/day care homes (Chap. 7), a Finnish day care group setting (Chap. 4), Chinese family baby raising practices (Chap. 8), New Zealand researching babies using visual methodology (Chap. 9), Australian cultural contexts and visual methods (Chaps. 3, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12) and Bangladeshi family science concepts in play (Chap.13).

The potentialities of an adapted wholeness approach for studying babies and toddlers and to unite the chapters into a meaningful whole are an exciting challenge.

1.5 A Wholeness Approach to Study Young Children's Cultural Worlds and Transitions

A wholeness approach to studying children should encompass daily life across different institutional settings and arenas from all three perspectives [societal, institutional and individual]. (Hedegaard 2009, p.11).

A wholeness approach to babies' and toddlers' learning and development means taking a broader view by looking at their participation across the several institutional settings and contexts in their everyday life. According to Hedegaard and Chaiklin (2005), an institutional practice that young babies experience everyday has at least three perspectives which contribute to the conditions for production, reproduction and development. The *societal perspective* is reflected in historically evolved traditions and interests in a society, with children developing by experiencing the activities in their social institutions. The societal perspective is informed by the different institutional practices that children enter. *The institutional perspective* focuses on the general settings such as the home, family day care setting, early childhood centres, etc. Questions such as How do babies participate in those different institutions?, What do they learn through the different experiences, and how do they make sense and build awareness of their institutional activities? and What kind of conditions do the different institutions offer to motivate babies' activities? all belong to the institutional perspective. *The individual (personal) perspective* characterises the shared activities of persons in particular institutions. The three perspectives (societal/social, institutional and individual) as a whole contribute to understanding babies' and toddlers' learning and development, with each perspective being interconnected and interrelated, thereby influencing the others. Without including any single perspective, it is not possible to see babies' and toddlers' learning and development clearly, as each is considered conditional for the others (Hedegaard and Chaiklin 2005). Drawing upon this view of babies' and toddlers' learning and development, this book provides a holistic view of the infant's world.

1.5.1 Societal Perspective

Considering cultural values and social structure in *the societal situation*, Pan and her colleagues in Chap. 8 explore how two generations (parents and grandparents) in current Chinese family contexts resolve their intergenerational conflicts and transmit their values in baby-raising practices. The chapter provides a fascinating social view on the differences and conflicts of values in baby-raising practices which further impact on babies' learning and development.

The societal perspective is also the subject of analysis by Dillon Wallace (Chap. 6) from Australia. Here a consideration of the well-being of mothers and young children in contexts of special health care is made. Dillon Wallace explores child and family characteristics to make an argument that the cultural context of the mother

and child relationship can improve their well-being, especially in the case of mothers and their young babies with special healthcare needs. She proposes that policy-makers, service providers and educators should take into account the impact that young special needs children have on maternal functioning.

1.5.1.1 Institutional Perspective

We can see the importance of the *institutional practices* in Tonyan and Paredes' work (Chap. 7). They draw upon the concept of ecological-cultural theory to explain how the providers in family childcare in the USA evaluate and construct their work with babies and toddlers through the lenses of 'cultural models (Love, Fun and Affection; School readiness)'. They conclude that babies are able to reproduce what matters to the providers and extend their own reproduction of cultural models into the future. Tonyan and Paredes' research exemplifies how values in the institutional practices become demands on babies' and toddler's engagement with the practices (Hedegaard 2012). This differs from traditional understanding of babies' development of their values often seen as a result of directly changing through biological needs.

Also recognised and acknowledged in the work of Johansson (Chap. 2) are the influences of babies' dynamic social situations in institutional settings (Swedish toddler group setting). Johansson claims that the child's commitment to shared worlds with peers emerges very early in life. Here it is proposed that the collective life is important and highly valued at a very early age.

The social situation in the early childhood institutional setting creates the conditions for babies' learning and development. One of the key elements of the social situation, the educators' engagement, has been examined by Singer (Chap. 14). Singer investigates the 2–3-year-old toddlers' joint play in Dutch child centres and concludes that toddlers' emotional security relies on educators' skills to manage the group in play. Toddlers need the time and space to be actively involved in their play. According to Singer, educators need to make a pedagogical shift from their focus on individual children to the dynamics of the whole group which has considerable impact on the individual child. The values of the institution need to be highlighted.

Within the institutional practice perspective, another important factor to be taken into account is babies' experience across different transitions such as transition to childcare from home (Monk and Hall, Chap. 5), transitions between different activities during everyday life (Rutanen, Chap. 4) and the transitory moments within one activity (Quiñones et al. Chap. 12).

For instance, Rutanen's work (Chap. 4) highlights the importance of transition periods while working with very young children. She draws upon Lefebvre's three moments of conceived, perceived and lived space and explores two horizontal, small-scale transitions (circle time and lunch time) that occur daily in the infant-toddler's care group in a Finnish day care centre. She finds young children are active agents in interpreting the symbolic space and spatial practices during their transitions. Rutanen emphasises that educators need to take young children's perspectives

to see their diverse needs and intentions and acknowledge that babies and toddlers experience transitions in many different ways.

1.5.1.2 Individual Perspective

To understand the young child's *individual perspective* through the wholeness approach, we can consider their motives and experiences in institutional practices as a relation between them and their world. The key for researchers who aim to understand babies and toddlers is to carefully consider how the world and relations are seen from the *babies' perspective*. We take the babies' and toddlers' perspective to investigate how they build awareness of their relational environment and why and how they respond to their world (see Li, Ridgway and Quiñones, Chap. 3; Sikder, Chap. 13; Quiñones, Li and Ridgway, Chap. 12; White, Chap. 9 and Rutanen, Chap. 4).

We can see an example of taking babies' perspective in the writings of Li, Ridgway and Quiñones (Chap. 3) where the babies' awareness of their world is conceptualised. Through the exploration of three babies from different cultural family contexts, they propose that having the parents' emotional reciprocal support in three babies' creative acts explains family values and demands for their babies' learning and development. They *take three babies' perspectives* to explain babies' emotional expression in their engagement in creative acts. The importance of babies' awareness of and curiosity about their world is highlighted, by showing three babies' emotional expression and responses with their parents' reciprocal support. They discuss the concept of *perezhivanie* (emotional experience) and explore how babies are capable of expressing reciprocal awareness of their world. The babies' competence in transformation of their cultural worlds has not been theorised in these ways before. Research on infants has more frequently noted the quality of interactions between the mother and baby that may affect their well-being and development (Bigelow and Power 2012; Creighton 2011; Nakata and Trehub 2004).

1.6 The Babies' Relations to the World

Hedegard (Hedegaard 2012) has argued that 'Experience should be understood as a relation between the person and the world and not only as something in the person' (p. 21). This confirms Vygotsky's conclusion that:

Environment cannot be regarded as a static entity and one which is peripheral in relation to development, but must be seen as changeable and dynamic ... the child, his development, keeps changing, becomes different. It is not just the child who changes, for the relationship between him and his environment also changes, and the same environment now begins to have a different influence on the child. (Vygotsky 1994, p. 344)

One interpretation is that babies' relationship with their environment is dynamic and changeable. This changing relationship can happen because of both the changeable environment and the development of babies. For instance, when babies start walking around, their view of the world is dramatically changed. Therefore, their relations with the world are changed and their awareness of the world is changed accordingly.

When a new mother goes back to work after maternity leave, new relationships are formed between the baby and people surrounding him/her. Importantly, the first key impact on babies' health and well-being is the issue of continued breastfeeding. Monk and Hall in Chap. 5 explore infant feeding practices during mother's transition to employment or return to study. They provide a cultural model of the transition relationship in a cultural context. They conceptualise the mother and infant dyad and argue that the expectations, tensions and choices are interlaced facets of the everyday lives of the mother/infant dyad as the mother transitions back to work or study and the infants' transition into nonparent care.

In the work of Quiñones, Li and Ridgway (Chap. 12), they conceptualise the affective moments of action in two toddlers' play. They illustrate how and why toddlers experience their relationship differently in a new social situation and how affective awareness of one another is created in the toddlers' play relationship. Their work proposes that young toddlers can perform affective moments of action when they make their own choices through both self-will and collective choice in play. Toddlers' relations to their world in the social situation promote their affective moments of action.

Babies' and toddlers' relations to the world are also captured in the chapter by Sikder (Chap. 13) where the concept of motives from a cultural-historical perspective is used to study infant-toddlers' development of science concept formation in a Bangladeshi family context. Sikder demonstrates this through a case study of a young child's play moments to explain and theorise the dynamic aspects of the child's relation to the world. In studying infants and toddlers' science concept formation in play, Sikder argues the relationships between persons motivate the child's learning in play. It is very important to take into account the curiosity, intentions, experience and engagement of the babies and toddlers in the activity within the pedagogical play context. The relationships with infant-toddlers are built through intentional experiences that use interactive enrichment in metacommunicative exchange and show how they can be presented with sustained and accumulative opportunities that accrue for conceptual learning (Branco 2009; Fleer 2010; Nelson 2007).

1.7 Researching the Babies' World

We have explained the importance of understanding the babies' relationship with their cultural world and taking babies' perspective to explain a wholeness approach to babies' learning and development. This brings us a challenge in researching the