
How do you view babies?

This is a great place to start for those wishing to develop or transform their pedagogy for working with infants and toddlers. Your image of the infant and toddler influences your relationships with individual children and drives the kinds of engagement that unfold.

If you see babies as vulnerable...

Then you see infants and toddlers as dependent and helpless, requiring you to be on standby to support them and relieve discomfort or struggles. You believe you know what every baby needs, and you control their environment and routines so that you never notice what babies might be trying to tell you. When you focus on the vulnerability of infants and toddlers, you emphasise safety and protection, and are more likely to interrupt and control their learning. Views of infants and toddlers as incompetent and irrational lead to interactions which are controlled or unstable and form negative experiences for infants.

If you see babies as communicators...

You listen to and interpret the wide range of signals, sounds and behaviours that infants use for communicating subtle and not-so-subtle messages. Rather than prioritising verbal language and assuming that babies are not communicating much yet, you appreciate the body movements and gestures that infants and toddlers use as a means of communication and engagement with you. You recognise and support children to become part of a group with its own special rituals, games, jokes and treasured objects, and notice the competencies of children to observe and imitate each other to facilitate communication and interaction with others.

If you see babies as teachers...

When you have an image of infants and toddlers as strong, confident learners, then you allow children to shape relationships, environments and the curriculum. When you see infants and toddlers as agents in their own learning and care, you let the infants and toddlers teach you what they need to grow; you let infants share their interests, and allow them to direct your attention and behaviour. You develop responsive pedagogies rather than rigid assumptions to which you expect conformity and obedience.

If you see babies as partners...

Then you view practice with infants and toddlers as involving a kind of reciprocal dance, where you and the infant/toddler are attuned to one another, and where you notice and respond to each other's cues. This reflects a sense of give and take in the relationship, rather than a sense of the caregiver always conceding to the infant's or toddler's needs or will. You might, for example, occasionally explain to toddlers why you can't meet their needs, at the same time expressing your belief in the child's competence to help themselves or find other solutions.

Partnership is associated with positive interactive experiences. In partnership, both the teacher's and the infant's behaviours and actions contribute to the type of relationship that evolves. Interactions are not pre-determined according to a set of generalised rules and routines, but developed anew, and through relationship, with each individual infant or toddler, making space for infants and toddlers to shape the interactions that develop. A pedagogy of partnership might take inspiration from the metaphor of 'te whatu pokeka', a traditional pliable wrap for babies which takes the shape of the infant as he or she grows.

If you see babies as researchers...

Then you recognise that infants and toddlers are feisty and demanding, persistent, insistent, grasping for opportunities and exploiting their environment as autonomous learners enquiring into their world. You see them as extremely competent and motivated to learn, driven by dispositions such as curiosity and purposefulness. You support children's investigations and therefore develop their dispositions and capacities, and increase children's desires to find out about people, places and things in their world. You talk and write about infants and toddlers as discoverers, inventors and meaning-makers, setting their own goals and achieving them. You slow down in order to actively listen to infants' and toddlers' interests, and to participate in or follow these interests as a way of being in tune with the child. You cue into the child's growing understanding of the world and give them time, space and relational support to allow them to shape their world and enable learning.

When you reflect on your current pedagogical practices, which image of the infant or toddler do you think informs them?

Which image of the infant or toddler do you think would be most empowering for the child?

What practices do you think you might need to develop in order to enact different images of the infant or toddler?