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## The Infant, Early Childhood Development and Child Rights: Re-awakening Opportunities for Social Pedagogy

### Niemowlę, wczesny rozwój i prawa dziecka: renesans zainteresowań pedagogiki społecznej

**STRESZCZENIE:** Podstawowym celem artykułu jest zwiększenie świadomości na temat pedagogiki niemowlęctwa, ze względu na znaczący deficyt tego zagadnienia w dyskursie pedagogiki społecznej w Polsce. Ponadto ma on wzbudzić zainteresowanie badaniami w tym niezwykle obszernym, zwiększając świadomość praw niemowląt w kontekście rozwoju praw dziecka. Korzystając z przeglądu badań uzyskanych w wyniku analizy dokumentów w artykule przedstawiono obraz wczesnej komunikacji prenatalnej i w pierwszych trzech miesiącach życia jako wielowymiarowego procesu pedagogicznego, otwartego na wpływy edukacyjne. W pracy rozważa się badania, które wskazują, że przywiązanie powstałe w bardzo wczesnym dzieciństwie jest kamieniem węgielnym przyszłych relacji społecznych, poziomu zaufania do innych i poczucia bezpieczeństwa. Podsumowując, artykuł łączy tematykę wczesnego dzieciństwa z podejściem społeczno-pedagogicznym charakterystycznym dla pedagogiki społecznej.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Niemowlęctwo, wczesne lata, komunikacja niemowląt, prawa dziecka, prawa niemowląt, rozwój w dzieciństwie, wsparcie rodziców.

**ABSTRACT:** The overall aim of this paper is to increase awareness of early infancy pedagogy, due to the paucity of this topic in social pedagogy discourse in Poland. The paper also aims to instigate interest in further research of this remarkable subject area to raise awareness of infant rights in the context of the development of children's rights. Using a research review obtained through desk analysis, the paper draws a picture of early infant communication pre-birth and during the first 3 months of life, as a multidimensional pedagogical process open to pedagogical influence. The paper looks into studies that indicate how attachment formed in early infancy is a cornerstone of future social relationships, trust in others and of feeling safe. Overall the paper links the early infancy theme with the socio-pedagogical approach of social pedagogy.

**KEYWORDS:** Infancy, early years, infant communication, children rights, infant rights, early childhood development, parental support.

## Introduction

*It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.*

Frederick Douglas (1855)

Helena Radlińska, a founder of social pedagogy in Poland, urged that for the practice of social pedagogy, one should derive knowledge directly from biological and medical science to find underlying causes of existing social phenomena (Przeclawska 1996). This recommendation is very useful when looking into issues of early childhood communication, which are considered primarily to be either psychological or medical. However, there is also a pedagogical dimension that is not yet sufficiently developed within Polish pedagogical research. The pedagogical dimension may be found in the education of future parents about parental skills and the pedagogical influence of parents' interaction with a newborn, as experiences during early infancy have an underestimated effect on the formation and wellbeing of a child. Moreover, any direct contact between the newborn and the parent is a form of "pedagogical momentum", where both the parent and the infant learn about each other. Tracy Hogg and Melinda Blau (2002) call it a "teaching moment", but "it should be seen more as a learning moment for both parties, unless the process is supervised and parents are instructed by a professional. Trevarthen (1980) labelled early mother-infant communication as 'inter-subjectivity', where both parties learn from each other during their interactions, experiencing a truly pedagogical momentum. Awareness may be viewed as a significant part of parental skills, therefore increasing parental knowledge about the importance of early communication and interaction is a pedagogical act. Leading parents to gain a greater understanding of infant communication is also pedagogical. Moreover, raising parental and professional consciousness of infant rights as an element of children rights, clearly indicates a pedagogical influence. All the above factors show that early infancy should be a legitimate area of interest for pedagogy in Poland, despite the fact that early infancy pedagogy is not yet sufficiently explored<sup>1</sup>. This is in contrast to the US, Canada, Austral-

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<sup>1</sup> It is not to say that there is a complete absence of literature on early childhood bonds and their impact on children's development in Poland, but pedagogical reflections are rare, e.g.

ia, New Zealand, Italy and the UK, which serve as examples of good practice in the area of early years, or even 'early months' pedagogy.

### **The initial bond, a predictive factor of future development and social functioning**

Classical studies by J. Bowlby (1959, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988) and M. Ainsworth (1970, 1978) focused on a secure, trusting and nurturing relationship between a mother and her baby, where the mother should provide a stable, safe base for exploration and learning. They both looked at indicators of 'disturbed' attachment to predict children's future issues and problems. There is much evidence of the importance of forming an early attachment between children and their mothers for healthy development, based on positive emotional development (Cassidy & Berlin 1994; Waters & Cummings 2000; Lewis et al. 2000; Maccoby 1980; Main & Solomon 1990). There is even evidence that shows the significance of positive early attachment on future peer relationships (Park & Waters 1989; Schneider et al. 2001) and on antisocial behaviour (Fagot & Kavanagh 1990). *Attachment behaviours displayed by an infant, according to Maccoby* (1980) cover a range of activities including crying, seeking closeness for consolation, displaying separation stress, showing joy when reunited and an all-purpose baby's orientation towards the carer. Attachment behaviours are more difficult to observe in adults, apart from caring attitudes, as many emotions (fear, stress, need of closeness) are internalized and not overtly displayed. However, multiple studies show a connection between attachment patterns in adulthood and the bond with parents in early infancy (c.f. Fraley & Waller 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver 2007). Babies age 0-3 are able to control the way in which they communicate, as demonstrated by a study of the reactions of American, Canadian and Chinese infants towards inanimate dolls with still facial expressions or when handled by mothers wearing a mask, where infants regardless of their ethnicity withdrew response if caregivers didn't interact and lacked in facial expressions (Kisilevsky et al. 1988; Legerstee & Markova 2007; Yazbek & D'Entremont 2006). Moreover, the same facial expressions have different effect on infants of different ages, stimulating a different reaction, coherent with the developmental age at 2, 4 or 6 months (Rochat et al. 2002). Looking at earlier evidence of two way

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Magdalena Czub, *The significance of social bonds for emotional development of a child* („Znaczenie więzi społecznych dla rozwoju emocjonalnego dziecka”), „Forum Oświatowe” 2003, 2(29) 31-49.

communication, the initial and most primal mother-infant contact is based on their sense of smell, as a study of breast-fed babies suggest, whilst they easily recognize their mother's individual smell and majority of researched mothers could also distinguish the smell of their babies clothes (c.f. Bullowa 1979). In forming an attachment with their infants, parents adjust their own behaviour to synchronize it with their baby's and vice versa, they also change their voice or use a series of baby specific noises to communicate (Bullowa 1979). According to Edward Tronic (1989), the emotional expressions of parents and infants are a form of communication that helps them to reciprocally adjust their interactions, thus an infant's later development depends on the operation of this communication system. There is conflicting evidence whether breast-feeding or early skin-to-skin contact strengthens attachment, but it has been shown to increase the volume of touching, holding, stroking, looking into baby's face and kissing during infancy (c.f. Anderson 1995; Lamb 1983; Kuzela et al. 1990; Kalus et al. 1972, Klaus et al. 1995). During breast feeding, an increased responsiveness to children's signals and needs by their mothers was also observed (Wiesenfeld et al. 1985; Lavelli & Poli 1998). Interestingly, studies have shown that it is possible to predict parental-infant attachment during pregnancy. Fonagy et al. (1991) claimed that an early maternal attachment at the time of pregnancy may indicate what the mother-infant attachment will be like at the age of one and that a mother's emotional state during late pregnancy and her early interactions with the infant, will also have an impact on healthy development (Lay et al. 1989).

Disturbances in early attachment come with an emotional cost, often leading to eating disorders in children (O'Shaughnessy 2009). Such evidence suggests that mothers should be taught how to form a positive attachment and that mothers who are more aware of the attachment formation process, may equip their children with higher self-esteem and ease of the forming of positive social relations in the future. It is worth noting that the studies discuss attachment to mothers and not to carers in general, which somewhat marginalizes the role of fathers during the early developmental stages. Men generally need more time and encouragement to bond with their babies, as they have not carried the baby in the womb for 9 months and they create attachment in different ways (Höfner et al. 2011). This creates opportunities for the implementation of pedagogical praxis and research. If one takes into account the impact of gender on infant communication, it is shown in the study by Katharine Johnson et. al (2014) that infants are more responsive towards the voice of their mothers and that mothers react to babies' cues more readily. Thus, mothers gain interaction time with their babies and have a greater contribu-

tion towards language development. Moreover, the same study suggests that the parental response to children may be based on the child's gender. Gerhardt (2004) claims that being held in a loving way provides a more positive impact on a baby's development than breast-feeding itself, which gives hope that a positive bond may be formed with a carer who is not baby's mother. Providing a loving response to one's baby seems to be a necessary component of their development. According to Snow et al. (1987), a high number of positive interactions, supported by verbal communication from birth, promote rapid growth in the brain structures responsible for language development. An interesting study of the melody of babies' cries at 3–5 days from birth, revealed differences between 30 German and 30 French healthy babies (Mampe et al. 2009), which indicates that the language development process starts before birth and that babies learn different language tunes in the womb. This highlights the importance of speaking and singing to a baby before their birth. David et al. (2003) provides a review of literature on the formation of native tongue sounds by infants up to the age of 3 months, a time when babies respond with certain cooing sounds to their parents. Children's ability to copy gestures and to repeat them, may be an indicator of their earlier ability to develop their speech (Rowe & Goldin-Meadow 2009; Iverson & Goldin-Meadow 2005). Therefore, interacting using gestures and movement is an important part of communication with an infant. There is significant proof that children with higher scores in preschool language assessments, have received more interaction and verbal communication with their carers from a very early age, when compared to their peers with lower scores (Zimmerman et al. 2009).

### **Socio-environmental aspects of early infant development**

Some studies suggest that good parental skills and parental involvement from early infancy is more important than socio-economic factors in children's development (Desforges & Abouchar 2003). The underlying socio-environmental factors such as: the social class of the parents, the mother's level of education, economic deprivation, the mother's wellbeing and single parenting were also of significance, but the power of good quality parental interaction was the leading cause for inequalities in an infant's development and language skills (Desforges & Abouchar 2003). Another UK-based educational research review by Effective Pre-School and Primary Education – EPPE (2012), confirms that parental engagement with their infants plays a key role in a child's readiness for school. In a Norwegian study, the amount of a child's interaction with mothers was perceived as one of the key elements of healthy infant devel-

opment, and one that reduces behavioral problems in young children (Borge & Melhuish 1995). A further study confirmed the negative effect of mother's absence on a child's development. P. Barglow et. al (1987) also proves that the better early attachment is, the less traumatic the separation. However, building this parent-infant relation is a very complex and personal process, affected by multiple obstacles and facilitating factors, where parental competence is the most significant predictor of parental attachment (Mercer & Ferkehch 1990). It has been proven that coercive early parent-child interactions, with a disciplinary parental style, has a negative impact on children's emotional regulation and may affect future relationships with peers in preschool and beyond (Scaramella & Leve 2004). Therefore the awareness of one's own parental style and alternative avenues to address challenging behaviour in infants is important.

The socio-economic factors that lead to becoming a teenage parent were distinguished in an American longitudinal research of 500 cases by Gest et al 1999. These factors included: low socioeconomic status, high levels of aggression, low academic ability, lack of popularity and school failure. Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) revealed the influence of an unstable, single parent family setting on an increased likelihood of parenting of the firstborn outside traditional wedlock, but only amongst boys. The above indicate the risk factors that should be considered in pedagogical practice and identification of positive and negative factors, makes a pedagogical influence, prevention or intervention possible and desirable. Wilson et al. (2007) showcased first-time parents' close contact with their infants, but also the jealousy felt by the parents of the infants, as the couples took on new responsibilities, awareness of which may help in creating support mechanisms. Identifying the needs of parents during the final phases of pregnancy, may be a key to improving the bonding process with their baby. For instance, future parents identified a need for more access to literature about transition to parenthood, as they often claimed to be unaware of the changes their family is going through and men in particular, felt less supported and almost excluded in the pre-natal phase, although they declared full emotional involvement in the pregnancy phase (Deave et al. 2008). In cases where parents maintained a positive approach towards pregnancy and the birth giving experience, they displayed greater satisfaction from parenthood, which indicates that helping and encouraging parents, has a positive effect on their attitude towards their infant and assists them to form a better relationship with them (Luts et al. 2009). Mercer et al. (1988) showed that in cases where the pregnancy was endangered, women demonstrate a higher level of attachment to the baby than their partners. He also noted the fathers in these cases should have been provided with guidance as to the ways in which

they could better support the mother. In a sample containing high risk families, early parent-infant contact at birth was not a predictor of positive attachment (Mercer et al 1990). Interestingly, amongst low risk mothers who were separated from their children due to illness and experienced no skin to skin contact at birth, greater attachment to their 8 month old babies was displayed (Mercer et al 1990). This study opposes Klaus and Kennell's (1976) concept that physical contact between mother and baby in the first 6–12 hours, is of paramount importance for the future of their bond. A mother's stress during pregnancy may negatively affect the formation of future attachment (c.f. Dieter et al. 2008; Henrichs et al. 2010; Maina et al. 2008) and fear of the birth giving experience amongst some mothers is a well known phenomenon (c.f. Areskog 1981). These issues should be addressed in pedagogical praxis. Research by Kai von Klitzing et al. (1999) shows that if the father has formed a rich and flexible mental representation in his imagination of the baby before birth, the resulting relationship will be more interactive. The awareness of this correlation may inspire pedagogues to aid future parental attachment and promotion of the father's role in early months.

### **Pedagogical messages in guidebooks for parents**

Thinking about the pedagogical influence on parental skills, there are a number of parental guidebooks published internationally, often based on scientific evidence and written in an instructive form. These guidebooks commonly discuss how to recognise and interpret babies' sounds and behaviours, to lower parental stress and aid better understanding. Some are more theoretical like: J. Cassidy, & P. R. Shaver (2008). *Handbook of attachment. Theory, research, and clinical applications*. New York: The Guilford Press. Others are directed at teachers S. Degotardi & B. Davis (2008). The majority are parent friendly and appeal to wider audiences (c.f. Murray & Andrews 2005; Hogg & Blau 2002). Kevin Nugent and Abelardo Morell (2011) wrote a book dedicated to communication strategies that babies display from birth. Their book is entitled "Your Baby Is Speaking to You: A Visual Guide to the Amazing Behaviors of Your Newborn and Growing Baby" and it shows how to interpret yawning, the rich range of cries, sleep smiles, sleep states, different range of smiles and facial expressions.

### **Infant pedagogy in practice – Case studies**

Australia's heritage of early childhood programs may be traced, as is the case with many countries, via the kindergarten and child welfare movements.

However, in 1940 the Australian Commonwealth Government founded child care centres for a range of children's programs in several major cities. Established in close proximity to where the children lived, these inner city locations were close to industrial areas and hence the children were impacted by overcrowding, poverty and poor health. As early as the 1940s, these centres were showcased as demonstration, training and best practice models for early childhood professionals across a range of multidisciplinary services – education, care and health. A unique aspect was the younger age of the children compared to kindergarten movements, with 0 to 4 years as the focus for the provision of care and programs for parents. The latter in terms of community services such as playgroup and toy library has faded as the focus on professional development was prioritized. However, the demonstration aspect continues with many visitors each year and parenting programs fulfil a dual role, bridging the theory-practice divide by providing sites for action research and implementation. Key parent programs revolve around attachment theory include: “Fatherhood project”, “Through the Looking Glass” and the internationally recognized “Circle of Security”. The latter is a parenting course running over 8 weeks aiming to provide “a roadmap to assist adults to build stronger relationships with their children” (Gowrie 2017). The interdisciplinary nature and social complexity of early childhood is acknowledged by encouraging family members to participate together with the professional facilitator coming from a range of backgrounds including health, social work and education. Organisations such as Gowrie, have played a significant advocacy role in programs for young children and their families, and in training and professional development in children's services. Examining the case of South Australia, it was certainly this legacy of strong advocates in early childhood which paved the introduction of the (now superseded) zero to eighteen years' curriculum framework, underpinned by social constructivism. This marked a distinct shift within the government's education policy, by acknowledging care aspects within education and that learning beginning at birth, which also occurs outside of school programmes. Responding to international PISA rankings and calls for 'post-industrial' forms of education to address flagging interest in STEM subjects at higher education levels, policy makers turned their attention to early childhood education (Westwell 2013). The emergence of infant brain studies within the field of neuroscience highlighted the importance of child development and improbable supporters were engaged to build the case for evidence-based activities and bridging the traditional divide between health and education. In pursuit of reforms, internationally renowned voices have been employed to lend their gravitas towards a political and so-

cial agenda. One of these saw leading Canadian researcher Fraser Mustard, become a 'thinker in residence' to advise on matters of policy and research strategies. The trend towards comparative infant and early childhood pedagogy has not abated, with South Australia following the lead from international projects such as UK's Pen Green, First Duty from Toronto and the most recent 'thinker in residence', Carla Rinaldi from Reggio Emilia.

The realignment within the South Australian education department has seen rapid policy and practice decision-making based upon close co-operation with researchers and 'think tanks' and facilitated by a long-term political mandate. The pragmatist philosophy of comparative education rests heavily on population health model and this has largely driven the governmental partnership between the departments of education, health and social welfare within the State. Universal access has become a catch cry with a focus on delivering programs and services for whole communities largely to reduce the stigma often associated with agency support. However, this accessibility and collaboration between child development researchers, government policy makers and practitioners finds its basis within decades of practical activity and goodwill, such as the groundwork laid by the Gowrie centres within the child care sector. Countries such as England, Canada, New Zealand and Australia with comparatively high standards of living, political stability and freedom and conversely, low levels of corruption, can rest on their track record. The positivist language has become somewhat reified with statements such as 'prevention rather than cure' and concepts of wellbeing and emotional health added to the health care portfolio.

Political attention in many countries has focussed on social justice issues with children and families becoming a target for financial and scientific investment. The argument made is that the negative effects of disadvantage and deprivation can be mitigated with high quality early years' services and home support. Universal home visiting is one such success story which adopted from Canada over a decade ago, now facilitates nurses to home-visit approximately 20,000 babies within the first weeks of life in South Australia annually. The home visit is primarily focussed on the early identification of health issues but the scope is extended into any family or child development issues and the promotion of access to other services, parenting information and support pathways for families (Child & Youth Health 2017). From these initial forays into integrated services a decade ago, South Australia has now developed a network of over forty '*Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting*' focussed on the antenatal phase to age eight years and their families. Each Children's Centre offers differing services and pro-

grams in response to the local community, although these are centred around a common educational core of preschool, childcare and playgroup. Through interagency co-operation, there are varied additional health and family programs such as vaccinations, speech pathology and health checks. Although from the beginning the centres have been mandated to build strong partnerships with local schools, the recent age change is significant. That is the additional provision of midwifery and ante-natal care which connects the Centre with women during pregnancy.

In terms of comparative pedagogy, other people such as those currently experiencing a different political atmosphere or with negative memories of their own historical contexts, such as in the case of totalitarian regimes in Poland, may not welcome the same levels of government intervention and blurring of lines between the public and private spheres (UNESCO spokesperson 2014)<sup>2</sup>. This is in line with concerns raised on the levels of State-sponsored intrusion with individualistic approaches negating the interdependent child-raising practices of members of Australian indigenous and other cultural groups (Vucic 2015). Although the stated outcomes of all the Centres is on supporting indigenous families and their children, four have been established to specifically reflect “a philosophy of acknowledgement, engagement and inclusion of Aboriginal history, culture and community”. Specific targeting of services seeks to address the deep-seated inequalities experienced by Aboriginal families. However, in her professional experience, the co-author noticed that an unspoken tension between indigenous members and recently arrived migrants remain unresolved.

Similarly, the evaluations of the Sure Start program in the UK were surprisingly less positive than expected given the amount of resourcing and attention the initiative received. The results questioned the suitability and effectiveness of the service delivery model particularly in regards to black minority and ethnically diverse families, the cornerstone of the program’s mandate. These findings suggest that under the pressures of rapid service expansion, the time and expertise required to build culturally sensitive and relevant relationships within a community are undermined. Failure to reach the intended target group is often attributed to a lack of understanding or resourcing on the part of the parent. However, the lack of parental engagement or agency cannot only reside with the families, as although there is a strong association with cultural perspectives of childhood and public-private responsibilities, many parents

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication to author.

cite unfamiliarity and previous negative experiences with services as significant factors. Thus rather than essentialising cultural groups, professionals and policymakers require insight and understanding into the variation of different families, a niche to be filled by more nuanced research (Roleke 2012, p. 12). This also appears to be the case in South Australia with the most recent 3-year evaluation of the Children's Centres which focussed on accessibility to services and the family experience. To address its own shortcomings, the report advocates for more research into the impact of the integration model and how it contributes to the health, wellbeing, and development of children (Brinkman & Harman-Smith 2013). However, the report on the qualitative study exposes a deep-seated flaw within the model. Despite the two year residency of Carla Rinaldi with the Reggio educational project, in its own evaluation, the 'child' is conspicuously absent. The document identifies stakeholders as 'people working in, with, and using services in Children's Centres' from which 'children as people' appear excluded (Harman-Smith & Brinkman 2013, p. 1). The issue may reside in part with the Reggio approach itself as Rinaldi (2013, p. 33) defines educational research as shared 'between adults and children is a priority practice of everyday life, an existential and ethical approach necessary for interpreting the complexity of the world, of phenomena, of systems of co-existence, and is a powerful instrument of renewal in education'. Furthermore, she advises that this research is made visible via means of documentation specifically representing the child's learning and teacher's professional journey. Although proposing that this is an element of pedagogical innovation which should appear at national and international levels, this omission of the child within the evaluation reports suggests that the issue may lie within 'documentation' and the Reggio 'progettazione'. This Reggio process of designing the learning activities and environment, to enhance participation and the professional development of the personnel becomes an end in itself. Rather than the rhetoric that there exists a shared responsibility of systematic review in terms of administrative, political, and pedagogical levels, the children are designated as 'heard' within the education component and that documentation forms their data. This mixed methods approach interplays 'hard' data with analysis of the discourse whilst neglecting the 'real' child. Using a critical realist approach to tease out the problem, it appears that although Reggio is based on an emancipatory ontology which encourages active dialogue for co-production between adults and children, the research creates a tension with a more contradictory, positivist stance. Furthermore, within the sociology of childhood the issue of rights has generally been overshadowed by the prioritising of voice and narrative. It is not enough to acknowledge that individuals are already knowledge-

able as a result of their life experiences and that interpretation is problematic, if this is only reserved for adults within the 'grown up sphere' and research with or by the child is pushed towards a periphery as a developmental tool or educational process. The rights' discourse in Australia is weak and lags behind European countries as demonstrated by an only recent appointment of a Children's Commissioner. Prominent international voices further contribute to confusion and misunderstandings if positioning child rights as within a particular sphere of interest. In the case of Rinaldi (2013) 'her' declaration of rights for children makes no mention of a global United Nations Convention or other frameworks. The historically and politically naïve audience, is informed that the subject of rights is new and as childhood is a cultural construct, so too can the individual child create and construct new rights, made possible by following her principles. Credit must be given to the region of Reggio Emilia and its educational approach in demonstrating to a wider world, the competence, complexity and capability of very young children. These preschools presented the image of the rich child as a skillful communicator able to express their own views and experiences. Subsequently, it has been more than a decade, since this influence appeared in other research and practice frameworks such as The Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss 2005). However, it is a misappropriation to claim the 'child as citizen' and an interpretivist view of rights as if emanating from the 'Reggio Approach' as Rinaldi appears to present (2013, p. 18). Hence, after her two-year South Australian residency and collaboration between health and education, child rights became entrapped within the educational setting as a tool to see children and constructed aspect of learning activities and were missed by the researchers. Contrary to requiring a specific approach or residing within legal frameworks, the principles and dilemmas of rights occur on a day to day basis within such local negotiations and practical applications as the Children's Centres. These are applied and enacted on real individuals, both young and old. The irony persists, that despite the insights gained, much mainstream research on and for children, is ageist and serves to exclude them (Alderson 2012). Despite the errors and missed opportunities, this cycle of inaction and incoherence may be broken by beginning with infancy and employing a pedagogical perspective particularly by resurrecting the historical legacy of child rights.

### **Infant rights in pedagogical perspective**

There is another aspect of interest for social pedagogy – the rights of an infant. Taking into account the life-long impact that the pregnancy, early

days and months have on child's development (Irwin et al. 2007), it becomes clear that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) and Human Rights Declaration, should be broadened to include issues of early infancy. A drive to increase awareness of specific early childhood rights comes from the University of Tampere in Finland, where the World Association for Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) was established to "promote education, research, and study of the effects of mental development during infancy" through development of a proposal for a Declaration of Infant's Rights. Amongst the basic principles of Infant Rights are:

- „1. The Infant by reason of his/her physical and mental immaturity and absolute dependence needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection.
2. Caregiving relationships that are sensitive and responsive to infant needs are critical to human development and thereby constitute a basic right of infancy. The Infant therefore has the right to have his/her most important primary caregiver relationships recognized and understood, with the continuity of attachment valued and protected – especially in circumstances of parental separation and loss. This implies giving attention to unique ways that infants express themselves and educating mothers, fathers, caregivers and professionals in their recognition of relationship-based attachment behaviors.
3. The Infant is to be considered as a vital member of his/her family, registered as a citizen, and having the right for identity from the moment of birth. Moreover, the infant's status of a person is to include equal value for life regardless of gender or any individual characteristics such as those of disability.
4. The Infant has the right to be given nurturance that includes love, physical and emotional safety, adequate nutrition and sleep, in order to promote normal development.
5. The Infant has the right to be protected from neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, including infant trafficking.
6. The Infant has the right to have access to professional help whenever exposed directly or indirectly to traumatic events.
7. Infants with life-limiting conditions need access to palliative services, based on the same standards that stand in the society for older children.”  
[From WAIMH POSITION PAPER 2014]

These principles go beyond those already in existence in the CROC. An alternative movement in support of Infant Rights was observed in the Decla-

ration of the Rights of the Newborn, also known as the Parma Charter (Bevilacqua et al. 2011), which was meant to provide goal posts for policy makers in terms of protecting the most vulnerable and dependent of all children. Non-governmental organizations, for instance the Natural Child Project from Canada, promote the idea of The Newborn Bill of Rights ([http://www.naturalchild.org/advocacy/worldwide/newborn\\_rights.html](http://www.naturalchild.org/advocacy/worldwide/newborn_rights.html)). World's Health Organization (WHO) puts an emphasis on policy regarding early childhood and pregnancy. In *A Policy Guide for Implementing Essential Interventions for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH)* (2014), they aim to “promote the implementation of essential reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health interventions to address the main causes of maternal, newborn and child ill-health and deaths” ([http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/policy\\_compendium.pdf](http://www.who.int/pmnch/knowledge/publications/policy_compendium.pdf)).

These declarations and international policy guidelines aim to raise awareness of the importance of early infancy and to cater for those least capable of being heard and listened to. The existence of early infancy rights movements show that there is a need for changes to international legislation and a need for well-equipped, knowledgeable specialists of early childhood pedagogy, who would widen societal and parental awareness, support babies and their parents and apply early years pedagogy in praxis.

Trevethan's pre-speech intersubjectivity and Bruner's socio-cultural theory work challenged the developmentalism of psychobiology in the UK and the US as far back as the 1970s. Demonstrating that embryonic speech and desire for social interaction was present at birth concurs with philosophical ideas of the purpose of human dialogue. Contrary to today's tendency to relegate early childhood research as a specific discipline and professional specialisation, these findings were revolutionary and spoke to a wider academic audience, questioning what it means to be a human (Trevathen 1976). Bowlby's attachment theory which emphasised one-way physical and emotional dependency of the infant has been stripped of its biological deficits in recent years. Mind-mindedness has become a focus for extensive psychological studies in Canada, UK, the Netherlands and Australia, dusting off philosophical origins for its investigations into the theory of mind. This is often manifested as studying the proclivity of the adult carer, most often the mother, towards treating the infant as a separate individual and attributing a state of mind to the baby (McMahon et al. 2016; Meins et al. 2011; Kirk et al. 2015). Philosopher-psychologist, Alison Gopnik became a US media sensation upon publishing her book, *The Philosophical Baby* (2015), which highlighted the sophistication, skills and consciousness of the infant to the general public.

The centrality of infancy within human development is slowly being recognised within higher education, as shown by one of California's largest universities in structuring part of its undergraduate education degree around Gopnik's text (California State University – Sacramento). Across the United Kingdom, universities spruik their multidisciplinary undergraduate and post-graduate childhood studies as innovative and globally relevant (University of Leeds 2016/17; Kings College 2016/17; University of Edinburgh 2016/17; University of Suffolk 2016/17; University of Sheffield 2016/2017). Despite its close relationship with the UK, most Australian universities did not follow suit in developing stand-alone childhood studies at tertiary level. It can be speculated that the dominance of post-graduate courses aimed at teaching qualifications reflects the professional orientation of the sector aiming to produce 'employable' graduates. However, this 'new' social study of childhood is not that recent, having emerged from the sociology of childhood which in fact argued against the normalizing trends and developmentalism of psychology where children are viewed as passive and becoming (Punch, Tisdall 2012, pp. 7–8). Joined by other disciplines such as education, law and social work, childhood studies became an advocacy vehicle for the recognition of the social construction of childhood. Particularly in the US, Germany and UK there was a proliferation of research which prioritised children's voice in seeking to improve understanding of the lives of children and young people in different social, cultural and educational contexts around the world. This coincided neatly with the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, with its call for acknowledgement of children's agency and participation to be respected in the present. As the sector matured, the earlier dichotomies of sociology versus psychology with its social or natural debates have softened and become more nuanced (Tisdall & Punch 2012, p. 15). Researchers and practitioners are now beginning to acknowledge the role of the baby as not only a social actor but a powerful agent within their own context. Berry Mayall (2002, p. 21), delineates between the social actor that acts from 'a subjective wish' and the added dimension that defines an agent, as one who relates to a relationship or a decision that occurs within 'negotiation with others' and this agency works within a set of social assumptions and limitations. On the flipside, at the world-ranking University College London (UCL) has an equally long tradition as a champion of rights. Sociological theories and discourses problematise the image of the child, agency and universal concepts of rights, with this division echoed at UCL – its Masters course (now) entitled 'Childhood Studies and Child Rights'. A source of legal argument and policy direction in favour of the gravitas provided by the international child

rights framework from the likes of law professor, Michael Freeman. Furthermore, from within the Institute of Education (UCL) itself, Priscilla Alderson's publications have presented compelling arguments for the relevance of the UNCRC, with due reference to cross-cultural and gender influences. Once taken into account, of the life-long impact that the pregnancy and the earliest influences have on a child's development, some argue the UN declarations are insufficient to tackle issues of infancy and early childhood, thus proposing the need for a specific declaration of infant or newborn rights (Irwin et al. 2007; Bevilacqua et al. 2011). A similar drive to increase awareness of specific early childhood rights, comes from non-governmental organisations, for example, in Canada and Finland, with the Natural Child Project and the World Association for Infant Mental Health, respectively. These alternative movements seek to change the goal post for policy makers in terms of protecting the most vulnerable and dependent of all children, and emphasizing their capacity for being heard and listened to. These infancy rights movements seek modification to the existing legislative rights framework, whereas Alderson argues for improved understanding and implementation as it stands. In her book 'Young Children's Rights', Alderson (2008) specifically addresses the compatibility of rights with early childhood issues. Real-life examples are explored in seeking to find a balance between young children's rights to protection, to provision (resources and services) and to participation (expressing their views, being responsible). Her seminal research into the hospital care of premature babies and ethics of consent provided extraordinary insight, provoking ongoing interest and broadening multiple perspectives of early infancy for researchers and practitioners alike (Alderson et al., 2005). This research base continues to highlight the need for well-equipped, knowledgeable specialists especially from early childhood pedagogy. This would widen societal and parental awareness, support babies and their parents and apply early years' pedagogy in praxis.

So what opportunities does this offer social pedagogy in the Polish context? The convergence of multiple disciplines around shared issues fits well within pedagogy. The example presented of research into the health care of babies (Alderson 2005) may well fall into the discipline of medical sociology and ethics but the impetus of what is becoming a long-lived social sciences project continues under the auspices of the Institute of Education (UCL). The concept of a pedagogical role for improving practice and outcomes for adults as well as children is relatively new in the UK, US and Australia. However, pedagogy as a European concept has benefitted, and at times, suffered under ambiguity and different definitions. In Poland, pedagogy is viewed as an educational science,

for the analysis of educational aims, content, forms of organization, methods and means of equipping both children and adults with knowledge and skills within a values system. As per Kupisiewicz & Kupisiewicz (2009, p. 132) this occurs in accordance to beliefs and attitudes with specific professional competencies as well as the readiness for continuous reflection and effective life-long learning. Such investigative complexity for researchers and practitioners alike, plus the desire for deeper understanding of educational processes, descriptions and analyses, led to the creation of various pedagogical fields. Social pedagogy emerged from the continental tradition and within the Polish context benefited historically from the unique contributions of excellent pedagogues such as Jan Władysław Dawid, Helena Radlińska, Maria Grzegorzewska and Janusz Korczak. The interwar period, with special deference to the Warsaw intelligentsia, acted as the breeding ground for an ideology centered around children's rights and interdisciplinary cooperation (Vucic 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Concepts highlighted within this article, such as maternal mind-mindedness and infant pre-speech may appear as radical and new foreign ideas. However, similar narratives were already in circulation in Poland almost a century ago via Korczak's prolific writing and his connection to academic projects such as Radlinska's 'research through action' and Grzegorzewska's higher education for teachers. Introducing the concept of '*opanowanie*' (a form of self-control) on the side of the adult, that is, a sense of mastery – calm, self-controlled composure in relation to the child. This learning moves beyond the theoretical, requiring a status shift to the 'child as teacher' facilitating the development of both skills and understanding through reflective practice. Furthermore, Korczak's use of colloquial language and metaphor served to popularize the idea that the earliest period of life was highly important. For example, in his publication, *Bobo*, Korczak (1914, p. 12) claims that the greatest exhibition hall filled with incredible machines would pale in comparison with the complex system of ever changing structures, processes and connections inside the growing brain of an infant. Discarding the Aristotelian philosophy of the child as 'a becoming', Korczak had declared even as a young university student that the child was already a person, an assertion that was to become his lifelong creed (Ciesielska 1985, p. 46). A rights-based perspective also enabled his confident rejection of behaviourist psychology so prevalent at the time. Rather than a tabula rasa blank slate or bundle of innate urges and reflexes, Korczak prefigures contemporary neuroscience, the concept of sensory pre-speech and

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<sup>3</sup> Unpublished doctoral research.

even the 'grammar gene'. He presents the inner life and communication of the infant as conscious, rich and cognisant: [Infant] looks and thinks, thinks the most mysterious and liveliest speech, without words – the language of images and fractions of images common to all babes all over world and all living creatures. It collects and ranks the images, populates the stations of the spiritual telegraph, creates materials to be the delicious building blocks symbolic of human language, in which image has its own sound and its own soul, good or bad, loved or hated (Ciesielska 1985, p. 13).

Forty years since Trevarthen (1974) published her seminal infant communication study in the popular journal, *New Scientist*, there has been a recent resurgence of interest, with the latest issue challenging Chomsky's linguistics posing that language is rooted in gesture rather than vocalization (Anderson 2017, p. 44). Thinking in images rather than words, enriches the preverbal world of the young child. Hence, communication, abstract representation, the emergence of grammatical structure, theory of mind and social relations all become elements of the landscape that is infancy. Attracting the attention of such diverse specializations as evolutionary anthropology and artificial intelligence, might just propel research into infancy to the status it deserves. Meanwhile, an introspective look within Polish social pedagogy itself may provide the philosophical framework and appropriate platform for groundbreaking work to take place.

## Conclusions

What could have been perceived by policy makers as secondary, behind catering for the basic physiological needs of an infant, should be moved to the heart of the benefits and costs analysis in social politics. Deficiencies in early attachment prove to be a significant factor not only in children's development, but also in their long-term abilities and the formation of their future social relations. Early attachment has an important place in personality formation, perception of self and of others, with lifelong outcomes and proven impact on life opportunities. Parental skills, mind-mindedness and appropriate awareness of professionals involved with families and children, are of paramount importance and therefore, early years pedagogy should gain more attention and more exposure in Polish pedagogical studies and praxis. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research into pregnancy, infancy and early childhood, may yield more than improved understanding of babies and their care. By conferring rights and elevating the infant to the status of a person, they may in turn, teach us what it means to be human.

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