

Quality education and care for infants and toddlers in child care is about providing something extraordinary



It is the right of infants and toddlers to experience wonder and joy in their lives, and to feel cared about in any relationship, whether in or out of the home. When caregiving is a task to be done, rather than an engagement with individual babies in unique contexts, it robs babies of their individuality .

New Zealand research* about quality education and care for infants and toddlers in child care notes that:

there are few mentors of qualified and experienced teachers to provide leadership in this specialised area. Infants and toddlers require empathic and knowledgeable teachers who appreciate the learning and teaching possibilities the image of a caring teacher as smiling and offering warm hugs obscures the complexity and intellectual challenges for teachers.

Teachers need to develop a pedagogy where learning, care and upbringing are seen as indivisible activities and for care to be more than ordinary. (Pedagogy is a process where teachers continually re-examine their values, practices, personal histories, and cultural world-view, as part of their image of themselves)

Teachers are central to the provision of extraordinary rather than just ordinary care, and need to:

- confront deeply entrenched culture of practice in regard to institutionalised care. In institutional care it is not uncommon to see very young children seated in

large groups for ease of management at predetermined mealtimes (waiting restlessly for some attention), rather than seeing a response given to an infant's individual cues. Responsive caring practice is evident when infants are fed on a teacher's lap until they are able to sit in low chairs with their feet on the ground around small tables, rather than being placed in rows of high chairs as in some centres with a view to the convenience of feeding large groups of children at the same time.

- be sensitive to each child's body movement to help them gain a sense of the child through responsive care. Caring encounters are learning experiences for the very young, and it is by being the cared-for that he or she will learn how to be the one-caring
- develop an 'ethic of care' which takes the image of caring beyond efficient completion of tasks to the larger picture of how a society cares for its youngest and understands that caring is not something you are, but rather something you engage in, something you do. Every interaction provides an opportunity to enter into a caring relation.

* http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/australian_journal_of_early_childhood/ajec_index_abstracts.html. Rockel, J. (2009) A pedagogy of care: Moving beyond the margins of managing work and minding babies. AJEC Vol 34 No 3

