

# Emotional security and daycare for babies and toddlers in social-political contexts: reflections of early years pioneers since the 1970s

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## ABSTRACT

We discuss oral history interviews with academics who laid the foundation of research and pedagogies in daycare for under three-year-olds in Europe and North and South America since the 1970s. Their work is clearly embedded in the social-political context of their country: the left-wing programmes for disadvantaged families in the U.S.A.; neoliberal policy and daycare because of employment of mothers in the U.S.A.; social-democratic policy and family support in Sweden; and state-controlled institutions for education in socialist-communist East Germany. The interviewees acknowledge the risk of infant daycare for emotional security. Related to values and social context in their country, the interviewees contributed to different interpretations of attachment theory, attachment policies and innovative insights such as multiple attachments, friendship between one-year-olds, group sensitivity, professional love and home-to-centre and vice versa transitions. All are convinced that today we have the knowledge to offer high-quality daycare, but that infant daycare can be a risk when economic demands are too dominant.

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## Introduction

Daycare for babies and toddlers is a hotly debated issue in early childhood education and care (Gillanders & Kantor, 2019; Singer, 1992/2018). Before the 1970s babies and toddlers in institutionalized daycare were rare and tended to come from ‘needy’ families with histories of poverty, abuse and neglect. Since then, the participation rate of under three-year-olds in daycare has greatly increased. Early childhood education and care have become a major policy issue, as shown by international policy reports of OESO, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the European Union (OECD, 2017). Investments in early education are presented as a way of contributing to nations’ economic prosperity, promoting equity and ameliorating disadvantage related to gender, race, ethnicity and social class. But there are huge differences in participation rates of under three-year-olds in daycare between countries and within countries. For instance, relatively high percentages of children aged under three attend daycare in The Netherlands (46%), Sweden (64%) and Denmark (77%) and rather low percentages in Poland (2%), Greece (11%) and Croatia (12%) (Oberhuemer & Schreyer, 2018). Resistance against daycare for the youngest children was and still can be strong.

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The increase of institutionalized daycare evoked the rise of early childhood education and care as a new academic discipline (Singer & Wong, 2018). A new generation of academics and advocates were involved in setting up daycare institutions. In this paper, we discuss their motives, values and theoretical approaches. We draw on data from the Oral History Project on *the Development of early childhood education and care since the 1970s* (Singer & Wong, 2018). In this project, interviewees were selected based on their being leading advocates, professionals and academics who contributed to theories and innovative practices in early childhood education in their country and at an international level. For this paper, we included 14 interviewees who reflected on care and education for under 3-year-olds. They are from Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, UK, U.S.A. and The Netherlands. The project was approved by Macquarie University, Australia. The transcripts and quotes in this paper have been approved by the interviewees. We added one interview done by Bradley and Brisby (1993). The experiences of the interviewees are presented as illustrative examples of academic contributions to, and perspectives on, institutionalized care for under three-year-olds. We do not claim that our interviewees are in any way representative of their country.

In the first part of this paper, we discuss the motivations behind the contributions to institutionalized daycare of four interviewees, and how their work is embedded in the social-political circumstances of the 1960s and 1970s in their country: U.S.A. (two examples), Sweden and former (communist) East Germany. In the second part of the paper, the focus is on contributions made to the pedagogical quality of daycare for young children of several of the interviewees across international contexts. We discuss one particularly sensitive issue: the emotional security of very young children in group settings. Finally, we discuss how interviewees evaluate the institutionalized care for babies and toddlers after decennia of intense involvement and advocacy.

The experiences of the interviewees demonstrate the dynamics between science and social-politics: social-politics influence research questions and theoretical approaches; science influences the focus and content of social-policy. Many ideas that the interviewees had to fight for are now taken for granted. The experiences of these pioneers help us to become aware of underlying values and choices. Are these values and choices still valid for childcare policies in the twenty-first century?

## Reasons for infant daycare in four social-political contexts

Until the 1960s the pedagogy in daycare centres for 'needy' families in most western countries was dominated by a strict medical regime with a focus on hygiene and prevention of infectious diseases (Singer, 1992/2018). Jan Peeters recalls his personal experience as a young father in Belgium of the 1970s.

In the morning when I brought my child, there was a social worker sitting in a sort of cage at the entrance hall. You had to undress your child and put it in a kind of bathrobe. Then she phoned to the childcare worker on the first floor to pick up my child. As a parent I have never seen the room where my child was playing and where she spent the day! My child cried every day, it was a terrible experience.

All the interviewees were passionate to change this medical orientation into a pedagogical approach and collaborative relations between professionals and families.

## Project head start for low-income families and left-wing ideology in U.S.A.

In the 1960s a new argument for daycare emerged in the context of the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement to address inequality and improve educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged families (Lamb, Sternberg, & Ketterlinus, 1992). In 1958 the U.S. was shocked because the Soviets launched the first satellite around the Earth: they were ahead in the Space War! In the face of this evidence of Soviet superiority, interest in early cognitive development to optimize the US intellectual power increased. By the mid-1960s, the Civil Rights Movement led to racial riots breaking out in several American cities: This proved was another motive for the federal government to be interested in early education. In 1965 President Johnson tried to pacify the riots by launching *The War on Poverty*. He committed himself to breaking *the cycle of poverty*. He launched Project Head Start,

a comprehensive programme that included health care, preschool and parent education, nutrition, and social and psychological support. Head Start was based on the theories of left-wing social scientists that early experiences have a life-long impact on children's development and that an enriched environment can 'bend the twig' in the right direction.

Betty Caldwell was one of these left-wing scientists (Bradley & Brisby, 1993). Before Head Start, she found in her studies that poor children developed normally until they were about 18 months old, and then their IQ declined. Caldwell related the decline to a lack of mother-child interaction. Caldwell:

I looked at the family situations and they were absolute chaos. I found myself thinking – because I was in love with John Bowlby in that period and very impressed with his stuff on maternal deprivation. (Bradley & Brisby, 1993, p. 10)

Caldwell wanted to set up an experiment to show that IQ of infants can be raised or reduced by nurture. For methodological reasons, she opted for an experiment in a professional child centre; at that setting the researchers could control the input to the children, which was necessary to comply with scientific standards to compare experiment and control group in a longitudinal study. But in the early 1960s infant daycare was forbidden in New York State and a waiver was required to do the pioneering work at the Children's Centre in Syracuse. Caldwell:

The notion of separating infants from their mothers was so unpopular at that time (...). For five years [of the experiment] I was a young turk villain, literally vilified by a lot of well-meaning people who still see me as advocating daycare, wanting to get all children in daycare; they totally have misunderstood the theme. (Bradley & Brisby, 1993, p. 11)

In fact, Caldwell was in that period 'in love with John Bowlby' and 'very impressed with his stuff on maternal deprivation' (Bradley & Brisby, 1993, p. 10). Bowlby's argument was that the best learning environment for a young child is his/her own home with his/her own mother. But Caldwell and her close colleague Alice Sterling Honig argued that many mothers are not able to provide what their children need. During a presentation for psychiatrists about the Children's Center Honig addressed the misunderstandings of the living conditions of mothers in sharp terms:

Sir, most of these mothers are single moms and they are very young; many of them have dropped out of high school and they have their own emotional growing up to do. Some of the teachers at that Centre have a Master's degree in child development. Think about it!

The goal of Head Start was to relieve overburdened mothers so that they could fulfil their children's needs. But in Head Start there was some ambivalence towards parents of disadvantaged, black and migrant families (Singer, 1992/2018). The line between understanding the shortcomings of parents and blaming the parent can be thin. Not all parents were motivated to meet the expectations of Head Start professionals and the dropout from the programme was sometimes high (Madden, O'Hara, & Levenstein, 1984). Moreover, evaluations showed that local Head Start interventions did not meet the high expectations of positive effects on children's IQ and cognitive development (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983).

Urie Bronfenbrenner, one of the founders of Head Start, wrote a theoretical underpinning: *The ecological approach of human development* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He took a firm stand in the defence of parents, arguing that society needs to provide resources for parents in the neighbourhood where the children grow up. In 2019, Head Start remains a popular provision for low-income families in the U.S.A. It has inspired many similar intervention projects in Western countries. As long as there are disadvantaged families that cannot meet young children's needs, there will be child centres to support parents (David, Gouch, & Powell, 2016).

### **Working mothers and neoliberal ideology in the U.S.A.**

Since the 1960s a growing number of mothers of young children entered the workforce, for a diversity of reasons (Lamb & Sternberg, 1992). In the face of poverty, and often following divorce, mothers

needed to work outside the home; further, higher levels of education for women, reduction of the birth rate, and demands for equal opportunities, underscored that mothers wanted to develop their professional talents and financial independence. Moreover, there were macro-economic interests in employing women, because of shortages in the labour market. Head Start pioneers like Caldwell and Honig met hostility towards infant daycare. But in the U.S.A. even more violent debates were evoked by daycare for working mothers both within academia and in the media, largely fuelled by the attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth.

In 1978 Ainsworth *cs.* had published 'Patterns of attachment' that introduced a procedure to measure the quality of attachment relations of infants with caregivers, the so-called Strange Situation Procedure – based on infant behaviour. That procedure opened up quantitative longitudinal studies to compare the quality of attachment in home-reared and daycare children. As a young developmental psychologist, Carollee Howes was in the audience when one of Ainsworth's students gave a paper on how childcare harmed children's attachment relationships. Howes:

You don't usually think of child development meetings as political, but that one was. I mean it was really vibrant and people were very upset. But I was listening and we got this notion that maternal attachment and childcare are related.

At that time Howes was interested in peer relationships of very young children in daycare centres. She decided to learn more about attachment and the adults' role in peer relationships. Howes:

I went back and re-read attachment theory and research. With my students we discussed: how many attachments and with who can you form an attachment? Out of that came the notion that attachment could also be formed to childcare teachers.

Howes was re-working attachment theory, or as she called it: *pushing attachment theory from the inside*. She studied attachment relations of young children with caregivers and peers (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). She showed that daycare can enrich young children's lives:

I am quite convinced that little babies can form friendship relationships. I think that those relationships are nurtured by adults who form a strong, safe, secure base and then turn those little children around towards their peers.

Howes started a longitudinal study of the effects of daycare on subsequent social adjustment (Howes, 1990). She remembers that it was hard for 'attachment folks' to accept that the relations of children with their caregivers can be real attachment relationships. Papers of the attachment theorist Jay Belsky were the start of an outbreak of anger and mistrust. He presented evidence of less secure attachments when extensive nonmaternal daycare had been initiated in the first year after birth (Belsky, 1988). Belsky's interpretation of his data was criticized. The debate degenerated into personal suspicions:

Jay Belsky accused us, Cathy McCartney, Deborah Phillips and myself. All of us were young, all of us had done childcare research for our dissertations. All of us were feminists. And Jay Belsky accused us basically – in the Wall Street Journal – of shaping our data to argue that childcare is good for babies. Because we were feminists!

In the late 1980s, there were many papers on the interpretation of data on the impact of infant daycare in academic journals (Singer, 1993). What about the impact of the quality of daycare centres and cultural differences? Were toddlers, who had started early in daycare, more aggressive or more assertive? (Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988). Nowadays such disputes among academics have waned and points of view are more nuanced. But at the level of politics, opinions are hardly changed in the U.S.A. Neoliberal politics in the States are not in favour of state support of parents who combine work and childcare. In 2016 Howes remained deeply disappointed in early childcare politics.

I mean childcare is despicably bad. When I'm feeling really sad. I think I gave a lot of my life to both the political stuff and the research stuff to making this work, and it's horrible for children.

The most urgent issue, according to Howes, is finding qualified caregivers.

Finding adults who can do the work. It's underpaid work, the turnover is very high. Parents need a good place for their children. Where they can feel that their children are safe, they're nurtured, they're learning and that's enough.

### ***Parental leave and daycare and social-democrat policy in Sweden***

In Sweden, the number of employed mothers began to rise from the 1950s. The post-war economic recovery was early because Sweden was not actively involved in the Second World War and had limited war damage. Concurrent forces of a strong national economy, shortage of labour, women's liberation movement and social-democrat welfare state policy resulted in an expansion of public childcare (Karila, 2012). In the 1960s the first steps were made to transform the traditional dual system of daycare for 'the needy' and kindergartens for 4- and 5-year-olds into full-time preschools for 1- to 6-year-olds. There was a strong willingness to invest in 'a good childhood', to listen to the 'child's perspective', to support equity among mothers and fathers, and assist 'good parenting'. Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, the first Swedish professor in early childhood education, recalls the 'developmental pedagogy' that was designed for the new preschools:

We related new theories to early childhood education of Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson. It was very much about communication and interaction and having dialogues with children.

In Sweden, there were no violent discussions about baby daycare among academics and in the media as occurred in the U.S.A. in the 1980s. The longitudinal study of Andersson (1992) showed the opposite of what Belsky, in the U.S.A., expected: children who had participated in preschool prior to their first birthday developed most favourably. Maybe even more importantly, since 1974 there have been regulations for paid parental leave, so mother and father can alternately stay home for baby care. Pramling Samuelsson:

We don't have babies in preschool in Sweden. We have parental leave for 480 days, so very few children begin before they are 1 or 1,5 years old.

Pramling Samuelsson stresses that the Swedish system is not perfect, especially not for the youngest children:

Last weekend while I was looking after my 2-year-old grandson, I think he opened and closed the door 300 times; we went up and down the stairs a hundred times. Can you do that in a preschool or will the teacher say 'No that's dangerous you cannot do that'? What do these very young children need?

Swedish researchers developed research methods to come close to children and to understand the children's perspective (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010). They used ethnographic and phenomenological methods to describe the daily lives of children and developed methods for child interviews. Videos were analysed to understand playing and learning and topics like early mathematics, language, literacy and arts. The dominant research on preschools in the Nordic countries differs from the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Gillanders & Kantor, 2019). Pramling Samuelsson:

Research from Britain and the United States is about developmental psychology, large-scale studies to measure the positive or negative impact on children. In the Nordic countries we have much more small-scale, qualitative studies to understand the quality of daily life of children in preschool.

The ethnographic research is well suited to describe and analyse new pedagogical phenomena like group care for very young children.

### ***Daycare and the socialist-communist policy in former East Germany***

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was a satellite state of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and existed from 1949–1990. In the GDR an extensive public childcare system was established. The

policy was based on the principle of equality between men and women. Full-time care and education for children in nurseries were encouraged and enabled mothers to participate fully in employment and society. Strong commitments were made to State rather than family responsibility for the care, education and welfare of children (Weigl & Weber, 1991). Over the years, the education programme for children and the professional training of caregivers were developed, monitored and improved by research. Until the 1970s the work in nurseries was mainly focused on medical care and hygiene. Then more attention was paid to pedagogy and developmental psychology; research was set up on language acquisition, creative skills, sensory and movement education and the organisation of daily life.

Lieselotte Ahnert became the first psychologist in the GDR attached to an organisation that supervised 50 centres in Berlin. Later she became a researcher at the Institute on Mental Health in Childhood and Adolescence (IHKJ), responsible for monitoring the quality of nurseries. In 1986 the government introduced a longer, paid parental leave from three months to one year to decrease the rate of infectious diseases in the under one-year-olds and, related to that, the unreliability of their mothers at work. Then an unexpected problem arose. Ahnert:

The rate of diseases in the youngest children became worse. Thus, the IHKJ received the order from the ministry to explore the causes. The IHKJ staff was convinced that they had done everything to keep the one-year olds healthy in the childcare centers. So the problem might be psychosomatic for which only psychology could help. For that reason, they hired me.

From the beginning, Ahnert was quite certain that her research design had to include not only the childcare setting, but also the family setting. A colleague brought for her, from a conference in Amsterdam, Ainsworth's 'Patterns of attachment', the classic book for attachment research that, as we saw earlier, caused the violent political discussions at the conference that Howes attended in the U.S.A. Ahnert:

With high excitement, I read this book and based my research design on the background of the children's attachment, which they brought from home and developed in the child care setting. In 1988, we started with the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) before and after five months in the child care setting to see if the mother-child attachment had changed.

In East Germany, attachment theory was seen as ideologically contaminated and meant to prevent mothers from emancipation. Consequently, Ahnert tells that they avoided speaking about attachment theory:

Instead, we always spoke about how children receive strangers and how they integrate the interactions with them in their experience. This was the only way to work with the SSP thereby not referring to attachment theory.

Their research showed that the childcare centres urgently needed good adaptation programmes where the start of daily separation from home to centre should be smoothed.

After the reunification of East and West Germany Ahnert continued to study attachment and stress related to daycare (Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, & Barthel, 2004). Of special interest is her cooperation with Michael Lamb, an American researcher, and their studies of the impact of the reunification of East and West Germany. East German childcare providers were urged to foster individual care provider-child relationships rather than peer relationships. Contrary to the Western expectation, they found that the care providers' sensitivity to individual infants did not predict attachment security; in group settings the 'group sensitivity' of the caregivers was related to the emotional security of children (Ahnert & Lamb, 2000; Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006). This indicated that in home and group settings different pedagogical strategies have to be used to foster emotional security. Ahnert and colleagues show that we have to continue being cautious for babies and stress in group settings, especially in the adjustment period of the child at daycare (Ahnert et al., 2004).

## Pedagogical strategies to reduce the risks of institutionalized care

In the early 1960s when Caldwell started her research in the Children's Centre, there was little pedagogical knowledge of how babies' IQ could be raised. Honig explains:

There were no textbooks to guide one about curricula for infants or how to train staff. We had to work on whatever we knew from Piaget's work on sensory motor development and on Erikson's socioemotional stages, starting with 'trust versus mistrust'.

Moreover, people disbelieved that caregivers needed training and knowledge. Honig:

The first publisher whom I approached with our manuscript book on training infant/toddler caregivers, said to me: 'What would we sell - 300 copies? What do you need to know except to change a diaper and give a bottle?' (Honig & Lally, 1981)

New pedagogical models were designed. We will discuss four examples of pedagogical practices developed to support emotional security in under three-year-olds: the key caregiver approach in the UK; professionalization of interaction skills in the Netherlands; the network approach in Brazil; and the parent-professional cooperation in Italy and the UK.

### *The key person approach and professional love in England*

The first report of the English government on the youngest children in daycare, emphasizes the importance of close, warm, reciprocal loving relationships for babies and toddlers (Department for Education and Skills, 2002). This principle is operationalized through the requirement that every child under five in early years institutions is assigned a key person (Elfer, Goldschmied, & Selleck, 2012). Mainly one member of staff should be responsible for a small group of children over an extensive period. Time and continuity are needed to form close attachments and for the caregiver to become special for the children, help them throughout the day, think about them and get to know them (Page & Elfer, 2013). In this respect Page (2011) introduced the concept of 'professional love'.

Peter Elfer is one of the academics involved in the design and implementation of the key-person approach. Elfer has a background in social work and developed a deep interest in psychoanalytic theories on emotional relationships in the early years. Contrary to the needs of children, he signalled a culture of distance and detachment in early years settings. Elfer:

The whole system is so tight for economic reasons. The parent rushes in by half past six p.m., the practitioners are anxious to go, maybe that the child's key person went off duty at 5 pm

Some well funded and well-led settings are excellent in ensuring sensitive and attuned attention to children, both individually and in groups. However, generally, early years settings operate as financial enterprises: keen to keep costs down. Managers move staff between rooms to cover for sickness. Flexible working is often prioritized over individualized interactions with children. Earlier studies in social-service nurseries in the UK showed psychic defences of the staff against becoming too attached to children (Elfer et al., 2012). The staff did not want to undermine the baby's relationship with their own mother, and they feared the painful feelings of loss when the child left. Elfer (2014) observed similar defences in settings for children of working parents (Elfer, 2014). Elfer:

The experience of pain from getting very closely attached and then having to say goodbye would be quite hard to manage. Again and again and again, year after year after year.

He observed the 'social defence culture'. For instance, only quick cuddles were allowed and children sitting on educators' laps were seen as inappropriate for fear that the child might become too reliant on a particular adult. Elfer:

Babies do have the capacity to stir up very deep feelings and the workforce tends to be quite young, female. Isn't that a lot to ask from very young women? To bear that emotional intensity?

According to Elfer the emotional complexity of caregiving is undervalued:

If nobody is attending to what that member of staff is feeling, how can that member of staff really think about the children? It is exploitative, it is not fair to do that to the staff, they get exhausted, they cannot do a good job for the children. Every staff member should have time for reflection and for supervision.

Elfer developed a model for work discussions to encourage nursery practitioners to talk about their individual relationships with children and families, including the painful as well as pleasurable feelings these interactions evoke. These work discussions have shown to be effective on the relationships of practitioners with children and parents (Elfer, Greenfield, Robson, Wilson, & Zachariou, 2018). To support the staff to give 'professional love' three things need to be addressed according to Elfer: 'Qualifications, pay conditions and attention to the emotional labour'.

### ***Pikler and professional interaction skills in the Netherlands***

In the Netherlands the focus is not on loving relations between professional caregivers and children. Most mothers work part-time and most children enter into daycare for one, two or three days a week. Centres often have two shifts because of the long opening hours to meet the needs of working parents (Lloyd & Penn, 2010). In one week a child might meet 37 different children and 6 caregivers in the daycare group (Van Hoogdalem, Singer, Wijngaards, & Heesbeen, 2012). Elly Singer who studied the social life of young children in Dutch centres, tells about the perspective of Dutch parents:

I think that most parents are happy with part-time daycare and take unstable groups for granted. Most of the week the child is at home with parents or grandparents.

In the Dutch quality system the emphasis is on the interaction skills of caregivers, especially the caregiver's sensitivity and respect for the autonomy of the child (Fukkink, 2017). Many trainings in interactions skills are offered. With regard to the youngest children Emmi Pikler training is popular.

Emmi Pikler was a paediatrician who set up a children's home after the Second World War (known as Loczy) in Budapest (Czimmek, 2015). Just as Goldschmied and Elfer in the UK, Pikler acknowledged the risks of institutionalized care: 'The rush and hurry in nursing prevent the development of a good relationship between the child and the caregiver' (Pikler & Tardos, 2001, p. 67). According to Pikler caregivers tend to give unnecessary support and to make children passive and dependent on their help. From this perspective, caregivers should not try to speed up motor development by teaching skills which, under suitable conditions, will evolve through the child's own independent activity. Interference and overstimulation impede the caregiver-child relationship and children's self-confidence. Innovative of Pikler's approach is her emphases on the importance of free movement of the infant and professional knowledge of motor development.

We interviewed Anna Tardos, the daughter of Emmi Pikler. Tardos was researcher and director of the Emmi Pikler Institute in Budapest. Anna Tardos:

We studied the development of manipulation and movement of infants under our educational conditions without the teachings by the caregiver. These studies clearly showed the importance of free play.

Pikler stresses that the mother-child relationship and the professional-child relationship are different (Vincze, 2002). The mother-child relationship is based on strong emotional attachment, whereas, according to Tardos:

The professional finds joy and pleasure in observing and supporting all the little steps of the child in his or her development.

Of course, Pikler also acknowledged that the caregiver-child relationship is foundational. But special for the Dutch Pikler training is that caregivers learn to observe the steps in motor development, to follow the lead of the baby, to organize free play and noninterference; and to never rush



up to an infant. Caregivers learn to give full attention during caring activities. It is about professional respect for the child and pleasure in the child's learning.

### ***Network approach of caregivers, children and parents in Brazil***

A pedagogical model that focuses on the dynamics in group settings is developed by Clotilde Rossetti Ferreira and colleagues in Brazil. In 1964 Rossetti Ferreira and her family had to move to London because of the political situation after the Military Coup in Brazil. She studied at Tavistock Clinic, had classes with Bowlby and worked on projects on development of attachment and social behaviours. In the late 1970s, she became the first professor in Brazil to study early child development and education. Just as Elfer in the UK and Pikler in Hungary, Rossetti Ferreira observed that caregivers in nurseries and daycare centres were overly focused on control and care. When she got involved in projects to enhance pedagogical quality, she decided to train caregivers in sensitive care of babies. Clotilde Rossetti-Ferreira:

To train caregivers to interact with the babies as a mom would do at home: talk to them, caress them. Always interacting with them, as you are changing clothes, you say 'What a beautiful red shoes do you have'.

But the implementation of 'mother substitute model' did not work. That came as a shock. Rossetti-Ferreira presented herself as model for sensitive care:

I said to the caregiver, let me substitute you when the mothers come to pick up their child. I did with the children as I taught my students. Then I found out that I only had changed nappies of two children, while the assistant caregiver had changed 10 children! Because I had done only two, the mothers were becoming desperate to pick up their children.

Rossetti-Ferreira concluded that she had completely misunderstood the situation. These mothers worked in the sugar-cane fields and were always in a hurry. They stopped working at four o'clock, picked up one child at daycare, another child from school, then they had to prepare dinner, do some washing; they were always in a hurry. Rossetti-Ferreira:

It was a different situation and you cannot work with the model of mother substitute care. A mother with twins is already in big stress, a mother with triplets is even more stressed, and in a daycare centre you have to care for a minimum of five children. You cannot work with the same model, you have to make another model.

Consequently, they developed a new theoretical approach to analyse 'Networks of meanings' to capture the complexities of the lives of children, parents and caregivers (Rossetti-Ferreira, Amorim, & Silva, 2007).

In group settings the focus cannot be only on the caregiver-child interactions. They found that the most available partners for young children are other children. But how to support secure and stimulating peer relationships? Rossetti-Ferreira and colleagues observed that very young children, if left in a large open space, usually stay around the caregiver. They conducted various experiments to study the impact of the physical structure of the environment on children's emotional security, autonomy and interactions (Rossetti-Ferreira, Oliveira, de Carvalho, & de Souza, 2010):

We showed that very young children do not stay in closed areas, when they cannot keep an eye with their adult of reference, probably for emotional security reasons. We observed more peer interactions in semi-structured areas and less in open spaces and closed areas.

These findings on emotional security and peers in group settings were confirmed by the research of other interviewees (Ahnert et al., 2006; Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Singer, Nederend, Penninx, Tajik, & Boom, 2014).

### ***Collaboration of parents and professionals and community life***

Early in this paper, we mentioned Jan Peeters who as a young father was confronted with the authoritarian attitude towards parents in daycare for 'the needy' in the 1970s. During his career his aim was

to change that rejective attitude into democratic respectful collaboration of all participants (Peeters, 1993). Not only for the parents, but also for the emotional security of the children and work satisfaction of the caregivers. That same democratic attitude was expressed by other interviewees as Honig in the U.S.A., Whalley (2007) in the UK and Van Oudenhoven (Van Oudenhoven & Wazir, 2006) in projects in developing countries. We will take Susanna Mantovani at the University of Milan-Bicocca, North Italy as an illustrative example of this contribution to pedagogy.

Since the 1970s Mantovani was active in social-political movements for daycare facilities for children of employed mothers. But at that time the Italian crèches had, just as in Belgium, a cold and medical approach of the children. Susanna Mantovani:

We wanted to do daycare in a good way, without harming children. Then we came across Bowlby and Ainsworth's Strange Situation. That made me think of the transition from home to crèche as a natural 'Strange Situation'. We wanted to help children to familiarize with the crèche and to feel secure. That resulted in practices that we called 'inserimiento'.

L'insertimientto was described as a 'once-in-a-lifetime' event, crucial to establish a trusting and collaborative relationship between parents and caregivers. Parents have to be supported in the emotionally loaded process of allowing the child to gain more autonomy in a new and non-family setting (New, Mallory, & Mantovani, 2000).

Mantovani's work is embedded in the cultural-political environment of North Italy. After World War 2 investment in early education was part of socialist and communist movements to make a better world. In that context, Malaguzzi developed the now famous 'Reggio Emilia' pedagogical philosophy in cooperation with parents, pedagogues and the broader community (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). In 1980 there were signals that the pedagogy for the youngest children lagged far behind the quality of education of the older children (Musatti & Picchio, 2010). Malaguzzi took the initiative to establish a network of practitioners, academics and politicians to increase knowledge and to share ideas about how to work with infants. Malaguzzi was a great networker, says Mantovani: 'We called him Napoleon'. This network still functions and successfully organizes regular meetings to discuss the quality of early childhood education at the community level.

Mantovani stresses that we regularly have to rethink our pedagogy to adapt to the new needs of parents and the community. During the years 'l'insertimientto' has completely changed. Baby daycare has become more familiar, and parents come from different cultural backgrounds with different ideas about parenting and child caring. Mantovani:

I remember a mother from Ghana who laughed, when the caregiver asked her to stay with her child today and tomorrow. She trusted another woman to take her child.

## Discussion

Listening to the interviewees makes us aware of how deep their work – and probably recent pedagogical contributions as well – is embedded within the social-political context. Their work – research questions, theories, pedagogical practice – reflects the needs, values and social-political struggles of their time. In the context of the Cold War and Project Head Start in the U.S.A. Caldwell and Honig received federal funding to design infant child centres to increase the school success of children from disadvantaged families; the focus was on positive effects on cognitive development. Also in the U.S.A., Howes had to defend maternal work-related infant childcare; in that context, researchers were focused on the supposed negative effects of daycare on infants' social-emotional development. Howes was even accused of shaping data to argue that childcare is good for babies for feminist reasons. Their East German colleague Ahnert worked within the state-provided communist child care system, where attachment theory was censured as an ideological contaminated Western theory. Nevertheless, she managed to put attachment issues and individual needs of babies on the pedagogical agenda. In social-democratic Sweden, the government invested in early education and care to free mothers for employment outside the home. In Sweden Pramling Samuelsson easily

attracted funding to set up small-scale ethnographic studies to contribute to high-quality early education for all children. Daycare for babies was not an issue because of parental leave during the first year after birth.

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory had a huge influence on the academic and social-political debates on infant childcare. But it is fascinating to observe the different ways the interviewees evaluated, interpreted and expanded on that theory; diverse pedagogical practices were underpinned by – what was seen by our interviewees as – attachment needs in young children. Elfer in the UK and Ahnert in Germany developed their contributions in line with attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth to support secure attachment caregiver–child relationships. They try to diminish stress and affective turmoil in dyadic relationships. In the Netherlands attachment theory is widely accepted. But interestingly, the focus is not on building up longer lasting affective relationships between caregivers with individual children, but on professional training in sensitive interaction skills. Although 'sensitive responsivity' is a basic concept of the attachment theory, Pikler's theories are to operationalize this concept in professional trainings.

Howes, Rossetti-Ferreira and Singer testify of their struggle with attachment theory. They showed that under three-year-olds can develop multiple attachments and that peers can offer friendship and stimulation. Rossetti-Ferreira found out that the 'mother-model, the focus on the caregiver–child relationship', did not work in the context of Brazil daycare centres. She developed the 'Network theory'.

The interviewees contributed to change the earlier infant daycare system for the 'needy' into services adapted the needs of their time. They designed procedures to build up collaborative relationships with parents when the baby commences in daycare (Ahnert, Mantovani). They sympathize with the parents in disadvantaged areas (Caldwell, Honig, Peeters, Rossetti-Ferreira, Mantovani, Whalley, Van Oudenhoven). Parents have to feel welcome, so the child can feel welcome and secure at the centre.

None of the interviewees argues for institutionalized daycare for all under three-year-olds. They say that parents should have a choice to stay at home or to use daycare. We asked them what issues on quality infant care have to be addressed in the near future. They conclude that institutionalized daycare is not without risks and document the problems that have to be addressed. The risks of routinized care and lack of personal involvement of staff with every individual baby; too much stress in young children; and difficulties in coping with cultural differences. They are well aware that pedagogical practices interact with the social-political conditions. Then big concerns arise. Economic interests often go first (Lloyd & Penn, 2010). Parents need dual income to pay the mortgage on their house, they make long hours because of travelling to work, full-time availability by the internet and heavy workloads. Probably the interviewees agree with Peter Elfer when he says:

I feel that's a really good thing for both men and women to contribute to the labour market, to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise. We have to develop the nursery provision to match that. But in the main I don't think that the market allows enough funding to provide the support that practitioners need to do their work.

The interviewees testify that caregiving for babies and toddlers is complex and demands a high level of training, just as teaching in primary schools. Caregivers have to combine personal relationships with the child with the responsibility for a group; to foster togetherness and friendship among peers; to cope with emotions that can be deep and disturbing towards children and parents. Moreover, they work in teams and reflect on their pedagogical policy. The work of caregivers is often undervalued: the status is low, the wages are too low (Oberhuemer & Schreyer, 2018). Qualified professionals are hard to find. The interviewees often expressed big concerns about the carelessness of society for young children. Daycare for under three-year-olds can be a risk when economic demands become too dominant and parents and caregivers are rushed and have lack of time.

The generation of our interviewees started full of idealism in the 1970s (Singer & Wong, 2018). They gave examples of high-quality daycare and offered proof that Institutionalized care can be an enrichment of the child and family. But the fight for recognition of the need and value of

professional care for young children is not over. The interviewees expressed their trust in the young people they have trained and educated. Tricia David:

Although it seems terrible we still haven't achieved all the goals we set ourselves. When I meet all the young people who have ideas and want to campaign, advocate, write about this kind of thing, I think 'Good, that's wonderful and that's how it should be – that's terrific.' And that's the best thing really for me now.

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## Statements of ethics

Ethics approval for the project has been granted by Charles Sturt University, Australia. The interviewees have approved the transcript of their interview, and approved the quotes in the context of this paper.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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