**[Karen Hope]:** So Sandra, thinking about the cohort of children that we're talking about tonight, which is children under three, how do educators notice children's interests and ideas and provocations, and then how do you determine what's meaningful? Because children do a lot in a day, or a week, or a month.

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** Yeah, this question about noticing and infants' ideas, interests and provocations. And I guess for many years we probably thought they don't have too many interests, ideas or provocations. They're babies. They need care. They need us to nurture them and then they'll grow into that educational environment.

But one of the things I think that I've really noticed in my many, many years of working with infants and toddlers, and then doing research alongside of them, was this importance of noticing. And the idea of noticing or the notion of noticing has become really, really important, and it's well covered in the literature now. And it's seen as quite a sophisticated art, but I think it's the particular artistic talent that those really talented early childhood educators who work with infants, what really sets them apart from other educators.

So expert infant toddler educators are really good noticers. Because they know that when you're working with very young children, it's more about noticing and less about children telling you. And so we're doing this listening and noticing as listening, but we're not listening for words, we're listening with all of our senses. Carlina Rinaldi has talked a lot about that active listening, that listening with all of our senses. And it's even more important when we're working with the youngest children.

So if we're going to really notice these things in infants, we need to abandon our task list, and our own intentions, and our own interpretations, and allow ourselves to really notice. And to do that, we have to allow ourselves to be surprised. Because if we go into an observation or we're just interested in watching what's happening, and if we go into that with our own agenda, what we expect to see, we won't notice that surprising and that unexpected. And that's where the magic is. That's where we really start to see what children are thinking about, what they're interested in, and what they're theorising about.

So much of the work that I did with infants in my research really brought to light just how much we don't notice and how much escapes us. And I had the absolute luxury of working with video, and set up in a room that just tracking how babies were encountering their educational environment. And it is a luxury, because we don't have the luxury of a video that we can go back and look at in real time and have an impact.

We have to just notice on the day. And of course, we can't notice everything. And actually, I think that's a really big caution, because we would exhaust children if we noticed absolutely everything and responded to it. And so we'd be exhausted ourselves, but also we would exhaust children. So I'm not suggesting that everything needs to be noticed, but if we're not tuned into noticing, we do miss a heck of a lot.

So I think one of the things as early childhood educators is we've been programmed to really look for big events and really big outcomes. And we've not been really trained to look for the minutiae and the really fine grain, in-the-moment things that infants are really famous for. If you miss it, you'll often not see it again. And some of the most remarkable things that I've been witness to, in working with infants, have really happened in a nanosecond.

So just imagine how much is going on that we are missing out on, and we aren't noticing. But when we train ourselves into this mode of noticing and listening, we see so much more. I think to do this, we need to be open to what we're looking for, and to be in this space where we're prepared to be surprised and not look for what we're expecting.

I caution that the infant educator's job is not about sitting down and noticing all day. And I really don't want people to think that the job really is about just sitting and watching, because it's a really active role. And the brain is really busy working, while you're watching children. But you're also being very responsive. And I'll talk about that a little bit later. But I think as John Dewey really stated many, many years ago, that to notice or to observe was not enough. We had to understand the significance of what we're noticing, and then we have to do something about it. So it really is a very intellectual role, and it's also a very physical role. So I think that's what I think separates us as infant educators in this art of noticing.

**[Karen Hope]:** Just thinking back to your research and videoing, I wondered whether you thought about when you started off as an educator, and how much better you are at it now. Or was there a little bit of, "Gee, if I knew this back then, or if I had these tools when I was teaching myself, how much different my work would have been, and my documentation would have been"?

**[Sandra Cheeseman]:** I do sort off, but then on the other hand, I think when I first graduated, I was full of life and energy and beans, and I think I was fabulous back then. I think I've learned a lot of bad things along the way, so I think it's a bit of give and take. But I think really, people new to early childhood, bringing a freshness and an energy that I think does wane over time, but we can certainly build and layer the understandings that we have of children. And yeah, I think if I really thought about it, there's a few things I might do quite differently.

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