



## Book Review

### **Working with babies and children: From birth to three by Jools Page, Ann Clare and Cathy Nutbrowne**

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This is a compilation of writing about practice with children under three. The authors are all based in England and, consequently, the focus is on issues and experiences specific to the English context, but within this, there is still discussion of ideas that are relevant to Aotearoa/New Zealand. The information within the book would be most useful in supporting students to develop theoretical understanding for working with young children, but it is also useful to support experienced practitioners who would like to reflect and think more deeply about their practice in light of the ever growing knowledge about how best to provide optimal care for young children and their families.

The book starts by saying that “babies are amazing” and this is the message conveyed within all the writing, but with more detail to reinforce the wonder, joy, appreciation and importance of engaging with passion when working with this young age group. Discussion within the Introduction includes acknowledging what the current view and general practice stance is: that children have many amazing capabilities from the start of life. This view and knowledge helps reinforce the importance of using language that well represents the startling abilities with which babies learn about their world. The language used here by the authors includes saying how babies are inventors, originators and architects of learning, and astoundingly so in these early stages of life.

Chapter 1 looks at what research tells us to bring us to a place where education is part of the landscape, not just from age five but also for children much younger. What is really useful in this Introduction and the following chapters are the anecdotal case studies to highlight key points and then, from these, a range of questions are provided to provoke our thinking about what our practice is like with young children. An example of this is the question, “what strategies do you use in your setting to help young children recognize a change is about to occur in their routine?” The book sells the importance of reflection, that is, how can a singular practice style be sufficient without it? It is useful to hear how practicing in only a prescriptive way does not give enough recognition to the individuality of each group and child within that group.

The second chapter takes us to a discussion of neuroscience. It seems worth highlighting what is a key point of knowledge from this information, which is that babies have a hierarchy of interest and cue in first on people, and then on objects and materials. We must conclude from this that relationship needs lie at the heart of practice with infants and toddlers. We have the science to back us up on that idea and this is reassuring to know. Chapter 3 further considers what quality is and what it is not, and includes a reading from Aotearoa/New Zealand authors Dallie et al. Policy comes under consideration in this discussion because, without policy that provides clear concern for quality, standards and care for young children can be undermined.



Chapter 4 presents the importance of planning for learning, based on the underpinning knowledge and theory of how to appropriately provide for each developmental age group. The theory covered here includes Piaget, Vygotsky and cognitive learning. This chapter also covers attachment theory and how it is also important that we are aware of any changes in a child's life, such as the birth of a new sibling, so that we can notice and provide for incorporating these experiences, rather than dismissing or not taking up on the meaning of such events from the point of view of the child. Adding richness to practice and fuelling ideas for practice are useful features that this book offers. This chapter evokes and invites us, as adults, to think about play, which struck a chord of interest for me. The great pleasure of being with children allows us to have these playful interactions that are sometimes lost in adult life and thinking. Many other areas are covered here, such as discussion of schemas and providing for heuristic play, where plentiful materials are provided on the basis of knowing the children. This is a well thought out discussion that discusses the view that it is not necessary to rush children to a symbolic form of play. The authors say, "young children need time to watch, explore, create and just 'be'" (p. 102). Lovely ideas for practice were provided here that allow us to think further about how to provide for the play needs of the toddler-aged child, in particular.

Chapter 5 continues to look at learning, but in relation to how the environment is made specific for young children. Within this environment, space is required for comforters and thought about how the outdoor space is utilised and accessed is considered (for instance, can babies and toddlers sleep outdoors?). Discussion is made of circle times to help us wonder about what is most useful for young children. Chapter 6 includes looking at the key person approach and discusses partnership with parents as a way of helping us understand and be specific in planning for every child. Chapter 7 looks into transitions and alerts us to the importance of being aware of the range of feelings that can arise at points of separation and change.

Within Chapter 8, the last chapter, we are taken full circle and consideration is made of the importance of love as a key area of practice. Love, in my mind, joins with the initial thought about "babies are amazing," and to support this, we must know and think about how we are with them. This book will take you some of the way. Do use this book, individually or as a centre, to explore, revisit or add another layer of thought to your practice.

## **References**

Page, J., Clare, A., & Nutbrowne, C. (2013). *Working with babies and children: From birth to three* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.