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Understanding children from 0 to 3 years of age and its implications for education. What's new on the babies' side? Origins and evolutions

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EDITORIAL

Understanding children from 0 to 3 years of age and its implications for education. What's new on the babies' side? Origins and evolutions

Our views on infancy and toddlerhood have greatly changed during recent decades, as already documented by previous reviews of ECEC literature (Plaisance and Rayna 1997; Rayna and Plaisance 1998). But increasing knowledge induces a need for continuing research, particularly with regard to the under-3s. Today there is a growing awareness of the persistent lack of knowledge supporting a more respectful welcome of the youngest in our changing societies. This consideration has stimulated recent initiatives, such as a review of research focussed on this field, within a network of researchers from seven countries coordinated by Jan-Erik Johansson (2010). This Themed Monograph on Birth to 3, of the *EECER journal* that we have been honoured to edit, fits into this movement.

Without aiming, within this editorial, to make a state of the art review on birth to 3 literature, we can mention that since the early 1970s, understandings of the young child, its care and education, has been radically modified by a number of studies, grounded in various value-based cultural contexts and thus using various theoretical and methodological frameworks (David 1999). Research, which emerged from questions raised by earlier studies or as attempts to respond to social or political needs, is now developing at the crucial moment when new paradigms develop and urge us to rethink early childhood education and care, in its whole, as well as 'with' young children (Swadener and Kessler 1991; Burman 1994; Cannella 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999; Brougère and Vandembroeck 2008; Pascal and Bertram 2009). A short journey across a selection of studies, published in English and French, display some significant approaches and discoveries, across a range of disciplinary frameworks and particular themes and objects of research, which have provided some building bricks for an understanding of birth to 3, in diverse contexts. This research had opened new perspectives for the care and education of the youngest, both in the minority and the majority world.

Current research on birth to 3 is following the path forged by a few pioneers, in different countries, who have played a major role for our research area. Among them is Charlotte Bühler (1931) who provided analyses of infants' and toddlers' development, and particularly of early peer interactions, observed in a centre-based setting in Austria. The enhancement of early social behaviours has supported the idea of the baby as a social being from birth, as argued elsewhere by Henri Wallon. The dominating positivist psychological approaches and laboratory settings as well as the hegemonic traditional conceptions of mother's role have slowed down the development of such observational work in centres, or families. Despite Jean Piaget's inspiring systematic observations of his own infants – already during the 1930's –, the generalised use of recording technologies, allowed only some decades later the rebirth of very young children's observations which began to be carried out in institutions, also according to the rhythm of ideological evolutions of the different countries towards mothers'

role and day-care centres for very young children. The work, from the 1970s, of two contributors of this issue, Colwyn Trevarthen (1979 a, b, 1982), Trevarthen and Hubley (1978) and Tullia Musatti and Panni (1981) illustrates this.

Also to be mentioned is René Spitz' and John Bowlby's largely disseminated studies on separation and attachment. While they have inspired entry procedures in day-care centres and considerations on transitions, often combined with other approaches, as noticed in Italy (Mantovanni, Restuccia Saitta, and Bove 2000; Musatti and Rayna 2010), they have also simultaneously discredited centre-based, out-of-home care. Thanks to innovative and contesting approaches of important figures during the 1960s, such as Irène Lézine in France, ways were opened to/for a new outlook on day-care centres and women's work, investigations 'in contexts' or researching for quality. The contribution of Irène Lézine in this was not only due to her use of recording technologies, but also to the development of new ideas expressed in her *Psychopedagogy of Infancy* (1964) and other contributions, such as MHO publications about play and toys (1965), or other papers contesting the medical model or the 'so-called maternal deprivations' widely spread by clinical psychology (1976).

In the same period, historical perspectives joined the psychological ones. Let us mention Philippe Ariès (1960) who was at the origin of a stream of important studies, in France, on the representation of childhood, including studies of birth, nursing and infancy as well as the history of preschool services, centre-based as well as family day-care. In Italy, the ongoing construction of early childhood pedagogical culture, including the infants' and toddlers' one, has been analysed within its local contexts by their different actors and partners. Numerous publications report on the extraordinary experiences of/by Reggio Emilia and other municipalities (Edwards, Gandini and Forman 1998; Gandini and Pope Edwards 2001; Rinaldi 2006). The historian, Egle Becchi, recently published the history of the Pistoia's one *La pedagogia del buon gusto* (2009).

Then, diverse historical and sociological approaches – joined by demographical and economical ones – have also deepened the field, focusing on some particular themes. For instance in France, the way early skills and learning have been represented over the past centuries (Garnier 1995) or cultural practices and resources – play, toys, books – (Brougère 1995; Manson 2001, 2010) have been explored. Recent developments in the sociology of childhood, which has emerged in other parts of Europe and in the United States with Berry Mayall (2002) or William Corsaro (1997), nowadays are beginning to include the under-3s, as shown by Marjatta Kalliala, in this issue, in her attempt to put different images of the child in dialogue.

Without going further in the overview, we must not forget that, beyond Europe, other pioneers have stimulated research and changes for the under-6s, including the under-3s, as demonstrated by Miwako Hoshi-Watanabe (2010) for Japan, within combinations of traditional cultural views (Kojima 1986) with some occidental understandings. Also in South America, a succession – and some combinations – of studies, generally imported from minority countries, has also been observed, from the dominant psychological ones, followed by the psycho-pedagogical ones then by some sociological ones, as in Brazil (Vittoria and Rabello Baretto 2007; Haddad and Nascimento 2007; Rosemberg 2007). Let us notice that Paulo Freire's spirit is influencing, in turn, current studies carried out in Europe, as shown in this issue by Julia Oliveira-Formosinho's and Sara Barros Araújo's article.

As mentioned, presenting a full review of the research could not be our ambition here, because it would turn out to be inevitably partial. From our perspective we can however mention some key points concerning methods and issues related to research

in early childhood and particularly on the birth to 3 age range. Working with the most dominated persons (the youngest and their carers, mostly women still being involved, mothers as well practitioners), means that power issues, at their multiple levels, are to be underlined, with inevitable paradigmatic shifts at the level of the education of the little ones and with regard to the training or accompaniment of the adults. Researching both rigorous tools and ethical positions to go ahead in these directions is a feature shared by studies in this issue, such as those by Florence Pirard or one of the editors.

A monograph as a composition

A monograph can be pictured as a composition, a piece of music or painting. This metaphor brings the role of the editors into light as making an interpretation, like a performer, in which the parts of this composition, the voices and sounds or shapes and colours are brought to an entity. A challenging task demanding an open mind and ‘close’ listening.

To start, the title of this work indeed suggests in what way the seven contributions hold together: this monograph is a collection of research articles focusing on the youngest children, babies and toddlers. The initiative to give this early age explicit attention in an EECERA publication must not surprise, as suggested before. Where the first EECERA conferences were echoing educational research on preschool, increasingly research with under-3s has become well-represented, particularly from the 5th EECERA conference which took place in Paris in 1995. The growing number of articles published in the EECER Journal shows this evolution.

Nevertheless we have to acknowledge that educational research highlighting this particular age range is limited, despite the increasing number of studies in this field. Many researchers, while noticing with Donna Berthelsen (2010) the ‘youthfulness’ of this research field in numerous countries, currently point to the need for and potential of research with regard to this age range. Recent systematic reviews of research on the under-3s in the Nordic countries (Broström and Hansen 2010; Greve and Solheim 2010; Hännikäinen 2010; Johansson and Emilson 2010) together with the recent growth of doctoral dissertations in their countries, support this conclusion. John Bennett (2008) and others, building on comparative surveys and international studies – *Starting Strong I and II* (OECD 2001, 2006) - made a strong plea to prioritize research on the youngest children. Part of their argument is how much poverty can affect this early age.

At the same time we can see that the findings of – particularly psychological – research on the youngest children are most fascinating and inspiring for the whole of the educational system. If developmental psychology could and still can be the subject of legitimate contestation by post-structuralist views (criticising the concept of normalization and other impoverishing effects in early education), arguments from this discipline are now confirming and developing the image of the very young child as a rich and competent citizen. This new strong message is most fruitful in the light of the continuous process of emancipation and empowerment of the under-3s sector in education...and beyond that age! The exciting experience that was ours when being involved in studies with babies as a member of a research team in Paris (Sinclair et al. 1982; Stambak et al. 1983; CRESAS 1991) is now lived by those who are involved in studies with the youngest children, their families and the practitioners who take care of them. They realize how research of this early period of life opens

an incredibly rich window and laboratory offering great perspectives for the whole of the educational field.

This key message is at the heart of the first contribution, by Colwyn Trevarthen, who can be considered, internationally, as one of the main contributors to the field of Birth to 3. His innovative work carried over recent decades, is inspiring a growing number of areas, including the early curriculum, prevention on illiteracy, autism, etc. We were honoured by his immediate, generous and enthusiastic response to our invitation to participate in this issue. Trevarthen takes us into an intriguing journey that in the end leaves us with a particular sense of wonder, an awareness of the richness and strengths these young persons bear in themselves. This understanding inevitably brings about a fundamental shift in our attitude and approach in relation to the under-3s. To lead us to this point, he confronts us with research findings in which ‘taking into account the perspective of a young child’ is the common approach. The harvest of this endeavour is rich and varied and documented by subtle observations and sensitive descriptions of what goes on in children. It celebrates ‘the creativity of early childhood,’ the ‘helpful intelligence children can offer,’ the child’s ‘capacities for regulating intimate encounters,’ the capability to ‘share the “communicative musicality”’ and ‘show aesthetic preferences,’ the urge ‘to learn expressions in dialogue,’ the demonstration of ‘an increasing self-awareness’ in infants and how at less than 16-months of age they ‘can organize themselves [–] into a working group.’

It pleads for ‘a more generous theory of human motivation,’ for ‘adventurous play,’ ‘to welcome and support the motives of the child,’ to acknowledge children’s rights and to ‘sustain practices [–] that serve these rights well.’

All this leaves us with an impressive view of the child’s mind. Not just as a general statement, but underpinned by a convincing articulation of processes that are not commonly acknowledged but clearly there if we want to see them.

Trevarthen has set the tone or given the canvas his ground layer. Let’s describe how the following contributions fit into this frame and together make a rich composition.

That brings us to Rosemary Roberts’ article on ‘companionable learning’, an article issued from her doctoral thesis and field experience. The link with the first contribution is readily made: the faculties of very young children so well articulated by Colwyn Trevarthen are predominantly displayed in interactions. This approach is not only in line with the breaking views of Vygotski, Roberts also bears on the concept of the ‘two person system’ introduced by Bronfenbrenner. From here a new dimension is introduced in the debate: the concept of ‘wellness’ and the interdependency between the wellness of the child and ‘the level of parental, familial, communal, and social wellness.’ Rosemary Roberts’ research is an attempt to develop a theoretical model in which ‘normal well-being’ is synonymous with ‘normal development.’ It is a search for the ‘components of young children’s holistic resilient well-being.’ The concept of ‘companionable learning’ is defined as ‘the mutual state of intersubjectivity that involves the child and the adult (or sibling or peer) both learning together in an equal, reciprocal dialogue.’ To grasp this phenomenon Roberts introduces the term ‘diagogy’ to correct the one-sidedness of the traditional concept of ‘pedagogy.’ This learning situation is the pivot around which four constructs of well-being revolve. The first refers to physical well-being, the second to communication covering ‘all interactions with the world,’ the third pinpoints the state of well-being attached to the combination of belonging-and-boundaries, and the fourth highlights ‘agency.’ The image of the child transcending these intertwined concepts is characterized by a deep sense of respect for the child’s needs combined with the acknowledgement of the capability of children to engage in

reciprocal relations. This goes up to the point of taking a responsibility – as a child – in the co-construction of the social reality. The concept of ‘collective well-being’ as an underlying ethical dimension expresses what ‘companionable learning’ in the end should bring about and gives meaning to a ‘caring disposition’ as part of the person’s profile. Another aspect of Roberts’ approach is the holistic nature of her analysis, which ties in with the actual paradigm shift in education. Even if categories can be identified, understanding the processes of ‘diagogical’ interactions is only possible when we can see how the emotional, social, cognitive and physical components are part of one and a unique flow. Never can the cognitive part be separated from how a person is experiencing (in the affective sense) the world of objects and people.

Although very much at a reflective level, Roberts’ analysis provides clear cut criteria to guide practice. ‘Companionable learning’ takes place in ‘emotionally charged interactions within secure relationships’ and is about ‘development that flows from active engagement with the world and the people in it.’ This brings us not only close to Trevarthen’s view, but fits very well in the advocacy for involvement or engagement as process-indicators for the quality of the provision as incorporated in Csikszentmihayli’s (1979) concept of flow, in *Experiential Education* (Laevers and Heylen 2003) and in the Effective Early Learning Project (Bertram and Pascal 2009).

From the angle of ‘companionable learning’ to the article of Tullia Musatti and Susanna Mayer is a small step. To start, their previous studies on peer interactions in early educational centres and intense and continuous involvement in analysing best practices, as in Pistoia *nidi*, have substantially raised our understanding of children’s early socialization. In this contribution we are taken through a detailed analysis of a particular type of interactions in which ‘reciprocal attention’ and ‘shared engagement’ by the children is seen as a mark of success, as we found in the former contribution. The study focuses on the impact of the gain of independent locomotion of toddlers on their social and cognitive experiences, with particular attention for the role of the spatial dimension of the setting and the educator in creating meaningful interactions. Two in-depth analyses of videotaped activities illustrate how the quality we seek at the level of the children’s experiences is not just reached by chance, but needs a fine tuning between the child’s agency, the physical environment with the materials on offer and the adults interventions. To start it became evident that the spatial arrangement of the setting in several recognizable areas supports engagement of the child. ‘Shared engagement around a molar activity’ is at the centre of three analysed episodes in which ‘exploring sounds,’ ‘exploring objects properties’ and ‘book reading’ were the core activities. The adult’s position and displacement further proves to be a significant type of intervention, flagging to children a locus for potentially interesting activity. The stimulating responses and initiatives of adults in relation to materials and activities have on several occasions been instrumental for longer episodes of engagement in children. The confrontation with materials could inspire children to start activities and from there develop their own new scenarios, combining materials without the adult taking the lead. We learn that when activities have a ‘spatial,’ ‘material’ and ‘action’ component a framework is created that contributes to episodes with stronger, longer and less interrupted engagement of each child. In all this, the gained capacity to move freely also meant that children sometimes wandered away from a molar activity to revisit it after a while.

In all, Musatti and Mayer shed a sharp light on the most inspirational and at the same time challenging concept of the ‘open framework model’ launched by High Scope in the 1960s, capturing the interactive relation between child initiative and adult initiative.

In the fabric of high quality provision an inclusive approach is in evidence: respect for each child and its individual characteristics by the adult are seen as an indispensable condition for all children to prosper. However this attitude in itself can be promoted as a goal for education, as part of what we see as the desirable outcome of our educational efforts. That is exactly what Julia Oliveira-Formosinho and Sara Barros Araújo have taken as focus for their contribution to this monograph. As an entrance to their topic they point to the enormous lack of studies on ‘diversity’ especially when looking at the under-3s, even if this kind of research is growing, thanks to the DECET-initiative and other dynamics. The rare studies however show already that, according to Glenda Mac Naughton’s review that the two contributors are referring to, children at an early age are aware of differences especially with regard to race and gender. With their model of ‘Pedagogy-in-Participation’, Oliveira-Formosinho and Barros Araújo aim, with reference to Paolo Freire, at ‘the creation of educational centres as democratic spaces’ cultivating a respectful attitude with regard to all kinds of differences such as ‘age, gender, social class, race and ethnic background, religion, temperament and personality.’ The insights drawn from an analysis of six intervention portfolios highlight several principles that can connect with the philosophy expressed in the former contributions. One of these is the importance of a daily life in the setting promoting participation and collaboration. Further, they reflect an attitude expressing positive expectations and belief in the potentials of children. A basic tenet of the pedagogical approach entails recognition of the importance for the practitioners themselves to be treated with respect and the need for companionship in learning journeys. The strong emphasis on the role of educational materials (which should be tested against the many faces of diversity) links with Musatti and Mayer’s insistence on how materials on offer facilitate and inspire adult interventions. Systematic observation, planning and documentation help to find inspiration for these interventions and to learn from reflection. What the authors succeed in transferring is the message that diversity is always there, inevitably part of any context. Let’s see it, let’s seize the opportunities they offer to make ‘exercises in democracy’ an integral part of daily practice – a message very much in line with the perspectives developed by Vandebroek and Roets (2009).

The implementation of an approach integrating child initiative and adult intervention also forms the starting point of Marjatta Kalliala’s article on the Kangaroo project, a Finnish intervention inspired by concepts and instruments developed within the Leuven Experiential Education Project (Laevers [ed.] 2005a). The aim of the Kangaroo research project was to enhance the well-being of under-3s in Finnish day-care centres. In this experimental intervention study adults were encouraged to take a more sensitive and active role especially during ‘free play.’ Kalliala rightly puts ‘our image of the child’ in the middle of the debate: recognising the potential of children and their agency must go along with an awareness of what adults can add to create meaningful experiences. To map what this means in practice, adults have been observed in six intervention groups and five control groups. The main instrument provided a rating for ‘sensitivity’ and one for ‘activation’ complemented by mini narratives based on observations. The interventions consisted of two half days of training and one feedback and consultation discussion held in every setting.

One may derive high expectations for practitioners when looking at the new paradigm so eloquently articulated by Trevarthen. But looking at the results of Kalliala’s study is a sobering experience. What she discovered is that low motivation in practitioners, combined with a low level of professional qualifications not only limits the

potential impact of interventions but also makes quality unstable (with a decline even in the scores on adult style). Her urgent plea to invest more in professional development of practitioners in Finnish childcare is understandable. At the same time it is obvious that other dimensions have to be taken into consideration. Kalliala points to the leadership in settings and how this can create a dynamism towards improvement of quality. We also can add the need of approaches for professional development that ‘empowers’ practitioners, whatever the level of their qualifications: a real challenge indeed.

We continue the journey, from the leadership in settings to the pedagogical ‘accompaniment’ of settings. Insisting on high quality of provision at the micro level as defined in the former contributions, has huge implications for the profile of the adults working in Early Years. Florence Pirard, long involved in practice of and research about accompaniment of professionals working in day-care centres, describes how we can bring practitioners to this higher level of professional development. Her case is based on the process of development and implementation of the new curriculum for children from 0 to 3 years of age in the French community of Belgium. Her theoretical framework not only includes references from English speaking scientific literature but also French speaking one’s (with Barbier and others). What stands out in the rationale of the approach is that one can’t decree quality and that designing a coherent framework is one thing, but making it work in practice is another. We have to consider from the start ‘the actual conditions and situations in which curricula are implemented.’ ‘Reflexive practice’ being the target, the road to it is shaped by ‘participatory relationships and alliances’ and ‘communities of practice.’

With the plea for a rethinking of the training facilities and the ‘professional accompaniment’ we are very much in line with the key principles highlighted by Trevarthen and Roberts for the children. The main message is the trust we have to have in the capacity of the practitioners to be active partners in the implementation process and the reciprocal relation between advisors or support workers and the practitioners.

Florence Pirard’s contribution is a convincing description of how far a strategy that fully respects this ‘participatory process’ can go, preventing the dangerous standardisation processes generated by positivists approaches by adopting the ‘making meaning’ approach developed by Dahlberg et al. (1999). It shows how the original Framework has been translated into three booklets (*Landmarks for Quality Practices in Childcare*) and how all stakeholders have been engaged in a substantial number of sessions (10-day cycles of reflection) to ‘make and refine meaning’ and to ‘develop and adjust action projects.’ Every fundamental point in the debate is turned into a series of critical questions that guide the action research and reflections during the next period. The clashes in opinions are not avoided but sought as starting points for further analysis. A quality indicator expressed at the level of the children in former contributions here pops up at the meta-level of the team: the approach mirrors ‘engagement’ and the ‘emotional intensity’ that define ‘companionable learning’ as what we seek to install in the coaching of practitioners. The strategy of implementation ‘encourages stakeholders to cross boundaries and engage in the adventure of inter-professional, inter-institutional and interdisciplinary work, which alone can lead to other ways of thinking and acting.’

The contribution from Ferre Laevers, Evelien Buyse, Tine Janssen and Annemieke Willekens, emerging from a broad research programme on experiential pedagogy, takes a distinct position in the collection of articles of this monograph. It focuses on language development in children between 0 and 3 years of age and reports on an empirical study with a substantial number of children. Our role in this editorial remains, however, to

explore which dimensions of the position taken in the opening article by Colwyn Trevarthen can be identified in this, it seems, more ‘technical’ endeavour.

A first element that characterizes the data collection is the choice to collect information through a critical incident technique resulting in ‘thick description’ of all observed interactions with a ‘loading for language.’ This produced a rich basis for further analysis of, on the one part, children’s utterances and on the other, adult interventions. Further, respect for the complexity of language as a competence in children is reflected in the kinds of categories that have been kept after confrontation of the literature with the collected descriptions. Under the topic ‘orientation to language’ the authors tried to capture how much picking up language and producing language is part of the child’s ‘motivation system’ – making him or her keen to take every opportunity to ‘mobilize’ his or her language competency. Another particular aspect is the attention for expressiveness in the children’s utterances. Language is not just about articulated speech and complex syntax. Powerful communication is very much dependent on the exploitation of paralinguistic elements, imaginative wordings and, indeed, the non-verbal support by mimic, gesture and posture. Attention for the levels of ‘well-being’ when a child engages in language mirrors the concern to take the whole child into consideration. The categories used to analyse adult interventions equally express a broad view on the role of adults. With ‘making contact,’ ‘creating a safe space,’ ‘tuning in,’ ‘stimulation of language production’ and ‘adequate response,’ it is obvious how much taking the perspective of the child at the level of emotions, cognition and motivation is seen as an essential ingredient of the adult’s approach. This is how practitioners can foster positive relationships, show respect and belief in children’s capabilities. The purpose of stimulating interventions is to bring children in the position of ‘active partners’ in the shaping of their development.

The critical reflections on the result point to dimensions highlighted in the former contributions. To start it is urged that interventions should lead to a higher proportion of child–child interaction (now less than 1/3 of the total of recorded utterances). Further the range of ‘functions’ addressed in (language) interactions are predominantly reduced to ‘information’ and ‘regulation.’ This should be broadened by supporting the ‘exploration of feelings and emotions’ and the ‘imaginative’ and ‘interactional’ use of language, resulting in lively dialogues and humour.

And what next?

This issue is far from exhausting all the major themes about caring and educating ‘young persons’ as Trevarthen calls them. Working with parents, children with disabilities, and other themes carried out in different countries within these very early years of life, are also promising further experiences and perhaps providing relevant insights for the entire educational field. . .

From the status of the current research, we can picture how we can take this particular field forward. Particular attention should be given to the development of a ‘sociology of education’ with regard to the under-3s which is just emerging. Also anthropological as well as socio-political approaches of infancy, regarding migratory phenomena, deserve further attention (Favaro, Mantovani and Musatti 2008). Further pedagogical issues, including the gender perspective which are also emerging (Karlsson-Lohmander 2010; Coulon and Cresson 2007), could be very enlightening when explored at the earliest age. Research on prevention of violence made against women should also be part of these studies. In view of these themes, play and learning

in under-3s still needs to be investigated. Innovative services such as the recently developed ‘integrated children’s centres’ (Pascal and Bertram 2010) deserve to be researched in order to understand processes and impacts and indeed to find out how this innovative format of service delivery can be optimized. Socialisation of parenting within centres for parents and babies in various cultural contexts is also a most relevant field for research, linked to the larger issue of co-education (Rayna, Rubio, and Scheu 2010). Taking into account the role of the practitioners in creating the most powerful learning environment for children, the development of curricula for the under-3s, particularly in countries where early childhood is divided (0–3/3–6), can be regarded as a cornerstone of any strategy to improve quality. Particular attention should be given to participative curricula (Laevers 2005b) and curricula aiming to bridge diversity. New approaches for initial and in-service training, and other areas of professional learning, including study visits, biographical research, etc., should be high on the agenda, with special attention for informal learning as well as theories on lifelong learning. These scenarios should integrate the professional relation with parents and help practitioners to learn to take the perspective of the youngest children as part of a revisited professionalism (Peeters 2008; Urban 2008; and contributors to this EECER Journal Themed Monograph).

To close this editorial one reflection remains. This is indeed the recognition of a growing consensus about our ‘image of the child.’ On the one hand we realize how much children are capable of. At the same time we see that adults have a role in creating the conditions for children to exercise their agency by giving room for initiative, providing a rich environment and engaging in ‘companionable’ relationships with children. The latter includes standing side by side with the children and developing ourselves as much as children do in our interactions. If some regions are showing ways towards best practices, many examples around us, also show a decline and regression in policy decisions on early care and education, due to worrying economic perspectives as well as a lack of shared knowledge at some crucial levels. Privatisation and fragmentation of provision, introduction of rigid prevention and security discourses (Ben Soussan 2010; Vandenbroeck 2010) are all dangerous developments. But we know enough today about the rich of potential both babies and adults bear in them, as well as about the power of relationships based on interdependence, the ingredients of a stimulating learning environment and about strategies and tools to improve quality. Thus there is no excuse not to meet the children’s rights to education and happiness from birth, everywhere in the world. The agenda proposed under the 10th principle of the *Children in Europe* Policy Paper (2008) can be used as a guide, and particularly the plea for ‘cross-national partnership: learning with other countries,’ as well as networking within countries, multiplying comparative studies, consolidating action-research with practitioners, and other initiatives. This is the way to create knowledge and change.

A last reflection transcends the early years. In fact we must realize the enormous relevance of the insights coming from research on the under-3s for the whole of the educational system and how much potential there is for a bottom-up movement where early years takes the lead. The actual body of expertise entails strong arguments to support all who criticise the way formal practices are increasingly imposed when children grow up and it links in with all the generations of education reformers who ‘urge that children should be respected for their intuitive abilities.’ Indeed, if we begin to realize what young children are capable of and the talents they display at a very early age, how much mustn’t we then question the way older children are

‘treated’ by the actual practice of schooling? Where is all this natural ‘energy’ gone, one may be tempted to ask when looking at older children-in-schools? Colwyn Trevarthen’s position strengthens the voices of current educational reformers like Sir Ken Robinson (2008) and Sugata (2010) who convincingly show us how insane the mainstream of education is functioning with regard to the human capital.

In the end one realises how much the implementation of children’s rights will be dependent on the capacity of the adult to overcome the gap between the common sense views on babies and toddlers and what really goes on while they interact with the world. Lack of imagination can be seen as our major obstacle in changing our view of the child and making education more effective.

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