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Title: A Notion of Care in the Early Years' Teaching and Learning

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In this essay, the notion of care for infants and toddlers within the early years of teaching and learning is a concept that will be explored, and takes into account the ways in which this has been understood and practiced. Historically, care for the very young children within Aotearoa New Zealand has had a somewhat grim past. In part, this can be attributed to the various images held of children over time and the association of women in society. Therefore, the justification of context becomes important and this will be discussed. Particular focus is dedicated to several key ideas that will be explored such as a professional care, a quality of care, the politics of care, the partnership and communication of care, and the professional development of care. Lastly, the essay will offer insights into the implication of care for infants and toddlers, and conclude with highlighting the main points. Where necessary, relevant literature will be incorporated to support statements made throughout this essay.

Historically, early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand has distinctly differed from the compulsory sector and has been concerned with ideas about "child rearing, the role of women in society, child welfare, and family policies, and the role of the state in supporting and fostering that welfare" (May, 1997, p. xi). In its early beginnings, the state's involvement in ECE was minimal and reflected the political nature of the times (Duhn, 2009). Although very little has been recorded with reference to the education of the very young, May (2003) contends they were "always present in 19th century classrooms and schools; often in greater proportion than older children" (p. 3). The establishment of infant schools by missionaries would indicate the influence of colonization with a particular focus to 'tame' Maori children. "Missionaries were concerned with what they perceived as a lack of discipline in Maori child rearing" (Duhn, 2009, p. 33). This is further implied in the writings of Helen May who recorded a journal entry from 1835 missionary. "Formerly a parent would never correct a child for anything it might do: it was allowed to run riot in all that was vile, and to have its own way in everything" (May, 2003, p.21). Such historical accounts provide insight as to the purpose of care of infants and toddlers.

New Zealand's Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has a long history (May, 2007; & Rockel, 2009) and considers that care had traditionally been interpreted in a conventional way, and regarded as "necessary for children's satisfactory growth and development" (Rockel, 2009, p. 2). New Zealand has initiated the 10-year plan from 2001-2012 in order to support "the policy of 100 per qualified and registered teachers for all early childhood services" (Rockel, 2009, p. 1), which would see the value and standard of care for children as being critical. Since the development of such a policy, teachers' skills and perceptions of care for infants and toddlers have altered from baby-minding to a responsive care curriculum (Cooper & Royal Tangaere, 1994). As a result, the teachers' qualifications of care curriculum have increased, acknowledging a pedagogy of inclusive care (Rockel, 2009).

A perception of care in early years' settings has drawn much attention and discussion from local and international experts about its values and standards (Rockel, 2009). Therefore, the idea of care from Goldstein (1998) would view this "as not an attribute or personality trait, but a relation. Caring is not something you are, but rather something you engage in, something you do. Every interaction provides one with an opportunity to enter into a caring relation (p. 2)". Further to this, Goldstein (1998) insists that young children need to be cared for during their learning experiences and both the one who is being cared for (infants/toddlers) and the one who is caring for them (teachers) will learn together. On the one hand, Moss (2006) considers care as a pedagogical framework. It makes the association with and provides a relationship between care, learning, and upbringing, "learning, care and upbringing (a typically pedagogical term) are indivisible activities; these are not distinct fields that must somehow be joined up, but interconnected facets of life that cannot be envisaged separately" (Moss, 2006, p. 32).

A concept of care for infants and toddlers is complex with multiple dimensions (Shin, 2014). Historically, care can be defined "as an emotional response and as labour, involving low status paid work or restricting women to care in the home" (Davis & Degotardi, 2015, p. 1734). Lally (1995) illustrates the complexity of care describing that "anyone can do that, until recently was done for no pay as part of daily family life, and that needs no training" (p. 59). This is further complicated when politicians challenge the very idea of teachers being paid to care for

children, when this is naturally a woman's role (Cooper & Royal Tangaere, 1994). The notion of care can be defined as "an individual's ability to take action, to take control, or make decisions, with an I can do it feeling" (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2005, p. 16). From a socio-cultural theory, care is explained not just as a service to 'mind' infants and toddlers whose parents were absent and busy but to empower and encourage children and their families (Ministry of Education, 1993).

A premise of care has been deemed as a core element of teaching and learning for infants and toddlers and an attribution of care is always considered by teachers and parents as a central aspect of effective teaching (Davis & Degotardi, 2015). Care is involved with teachers' professional identity which is anticipated to encompass a moral and ethical approach to teaching. This idea is relevant to "the caring for the self, for others, for ideas and natural world which is the need and aim of an ethical life" (Noddings, 2003, p. 245). In addition to this, Noddings (2002) also gives the definition of care in many perspectives such as "attentiveness towards others, considering other's points of view and assuming a stance of support" (p. 13).

The theory of care is an important focus for several reasons. Firstly, with regard to the first years' pedagogy, the construction of care in terms of social and political views is multifaceted. Care is central to early years' teaching and learning, yet it catches much less attention in the national curriculum document (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). The childhood literature of care has recently been reviewed and identified as important in the professional identifies of teachers who are labouring with infants and toddlers (Dalli, 2008; Rockel, 2009). For example, no research has been conducted that has addressed the concept of care in the Early Years Learning Framework, particularly the different perspectives of educators toward concepts of care in early years' teaching pedagogies (Davis & Degotardi, 2015). There is discourse of the concept of care discussed in some national early curriculum, yet there are still misinterpretations by educators about the premise of care when enacting in the curriculum (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009).

Secondly, the first years of children's lives is regarded as a crucial period for learning and growth of the long-term investment which results in economic and social development. It is

the years that is deemed as every aspect of life is started to evolve and build a strong foundation in terms of identities, beliefs, cultures, norms and language (Goldstein, 1997). It is also a situation that is considered as the bonding relationship between children and adults regarding physical and emotional aspects (Degotardi & Pearson, 2015). However, the studying and understanding of care is still needed to discuss and debate. As far as the notion of care is concerned, many teachers and caregivers in this profession merely and partly understand the physical and basic care, whereas care should be interpreted and understood as an ethic of care with professionalism (Goldstein, 1997). Therefore, the premise of care should be a top agenda to be discussed and studied for further understanding and practicing.

Thirdly, a career as a caregiver or teacher for infants and toddlers is currently underestimated and undervalued by society and other professions. The title 'caregiver' is associated with mothers who are working at home and is seen as non-work, which leads to viewing such important work as a low status (Cooper & Royal Tangaere, 1994). Degotardi and Pearson (2009) add that the profession as teachers for the first years is regarded as low credit, less paid, and women's work. This situation impacts on ethical issues of when young children are sent away to childcare centres with caregivers (women strangers) who may not provide enough care (Rockel, 2009). Moreover, a 'caregiver' can be conceptualised as a feminization of women who are involved in low value work in the home settings. Andrew and Newman (2012) have entitled this as caring labour that is usually underestimated as a skill when compared with other professions. The ideas of maternalism in childcare highlight the same problem of undervaluing work with infants and toddlers, especially babies (McDowall, Clark & Baylis, 2012). That is why the discussion of a notion of care is mandatory and needs to address the values, status, and professionalism of teachers for under-two-years-old in the contemporary situation.

Fourthly, the early years' education and development in Cambodia is very complex because multinational ministries are concerned, which hinder working pace and quality. Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) currently has strong commitment and attention to Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) (Rao & Pearson, 2009). Even though the national

policy of ECCD of Cambodia was approved in 2002, regarding care in the early years drew less responsiveness and consideration as the policy does not focus on or mention care of infants and toddlers as a top priority (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport , 2010). The main focus is concentrated on preschoolers who are three-to-five-years old (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). Hence, there is no clear research and study about care in the early years as this profession is also less paid and little motivation.

Lastly, regarding the social and political perspectives of Cambodia, such as the chaotic and civil wars between 1975-1979 (Pol Pot regime) and 1997 (6-7 July, coup d'état), young children did not have the opportunity to receive formal care and education, which is usually provided by many governments in other countries. Its effects were children out of school, orphanages, broken education systems, teachers killed (Zimmer, Knodel , Kim , & Puch, 2005). As a result, early childhood care and development (ECED) in Cambodia is undervalued and received less investment from the government (Walle, Uon, Cnudde, & Keo, 2013). Thus, many young children missed out on schooling and received little attention from parents and communities.

Due to the importance of what has been discussed above, the idea of care continues to draw attention and challenges for teachers who are working with children under two years of age. In terms of a professional care, Goouch and Powell (2013) theoretically state that this refers to teachers' self-identities with a variety of care related to depositions and activities, which is regardless of education and teaching. Taggart (2011) claims that professional care is inseparable from ethical codes of practices, including a moral basis of care, which involves competencies and skills of professional teaching. Moreover, the discourse of professional care shares a great influence on the professional identities of educators, which Rockel (2009) considers and values caregivers as teachers who have equal status and professionalism. However, the concerns over the concepts of professional care in terms of social and professional substantially and negatively influence teachers' sensation of self, and expert values (Goouch and Powell, 2013). Because educators perceive care and caregiving as a lower profession, parents may unconsciously view the work with infants and toddlers as undervaluing and lacking in recognition for the professional care of teachers (Davis & Degotardi, 2015).

With orientation to quality of care, its impact in ECE settings during infant and toddler periods have been intricate to describe, and are subject to debate. Dalli, Jayne White, Rockel, & Duhn (2011) argues that quality of care in a structural setting should be complied with adult-child ratios, group sizes, teachers' characteristics in terms of qualification, education, skills, and the physical environment of ECE settings. Also, regarding large class sizes, high noise levels, and adult-to-child ratios in a theoretical lens that do not adhere to standards, result in not having enough time for educators to provide responsive and meaningful care for infants and toddlers (Dalli, 2017). On the other hand, Manning-Morton (2006) argues that the quality of care should reflect on educators' daily basic activities and their professional "experiences, feelings, values and beliefs" with young children (p. 45).

Additionally, parenting at home and time consumption in ECE setting are very precious value for quality of care in the first years. Adi-Japha and Klein (2009) comment that children who have high quality parenting are well prepared for their next level of schooling and have better language competencies than those whose interactions with parents are minimal. However, Dalli et al. (2011) adds that infants and toddlers who stay in childcare centres for longer hours have positive and negative impacts on their development. Crockenberg (2003) also notes that:

"the amount of time in child care is associated with differences in child aggression and social competence, independent of the quality of caregiving at home and in child care. This may mean that longer hours in child care during infancy and early childhood adversely affect development even when quality of care is high"
(p. 1034).

With reference to the politics of care, this has been embedded in curriculum document policy. The influence of political care has altered curriculum and policies several times, which draws the attention of researchers' and educators' conceptualization of care (Davis & Degotardi, 2015). Tronto (1993) claims that the notion of care is flexible in terms of social, political, demographic, and economic grounds. Noddings (1996) positions the politics of care as a "dispositional trait" which is related to social and political development (p. 12). Tronto (1993) also adds that care is a collective attitude and responsibility which is variable and connected to

a social and cultural phenomenon with regard to political and moral factors. Moreover, Sevenhuijsen (2000) emphasizes that the construction of care has to start with insights where every teacher frames his or her responsibilities in social practices. Dalli (2008) contends that an “understanding of educators’ views on a politic of care can contribute to a ground-up perspective that can enable a reconceptualised view of professionalism that reflects the reality of early childhood work” (p.174). Tronto (1993) finally argues that care is involved with thoughts and actions that will be formed and impacted by political ideology when care institution is working.

Partnership and communication between parents and teachers in a theoretical perspective of care creates a better and safer environment to support young children learning to be more responsive and meaningful. Sharing and understanding students’ backgrounds in terms of families, interests, strengths, wellbeing and experiences would contribute to and foster the teaching and learning process (Chan & Ritchie, 2016). Thus, partnership and communication between parents and teachers are indispensable (Chan, 2017). Smith (2013) argues that the relationship between teachers, parents and children in the first years are important for future learning and development. Infants and toddlers’ interaction in both centres and home such as gesture, crying, playing, and movement are prominent and do support learning and development in the early years (Chan & Ritchie, 2016). Therefore, the function of partnership and communication would struggle to make the gap of relationship and communication between parents and teachers to become closer (Chan, 2017). Because it does not occur only in ECE settings, it also happens in the community and home through the engagement of parents and teachers. Through good partnership and communication, parents or guardians can offer additional care to infants and toddlers to build up their happiness and pleasure, and to live together.

With reference to professional development of care in a political lens, the growth of needs and demands in ECE services from birth to age two enables teachers to be more professional and own identity in their professions. According to Dalli (2017), improving professionalism in the workplace must be thought of as a qualification and standard within a code of ethics of the

individual teacher for the quality of care and education. For example, in OECD countries, governments have improved their quality of care and education services because of the professional of individual teacher. As a result, the rate of participation of infants and toddlers in ECE settings has increased – about 5% from 2006 to 2013 (Dalli, 2017).

Also, working conditions and incentives of the first years in a social lens is indispensable and inseparable from professional development in order to support a better care. Manning-Morton (2006) notes that “the quality of care for children aged two and under is directly linked to pay and conditions of work of staff, and to staff support and training (p. 43)”. Manning-Morton (2006) continues to state that a professional approach of teachers, including personal awareness and theoretical knowledge, contributes to the quality of provision. Additionally, Smith, Ford, Hubbard & White (1995) state that:

“working conditions, wages and education of staff were of crucial importance in providing high quality childcare environments for infants, and yet far too many staff had “low levels of school education, [were] untrained, poorly paid, and experience[d] less than adequate working conditions” (p. 64).

With regards to Cambodia, professionalism of early childhood teachers for the first years is regarded as a core component for quality improvement and development. A policy framework and guideline on ECCD was devised since 2002 and focuses on providing quality care and education through quality teachers (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, 2010). Yet, the professionalism of educators is still a major concern (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). Therefore, Cambodia’s teachers need more room for improvement in terms of teaching strategies, skills and knowledge of care in order to improve and develop their professionalism which benefit to the first years teaching and learning.

The above discussions of a notion of care are important to draw significant implications for educators and parents working with infants. Firstly, the notion of care is very useful and high demands much attention from practitioners, researchers, policy makers, parents and

community members. When coming to the discourse of the concepts of care in an infant and toddler setting as a professional practice, it is deemed as value-laden and problematic (Rockel, 2009). However, care is regarded as an effective pedagogy and practice in the early years' setting (Degotardi & Pearson, 2009) because care is a combination of a moral and ethical approach of educators' practices. A disposition of care produces a loving relationship between educators, parents, and young children, which leads to supporting children in their learning and development. For example, the activities of physical and basic care that include nappy changing, toileting, sleeping, playing, feeding and other routines are considered as vital events for the establishment of a caring relationship (Davis & Degotardi, 2015).

Secondly, an important role of the notion of care is to guide infants and toddlers to fix the fragments of society and early childhood care and development issues. It also enables teachers to do reflection in order to build new knowledge in a conscious approach to fix Cambodia's broken society, as an example. A pedagogy of care helps young children to get a quality of care where their wellbeing, happiness, and pleasure are taken into account (Noddings, 1996). In a pedagogy of care, a teacher's role is a facilitator, and infants and toddlers can dream, discover, and break through their ideas and thoughts (Goldstein, 1998). In doing so, young children have opportunities to play and explore, and be involved in and imagine fairness in their contexts, which can transform and rehabilitate the unhealthy society by the recognition of injustice (Noddings, 1996). Therefore, children can conceptualize and contextualize their experiences of care and play which greatly contribute to their long life learning.

Even though there are various discussions concerning the notion of care in infant and toddler settings from many backgrounds and concepts, it is important to draw on useful and necessary discourses in terms of a political, social, historical and theoretical lens. Those vital dispositions of a professional care, the politics of care, communication and partnerships of care, and professional development of care will bring about changes in perspectives, for an example, in a Cambodian context where the early years' learning and teaching is still a major issue and needs to be addressed and supported by parents, educators, policy makers, researchers, and non-governmental organizations. Lastly, I believe that the ideas and premises in this essay will be a

part of the development of the future of ECCD in other places as well as Cambodia, which will contribute to effectively exercise a pedagogy of care for under-two-years of age.

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