

METHODOLOGY

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'Visual Vivencias' to understand subjectivity and affective connection in young children

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Abstract

This paper theorizes the concept of affective connection as a dimension of subjective sense. A methodological tool of 'Visual Vivencias' is used to analyse how young children create affective connections with adults and other young children. A cultural - historical approach is discussed to explain how young children develop significant and affective relations and connections with each other. Video observations were made of a baby and her family who live in Australia and with Mexican heritage. Two case examples are discussed, the first one involves a baby and her father and the second one is about two babies interacting. The analysis of the data includes moments of intensity, affective exchange and action and affective connections. This paper emphasises the importance of using visual methodologies to further understand babies' subjectivity as they affectively make sense of their world. Pedagogical implications are discussed such as the importance of educators having close affective interactions with young children.

Keywords: Cultural - historical theory, Subjectivity, Affect, Young children, Babies

Introduction

This paper analyses the topic of subjectivity from a cultural - historical perspective using qualitative methodology. A cultural - historical approach is used to develop the concept of subjectivity. The concept of subjectivity represents a new way for thinking that goes beyond dichotomies of social and individual; cognitive and affective (González Rey 2000, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2011a). The concept of subjectivity is used to understand how the subject expresses, creates and organizes different life experiences which is different from how the subject interiorizes an experience. Subjectivity is constituted in its own history - in a particular moment in time and a specific context in which the experience is constituted and generated (González Rey 2000).

Through using a qualitative research and video research methods, the researcher needs to make sense of everyday experiences in the moment that they occurs and in the moment of analysis (Quiñones and Fleer 2011). The methodological tool created was given the name of 'Visual Vivencias' as it captures moments of subjectivity and these moments are analysed as they are made sense subjectively by all the participants (Quiñones and Fleer 2011). The concept of 'subjective sense' relate to those experiences and how the subject is able to expressed and are configurated them and not as what the subject might be conscious or aware when this experience occurs (González Rey 2009). For example, being and have the experience of being aggressive is associated to those subjective

expressions that appear in the subject's which are produced symbolically. There is an inseparable relationship between symbolic and emotional productions when thinking of how the subject is subjectively generating specific actions. All these needs to be accounted when thinking of subjectivity as a complex system that is historical, social and cultural for the human psyche (González Rey 2011).

Video methods allow for understanding more how the subject expresses and generates multiple subjective senses - which are communicated through embodiment of symbolic senses through different symbolic forms such as affective voice, affective gaze, non-verbal communication, gestures and postures. This paper aims to explore two case examples, the first how a father and a baby affectively connect through different subjective senses. The second part how young children build affective connections over time. Through using these examples implications for pedagogy and future research are discussed.

Research on subjectivity and affect

Kirschner (2013) encourages social researchers to develop theories of subjectivity that acknowledges affective dimensions which includes feelings and emotions. When studying subjectivity is important that the researcher carefully chooses research methodologies that can include affect. In particular sociocultural researchers need to account "aesthetic - affective" dimensions of subjectivity (Kirschner 2013, p.233). Affect and subjectivity need to be studied as a whole and in connection with each other (Blackman 2010; Blackman and Venn 2010; Ticineto Clopugh 2010).

Very little research has been done in relation to how very young children experience everyday life across different societal institutions (Johansson 2011; Johansson and White 2011). When researching infant's everyday life is important so that the researcher is able to develop an ethical stance to researching young children (Elwick et al. 2014; Johansson 2011a). This can be developed by listening in and looking deeply at infant's experiences and the researcher must be aware of a "necessary tentativeness and humility concerning the limits of our insights" (Sumsion and Goodfellow 2012, p.315). Researchers investigating infants and toddlers worlds need to be sensitive about which research methods they use to investigate young children. It is also important that when analysing visual data, the researcher accounts that it is a challenging process and a "subjective and iterative endeavour" (White 2011, p.194). To understand subjectivity both methodologically and theoretically a cultural - historical approach is used to research how young children develop significant and affective relations and connections with each other.

Cultural - historical theory

Vygotsky (1998) explains how culture is a product of social life and development takes place in different social forms. In studying young infants, Vygotsky (1998) uses the concept of social situation of development which is connected to the care giving of adults. For very young children, their social situation of development it is very important for this period to develop close relationships with adults. At first instance, the adult care giving relates to infants biological needs. For example, infants need exclusive help of adults for situations such as feeding and changing clothes (Vygotsky 1998). The adults

(such as parents) that are in close relationship with the infant develop a special form of relationship, as this interactions are of close proximity and intimate. Vygotsky (1998 p.215) explains “a completely unique form of social relations develops between the child and the adults around him”.

The infant and caregiver interactions are very unique “he is forced to maximum interaction with adults... but this interaction is nonverbal interaction, frequently silent interaction of a completely unique type” (Vygotsky 1998 p.216). In this unique form of relationship, the infant perceives and acts upon his field of vision and this is strongly connected to affect (Vygotsky 1998). Infants are always in situation of cooperation with the caregiver and their field of vision - what they see- is the adult and connected to affect. This raises important questions for pedagogy as how the caregiver, in this case how the father caregiver and is in close and affective relationship with a baby. This is explored later in this paper. The concept of affective connections as a theoretical concept is developed in this paper to understand subjectivity.

Affective connections and subjectivity

In his writing about remembering, Vygotsky explains how children “accumulate experience with respect to his own remembering” (Vygotsky 1997, p.116). Children have the ability to remember previous experiences with non-human objects (Vygotsky 1997). Through these children establish certain connections to previous experiences, for example the use of knife for cutting bread. The child gives a meaning to an object and also learns how to use it and depending of which cultural purposes the child gives meaning to. Even so, this explanation relates to an object, this can be similar to humans and how we make connections with each other through our everyday experiences.

Vygotsky (1997) describes the concept of remembering in relation to how children develop higher mental functions such as memory and how children are able to transition from remembering, to making new connections, to using verbal language (words) and to giving qualitative properties to what words signify.

In extending these ideas, Vygotsky (1997) explains the relations between sign and meaning to understand the complex path and transitions that children make into making new connections and discoveries with different objects. He gives an example, when children play, children are keen to give names to objects which includes qualitative properties of an object - e.g. soft, joyful. In play, children act and use objects (for example, any object might represent medicine). Children remember well the symbolic meaning given to a specific object. In play, there is a connecting link between signs and meanings as the child gives an object a meaning, the child is able to give a story and tell complex stories about people and objects. In play, Vygotsky (1997 p.119) explains “what is essential is that a child does not make a mistake in his play”. The child is wilful and certain about the connections he/she makes in play.

Vygotsky (1998) explains how experiences are important for children as they learn to make new connections between previous and new experiences, this helps develop their senses. In respect to sense, Vygotsky refers to how children are able to intellectually and affectively sense and understand these experiences. The concept of sense integrates the dimensions of intellect and affect with how the subject produces, configures and expresses him/herself to the world (González Rey 2009).

The connections children make are important for how they learn to relate to humans and non-human objects. The child's perspective is important in how these symbolic meanings are created. Subjectivity allows to see the multiplicity of subjective forms children experience in everyday life. Sense expresses the unity of intellectual and affective processes related to the subject living experience (González Rey 2007).

González Rey (2002) explains human productions are organized according to the history of its protagonists. Therefore, a cultural - historical analysis of subjectivity is required in how young children in contemporary societies are able to make sense of different experiences that are subjective. Subjectivity is defined as a system of meanings and subjective senses that organize the psyche life of the subject and society (González Rey 2000).

Emotions become an important affective dimension to understand how children are able to intellectually and affectively connect through sensing the experiences they are part of. Emotions are produced subjectively "emotions become elements of sense acquiring a subjective expression...subjective sense as a type of emotional and self-organized unity of subjectivity that characterizes itself in relation to dominant meanings and emotions" (González Rey 2008 p.145). Subjective sense involves the subject's emotional and symbolic processes as the subject configures them as they appear in the moment of action.

Research in early childhood has not accounted this new perspective. Most research has focused on associating emotions to a certain quality such as children being angry or happy (Denham 2006) or children's ability to learn and reading the emotions of others (Berhenke et al. 2011; Bosacki 2007; Denham 1986, 2006; Denham and Brown 2010). Further, other researchers have used attachment theory to explain children's relationships with adults and how it influences their secure attachment relationships (Colmer et al. 2011; Cortazar and Herreros 2010; Raikes and Thompson 2006; Zanolli et al. 1997). When discussing emotions in this paper, it is discussed from an affective dimension and related to sense and subjective expressions, as previously explained.

Methods

"Visual methodologies allowed to visually interpreting and discussing how children learned and made sense of their emotions in the social situations they occurred" (Quiñones 2013 p.xxii).

The researcher needs to pay careful attention to what kinds of methodologies are chosen to capture affective dimensions of every day life. In this paper the focus is to understand human relationships and how we are able to affectively connect with each other. The methodological tool of 'Visual Vivencias' allows not only to capture data but to visually observe affective dimensions which includes subjects' generation and production of affective dimensions which includes feelings and emotions.

The concept of *perezhivanie* (*vivencia* in Spanish) is a cultural - historical concept used as a unit of analysis to understand affective dimensions of everyday experience. It is necessary to identify across the visual data young children's affective moments in their everyday life. The researcher captures it visually and different perspectives and attitudes towards certain situations are revealed. This concept is described by Vygotsky (1997) as,

The emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] arising from any situation or from any aspect of his [sic] environment determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child ... each children has a different attitude to the

situations. Or, as we might put it, each of the children experienced the situation in a different way (Vygotsky 1994 p.339 – 340).

A visual methodology is used to capture *momentitos* of intense living experiences made by young children. Video observations were used and still images of specific *momentitos* were taken from the video for further analysis. Video digital observations create a visual means to observe and study children in their everyday settings and facilitate later discussions with the participants (Fleer 2008).

Video can act as a form of dialogue between participants. In this process, the researcher shows a moment that was lived and is re-lived by the participants. This iterative process provides deeper understanding of subjective senses of a past experience. Another iterative moments is produced when the reader looks at the visual images and provide another level of interpretation. This provides another layer of analysis of subjectivity and the affective dimensions of an experience can be understood and sensed visually.

The examples selected were from everyday practices in a family context. The researcher meet with parents to discuss how they felt about observing the video. The moment of observation allowed parents to focus on the experience itself and their comments show a moment of configuration of the experience.

Screen images were selected for discussion and the filmmaker (researcher) focused on capturing family practices. In case example one, a father and her daughter are interacting, father holds the six week born baby, Silvana and the second one, is about two babies playing, Silvana and her friend Fleur. The parents in the research were shown the video segments and they commented on the interactions between themselves and their young children. The discussions of these findings were shared by the researcher to avoid imposing her own interpretations and to create dialogue that enriched the analysis which is itself was a very subjective process.

In relation to family practices, Hedegaard and Fleer (2009) explains how families have *practice traditions* and *values* that are sometimes inconsistent with other family practices and this creates conflicts in these gives conditions to how children learn. Hedegaard refers to motives as “longer-lasting dynamics that giving directedness to a person’s life and characterizing his or her own personality across different institutions” (Hedegaard 2005 p.192).

It is important to note how young children have strong *motives* that characterize their affective *intentions* to engage in an activity and practice they are part of. These strong *motives* can place *demands* to children and adults, and from *demands* conflicts may arise “from not been able to handle objects, also conflicts between different intentions of persons in the activities, and between different motives related to different activities in the practice” (Hedegaard and Fleer 2009 p. 260).

These theoretical concepts are important when analysing how young children subjectively create affective connections with others as they share their motives in the activity they are part of and how they might also place their own demands towards others. The next section provides case examples on how these was created with very young children.

Research context

Ethics approval by Monash University was granted. Parents gave consent for their children to participate and gave permission to use the examples, images and analysis of these findings. As a researcher, it was hoped to create what Sumsion and Goodfellow

(2012) explain, research that acknowledges the need of being tentative and humble with the analysis of the research data. The findings are tentative, they are not fixed or certain they are provisional. As babies in this research grow up they might reveal another aspect of how they see themselves. As a researcher, it was hope to gain babies consent through writing the findings and conclusions in a humble way. The researcher needs to be humble in reviewing the data and the data analysis needs to be done in close dialogue with parents when participants don't speak, like babies in this research. There are elements of the data that remain unknown and in the limits of our own insights (Sumsion and Goodfellow 2012) and the researcher's own subjectivity remains in making claims about it. The awareness of all these issues are important to be considered and hopefully this has been done in an ethical and respectful way for the participants.

The aim of the research was to investigate the everyday life of young children and how babies affectively relate to their worlds. The everyday life of baby Silvana was recorded at home. The participants in the study lived in Mornington Peninsula in Australia. Silvana's family heritage is Mexican. At the time of the research, Silvana's father was a stay home dad, self-employed and was equally involved of caring for Silvana.

Fleur was Silvana's friend. Fleur's family consisted of her mother who was Australian and his father was Dutch. Silvana and Fleur met in mother's group since they were two months old. Mother's group is organized by the local council and it's a space where mothers meet to interact with each other and share experiences of being first time mothers. In the second example, Fleur met Silvana for a play date in Silvana's house.

Subjectivity is constituted in action and our histories involve many people and characters (Díaz Gómez and González Rey 2005). A methodology that captures young children's subjectivity sense is discussed with these two case examples. Two visual examples were selected to show how baby Silvana who is six weeks old (example one) and ten months old (example two) affectively relates to her father and her friend Fleur. The two example occurs in Silvana's family home.

Results

In order to understand young children, in this case, the focus child, Silvana's subjective sense and how she relates to others, visual narratives are used to account and exemplify how babies make affective connections. Affective connections with significant others are made through symbolic senses and productions through gestures, gaze, touch, postures and tone of voice babies connect to others. The following case examples were selected because as Vygotsky (1998) explains they were identified as being of unique type, were non-verbal interactions and forced a maximum interaction between adults and infants.

Case example 1: affective connection

The first example takes place at Silvana's home. This takes place in an afternoon and it's a moment of contemplation between Silvana and her father. This example develops in a period of one minute. This interaction begins silently as the father looks intensively at baby Silvana. They are sitting in a couch and looking at each other. Silvana responds, looks back and exchanges gaze. The father is smiling as he holds Silvana's dummy. He takes in and out the dummy, when she opens her mouth, the father takes the dummy. The father is smiling all through the interaction as he pretend to put in and out the

dummy in Silvana's lips. Silvana responds to this fun and teasing game by opening and closing her mouth, and by making sounds of her own.



Image 1 and 2: *Moments of intensity*

The father is playing with dummy and then takes it out from Silvana's mouth. The father opens his mouth and suddenly Silvana imitates her father which is also opening and closing his mouth. Silvana opens her mouth when the dummy is placed closer to her mouth. They are intensively looking at each other.



Image 3 and 4: *Moments of affective exchange*

Silvana says: “agu”

Father: “You want to talk don’t you”... (This occurs while he continues to put in and out dummy in mouth)

Silvana opens and closes her mouth and says affirming “mmm” as she closely looks at her father.



Image 5 and 6: *Moments of affective connection*

They now have focused on a sound and father say “jjuuu” and then Silvana “agu”. Silvana babbles and makes a sound “mm”. The father continues saying agu, Silvana moves her head to a side and the father puts dummy inside. And they never stop looking and contemplating each other silently as Silvana sucks her dummy.

In this example we can visually observe how the father and Silvana affectively relate to each other and this silent interaction develop from *intensively* to *affectively exchanging* to *affectively connecting*. At a very young age, Silvana is making strong affective connections with her father and her immediate world is about him. As Vygotsky (1998) explains young children develop a close relationship with those around them and this example shows the different moments of how the experience is affectively sensed and produced by them.

In this example, Silvana makes an affective connection with her father and her father with her. These emotions of love are subjectively express by the father in the interview, as they acquire a subjective expression that is communicated silently by both participants. This experience can be seen as another event in the everyday life of a baby. It is vital to pay close attention as the analysis becomes an iterative and sensitive process which is made subjectively and is characterised by multiple senses - non-human (dummy) and human (father/baby) made through the moment of making an affective connection. Silvana and her father make this connection silently and through creatively imitating gestures such as opening and closing their mouths.

This experience contains cultural meanings that are subjective. For example, Silvana's father mentions how these experience is about having fun and is a game of teasing. Through being playful about taking dummy and putting it in and out, Silvana is able to communicate a strong motive of having it back through saying twice "mmm". The father senses this as verbally communicating and he says "you want to talk don't you", which the subjective interpretation made by the father who closely relates to what Silvana which is affectively demanding his attention from him. As Hedegaard and Fler (2009) explain demands arise between different intentions of persons and strong motives are characterized in engaging in different practices. Because teasing is a cultural practice valued through having fun and playing, the father teases Silvana with a dummy, an object that Silvana has created an affective relation and at the same time engaging with her father in an affective way.

Silvana's father commented on this video clip, "I am teasing (or joking) with her, I love her, I am looking at a part of me... *La estoy vacilando, la amo, ella es una parte de mi ser...*" Through this comment it can be interpreted how the father is able to subjectively sense her experience with her daughter. The different moments to the family practices to show different affective dimensions such as having moments of intensity and moments of affective connection between parents and children, as the father expresses children are part of us.

These meanings are organized and configured in different forms when doing the analysis with participants. The symbolic productions made from participants are beyond explanation. There are many symbolic and emotional productions made as the experience develops, and how the affective connection is made. The affective connection becomes stronger and more significant as the participants look more closely at each other, there are many moment of silence where the participants develop strong affects of love and appreciation which become "overwhelming" to verbalise as Silvana's father comments.

Silvana and her father exchange looks and gaze with much intensity as they develop affective connections, this a strong motive which is love, the love parents have for children, and the love babies are able to express through reciprocally gazing at each other. Silvana as little as six weeks learns about 'gaze' is an important dimension of affectively connecting with people.

The following case example takes place between two infants and as they become more mobile different symbolic and emotional productions lead to developing strong affective connections.

Case example 2: building affective connections

In the following example, Silvana is establishing a relationship with Fleur for the past few months. Silvana has learned from her family home that exchanging looks and gazing when interacting with others is important when developing significant affective connections. This was seen in the last example with his father where she subjectively sense and configured through intimate exchange with his father. This example contains *moments of affective action and of building affective connections*. This example shows the importance of the time needed for infants to be familiar with each other and in this interaction it is captured how it is believed an affective connection is created.

The example takes place in Silvana's home, her mother is filming and Fleur is a guest. Silvana has already established a relationship with her mother and Fleur is familiar with both of them. Silvana is ten months and Fleur is nine months. Fleur is already crawling

while Silvana is not yet. This is important as Fleur has more freedom to move around while Silvana needs to wait for Fleur to move closely to her.

Silvana and Fleur are playing on the mat. Silvana looks at Fleur while she plays with an object which she is chewing. Fleur is looking at something else, an open box with toys, then at an electronic toy that makes music. Silvana moves her hands and is making noise to what might mean to get the attention of Fleur. Very quickly Silvana leans back to what seems touch Fleur's feet and at the same time Fleur turns to see Silvana's mother and gives her back to Silvana. Fleur positions herself in front of the adult.



Image 7 and 8: *Moments of affective action*

Fleur positions herself in front of the researcher giving her back to Silvana and Silvana stays at the back. This is a good opportunity for Silvana to touch Fleur. Silvana touches Fleur several times and Fleur smiles. Soon after Silvana finishes, Fleur moves and Silvana leans back to touch Fleur. Fleur is looking at a box of toys and she grabs one.



Image 9 and 10: *Moments of building affective connections*

Silvana touches Fleur then Fleur turns around again and chews a toy and eventually after 56 s had passed Fleur kisses Silvana for a second. Silvana's mum comments: "Fleur kissed you". Then Fleur claps and Silvana keeps smiling and Fleur say "ahh". Eventually, Fleur crawls to get more toys and Silvana observes what Fleur is doing.

In analysing this interaction there are different *moments of affective action* though patting, touching, kissing and intensively gazing. The infants have different affective attitudes toward this situation. In this everyday life playful activity, they both develop strong affective intentions and purposes for what they want to do. Silvana wants close interaction and eye contact from Fleur. Fleur is interested in exploring the new objects and in making connections with the adult that is taking care of them, Silvana's mother. The way they are positioning creates different ways of active participation and creating *moments of building affective connections*.

In different moments, Fleur has different motives from Silvana's. Fleur wants to interact with objects and exchange looks with Silvana's mother. She is also able to move freely as she is crawling too. Fleur's mother comments on how these two little friends are different from each other.

"I think Silvana is more intense, there is a lot of expression and passion in terms of what she wants to express and what she wants others to do to join in. I think Fleur's concentration is shorter than Silvana's. Fleur is quite carefree, you could come or go and it would all be fine and dandy" (Fleur's mother).

Silvana in this example can be seen as very expressive and passionate and wants Fleur to join her in and almost share the same motive. The meanings they create are subjective as they are interpreted they can have different meanings to the infants. However, their actions are produced symbolically and emotionally and they progress as they subjectively sense each other's intentions. On the other hand, mothers get to know their children well and Fleur's mother also knows well Silvana. Fleur is relaxed and is able to account for Silvana's intentions. Fleur accounts Silvana by kissing her.

It is important to acknowledge actions as part of subjective sense because "the processes of shaping a living system of actions, as in a subjective production" (González Rey 2011, 2011a p.272). Babies' *affective actions* enabled them to create an affective connection between each other. For Silvana the forms of establishing an affective connection involved attention from Fleur. Silvana's established this connection non-verbally through touching and exchanging looks which is an important value when interacting with her family. Fleur was able to take upon her perspective at the end and she finally gave a kiss and said "aahh", this moments of action, Silvana is able to responds affectively through smiling. Both infant have strong will and affective motives and these placed demands towards each other, babies like Silvana and Fleur are able to resolve it in affective forms. They learned how their world consists of relationships with significant adults but also with significant others like them.

Their subjective sense in this example relates to their ability to read and interpret each other's affective intentions through the actions and symbolic productions created in the moment of affective action. Practices and activities progress over time and because they are experienced intellectually and emotionally actions allow us researchers to understand subjectivity in how young children learn the 'art of reciprocity' with others.

The 'art of reciprocity' involves "the value of possessing awareness of how to engage with others with all parts of your being- including how children feel and think about each other and about what they play" (Ridgway et al. 2015). Through this example, Silvana in order to engage with others has to subjectively sense by being patient in getting a response back from Fleur. A minute can be a long time for these babies and it this example shows how time is an important element in babies building on affective connections with each other.

Discussion

The findings of case example one reveal ways of participating and interacting that are important to considered for pedagogy. One important finding was the father used teasing to interact with her daughter. Teasing games has been found a form of fun, joking or trying to playfully scare a child; it has been considered verbal play and important in supporting children's development (Göncü et al. 2000). It has been found further research is needed to show the impact it has in the development of children (Göncü et al. 2000).

In this example, it was founded how the father's pedagogy were shown through the different affective moments - intensity, exchange and connecting. Teasing created a fun and affective form of connecting with the baby. Through giving and verbally teasing, the father developed a complex social interaction between a very young baby. These moments also provided the father teaching a teasing game with her daughter and putting in the dummy in an out of her mouth. Silvana on the other hand learned to interact and be patient and she and demonstrated keen attention demonstrated by Silvana. These are important learning dispositions as teasing allows to imagine symbolically with object and others. This affective moments that were presented with the father helped Silvana build other affective connections with others such as Fleur. In everyday life there are many affective moments parent have with their children and the way they interact serves building on foundations on how to interact with others.

In case example two, Silvana and Fleur create an affective connection through different moment of action and connection. In these moments the parent is present, however not directly interacting but by being there with them and letting them get to know each other. The mother comments to Silvana how Fleur's kissed her, being this an important moment were they are building affective connections.

For educators, such as parents is important that babies are able to interact in close proximity just like Silvana and Fleur. This helps them build affective connections with others than their own family. Even so, Silvana and Fleur are ten and nine months, they can teach us how each have a different way of affectively connecting, producing many different senses through actions and being able to reciprocate, engage and be aware of others. Affective gaze, touch, smiles are affective actions that enable young children for creating a close affective connections and should be valued as a form of being with others.

Conclusion

In order to gain young children's perspective is important to understand the nature of their experiences and how adults give time and space for them to build on affective connections.

Through having visual methodologies allowed to capture multiple perspectives - those of significant adults, parents and those of young children through interpreting and analysing subjectively their subjective senses.

Through analysing visual narratives the researcher gradually analyse the different manifestations of affective connection babies make through different expressions and productions. This research shows how significant people are such as parents not only care for babies moreover in how they create and support many affective moments. These moments are important in building affective relationships with babies. More research is needed in how educators are able to recognize and encourage moments of affective connections such as the ones identified here. This paper has shown babies learn to interact and communicate affectively with adults and other babies.

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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