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Babysong revisited: communication with babies through song

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Abstract

The Babysong Project arose out of the Baby Room Project and its aims included supporting baby room practitioners to develop 'communicative musicality' (Malloch & Trevarthen 2009), extending research knowledge about baby room practices and helping practitioners to explore opportunities to question and adapt their own ways of working with babies in their care. Six years on, we reflect on the project and consider the significance and sustainability of what might have been achieved. We also probe whether there are further areas for development. We conclude that while there were many positive outcomes, we recognise the challenges of sustaining and nurturing the confidence of practitioners and the desirability of addressing the organisational aspects of the initiative to promote the embedding of practice. There is a real necessity for such projects, often involving radical challenges to previously held attitudes and practices, to be funded over longer periods of time. We also acknowledge the rich, untapped potential of using song to connect with families and carers.

Keywords: baby rooms; singing; song; communicative musicality; reflective practice

Introduction

'Babysong' arose out of work with practitioners to develop practice in baby rooms in English day nurseries. From the findings of earlier Baby Room Projects, this new project was developed that focused specifically on singing. This involved capitalising on the value of 'song' and importantly, vocal interactions and behaviours associated with singing, to maximise the emotional, bonding dimension within communications between practitioners and the babies in their settings. This project, entitled 'Babysong' was funded by a charitable foundation and offered to 15 local baby rooms in South East England during the 2015–2016 academic year. It encompassed 10 sessions, visits to settings and a dissemination conference. In this paper, we revisit the project and reflect on its value and significance as well as the challenges it presented.

Singing matters

In all cultures it would seem, parents sing with their babies. This is most likely to have begun in the distant past with communities carrying their infants whilst foraging, as a way of giving attention to their babies in a multimodal way, the singing synchronising with the rhythmic movements (Trehub, 2021). Contemporary cultures have lullabies and children's songs which have often been handed down through the generations, and, as with any oral tradition, become slightly altered with each sharing. They form a rich seam within cultures (Mithin, 2005; Trehub, 2001). Whatever the cultural differences in these songs, there are certain universals in terms of their features and characteristic. 'Musical idioms differ in which acoustic features they employ and which

emotions they engage, but they all draw from a common suite of psychological responses to sound' (Mehr et al., 2019: 5). While acknowledging that universals in music are hard to pin down, Mehr et al cautiously suggest the existence of clusters of correlated behaviours, such as slow soothing lullabies sung by a mother to a child or lively rhythmic songs sung in an energising manner (ibid). Songs such as these, it could be argued, are designed to aid bonding and communication, to relax and soothe babies, or to entertain and amuse them. If we think beyond 'song' simply as an object or product, however, we see that 'music' and 'musicality' have a much more subtle, and significant part to play.

Babies are hyper-sensitive to the rhythms, melodies, and terms of speech long before they understand the meanings of actual words. Indeed, there is a weight of evidence to show that babies much prefer listening to 'infant-directed speech' ('IDS') than to normal speech (Mithin, 2005; Trehub, 2001). A characteristic of this kind of speech is that it is slow and pitched higher in the range with exaggerated 'ups and downs' in pitch. This form of IDS, known as 'motherese' is often accompanied by larger, exaggerated facial expressions and movements of the head. There is evidence that this kind of 'musical' speech is universal, regardless of language (ibid). Babies are, it seems, predisposed to engage in this way – to respond to the rhythmic elements of music and other regular sounds, to exhibit tempo flexibility, and demonstrate positive displays of affect towards music (Zentner & Eerola, 2010), so this is not altogether surprising. In turn, motherese can seamlessly slip into what has been called 'Infant Directed Singing' or what Dionyssiou (2009) called 'Singese'.

Babies appear to be even more responsive to the sung interactions of their carers than they are to motherese. This is the case whether they are 'known songs', made up songs or just simply musical sounding noises (Trehub, 2001). Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) coined the helpful term 'communicative musicality' to describe exchanges with infants that help to create emotional connections and develop intersubjectivity. The term 'musicality' as opposed to 'music' is specific here. Savage and colleagues (2021) define musicality as a set of traits that allow us to perceive, produce, and appreciate music. They emphasise the deep links between production, perception, prediction, and social reward arising from repetition, synchronisation, and harmonisation of rhythms and pitches. This is important, as the dyadic nature of communicative musicality means that infants, as well as perceiving, and imitating sounds in response to those made by the carer, will often take the initiative. Indeed, babies' vocalisations that are rewarded by an imitative response from the carer give those infants a powerful sense of agency. Gratier and Magnier (2012) make the point that infants have a strong desire to share meaningful experience. They *intend* meanings and they do so through interpersonal coordinated timing that is motivated, from birth.

Mithin (2005) suggests that music has a developmental, if not evolutionary, priority over language. As well as contributing crucially to an important developing relationship, these kinds of interactions are seen as beneficial, developmentally, for the baby. They activate large swathes of both sides of the brain and help to foster language development and emotional well-being (Goddard Blythe, 2011; Young, 2008). Trainor and Schimdt (2003) speculate that they may have an effect on the brain's emotive processing functions, before the development of language skills.

There seem to be distinct benefits too for parents and carers in this kind of communication. The importance of this was recognised by Goouch and Powell in their summary of the Baby Room Project (Goouch & Powell, 2015). MacKinlay and Baker (2005) specifically looked at creating positive experiences for first-time mothers through lullaby singing. They concluded that seeing their babies react and respond to their singing creates a sense of empowerment and achievement. This was exemplified in the Limerick Project where Carolan and colleagues (2012) considered the benefits of mothers singing with their babies while they were in utero and when newly born. This research found that singing lullabies benefited the mothers in four distinct ways:

1. It enabled them to feel **closer** to their infants;
2. It developed their **confidence** with their babies;

3. It enabled them to make **connections** with others;
4. It provided them with an additional tool for **communication** post-birth.

Carolan et al. (2012)

It was the Baby Room Project findings of Goouch and Powell (2015) that gave rise to the idea of a Babysong Project.

The context for 'Babysong'

In 2003, a Review of Literature was compiled to inform the Birth to Three Matters Framework (David et al., 2003). A significant conclusion from this review identified 'the paucity of research on the processes and practices of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) for children from birth to three' (David et al., 2003: 140). Despite the expansion of daycare for babies, including the relatively speedy rise of private provision and new multi-nursery businesses, at the time it was reported anecdotally that the notion of a 'baby room' was relatively unknown, with baby room practices apparently invisible more broadly in society. Within the research field, where policies and the ethics of care for babies were discussed, Dahlberg and Moss (2005) queried whether baby rooms were simply 'enclosures' to achieve standardised outcomes and to be provided while parents worked; a technical approach to ECEC. Research attention was also being given to emotional well-being in daycare (see for example, Elfer, 2005). More recently, wide-ranging research now exists across the world, identifying, in various research fields, and drawing attention to how babies are cared for in baby rooms, who the carers are, and how both babies and carers are supported by national policies, education and training and research dissemination (e.g. Goouch & Powell, 2013; Harrison & Sumsion, 2014; Li, Quiñones & Ridgway, 2017; White & Dalli, 2017).

As our own research into baby room principles, policies and practice evolved, our understanding of the concept of 'care' was supported by Tronto's discussion of the power, politics and an ethic of care in relation to care-giving and care-receiving (Tronto, 1993). Noddings' philosophical approach to the discussion of care and 'the receptivity of caring', requiring inward reflection as a part of critical thinking, was also influential (Noddings, 2012: 242). These political and philosophical debates have been an essential part of each of the subsequent project designs and pedagogical frameworks.

As a result of our concerns and research interests, we began to examine how babies were cared for in daycare settings and developed the project called 'The Baby Room'. Our focus was centred on the people who were employed to care for babies and understanding where knowledgeable, attentive and reflective practice existed. We aimed to raise awareness of the professional needs of those working in baby rooms in daycare. We created a bespoke pedagogical approach where practitioners were offered opportunities to extend their own knowledge and understanding through reflection and discussion (Goouch & Powell, 2013).

An integral part of our Baby Room Project was the examination of themes of relationships and talk and significant early findings were that 'functions' of care – that is feeding, changing, washing and putting babies down to sleep as well as cleaning and tidying the baby room – occupied much of baby room practitioners' time. Additionally, we found that the benefits of intimacy and close interactions between adults and babies were not always evident and that talking to babies was not always a naturally occurring behaviour. Times to enjoy 'stillness' with babies, opportunities for 'lulling' babies and for 'being in the moment' with babies appeared to be rare within busy baby rooms. This rarity was noted and often lamented by the practitioners in our project.

We connected the desire for calm intimacy with the pedagogical and philosophical writings of the German educator Friedrich Froebel. In common with contemporary theorists (see Malloch & Trevarthen, 2008; Zentner & Eerola, 2010), Froebel believed that babies and young children possess an innate musicality that unfolds and is drawn out through human connection and becomes

intersubjective – sharing and empathising with emotional states. Froebel suggested that songs that are familiar to babies have a special appeal. He also argued that the content of a song should attend to a child's interests and experience, their education and their developing sense of self in the world; they need to hear songs that reflect and value their family and community cultures and heritages as well as learning to recognise and respect other people's (Dyke, 2019).

Froebel valued singing as a holistic, relational aspect of play and creative human endeavor, but it was more than a pedagogical tool. He believed that singing could enable babies' carers (primarily referring to mothers) to surface latent feelings of love and care towards their children and to help the child develop and process their sense of self, and understanding of that selfhood in relationship with others, the environment and the universe. In Froebel's philosophy of 'Life Unification' – or the 'Spherical Law' – and by extension, his pedagogy – a child's self-activity, when nurtured and guided by a responsive carer, can mediate 'the externalization of the inner and the internalization of the outer' (Wasmuth, 2020: 58).

Singing in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Contexts

The care of babies outside of the home, in daycare centres, has changed dramatically during the last century from being a state provision for so-called 'needy' children to a now predominantly private provision from which families, with state support, can purchase daycare. A key rationale for the Babysong Project was to challenge what was perceived as the growing functionalism in baby care already noted in the context of the Baby Room Project (Goouch & Powell, 2013; Rock, Trainor & Addison, 1999/2010). This is especially troubling considering the time that babies and young children can spend in nurseries – as long as 50 hours a week. The huge benefits of singing with babies as we have established have long been recognised. Much of the research in this field, however, has focused on the domestic context on the babies and their immediate carers – mostly the mothers (e.g. Carolan et al., 2012; MacKinlay & Baker, 2005). It seemed an important and logical development to extend these kinds of behaviours and approaches to ECEC, building on this natural, but at the same time rather special kind of communication between babies and baby room practitioners, but this time beyond the home.

The aim of the Babysong Project then was to work with practitioners from baby rooms in local nursery settings to explore and apply theories on the benefits of singing with babies, and in particular introducing ideas and approaches around 'communicative musicality', in ECEC settings. We adapted the findings of the Limerick Project (Carolan et al., 2012) outlined above, to create a theoretical framework for our own project entitled 'The 4 Cs' (Figure 1). It shaped our work with the participants, exploring ways in which singing and song could promote these dimensions (see also: Young, 2017, 2018).
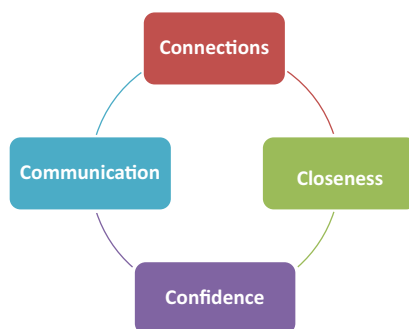

Figure 1. The 4 Cs.

The Babysong Project's independent evaluator identified a raft of positive outcomes from the project (Barnes, 2016), and six years on, we reflect on these and consider the significance and importantly, the sustainability of what might have been achieved. We also probe whether there

are further areas for development not encompassed in the project at the time. The purpose of this paper then is to look back over the six years since the completion of the project and reconsider the worth and ambition of the Babysong Project in terms of the benefits and the challenges but also avenues for further research and development.

Methodological context

The Babysong Project was designed to gather and co-construct research data through dialogic professional development events, with a view to participants applying their understanding back in their settings. The group became its own unique community in which we were all insiders and as researchers we adopted ethnographic principles to reflect on the small culture we co-created.

There were 10 half-day sessions, each of which took place over a morning in a university building in close proximity to the 15 early childhood settings. Participants from these settings each worked with babies and toddlers whose ages ranged from 3 to 24 months. Although each session was framed in advance by the researchers and (for all sessions after the first) in response to the group's interest and dynamics, the dialogic nature of the approach was such that fluidity became inherent with interactions and interjections that occurred 'in the moment'. Doubtless, as the project designers we retained overall control of the direction of travel, largely steering the course of actions and dialogue; but the participants were actively involved in making the project's loose frame come to life and shift its course over time. Everyone's diverse and unique knowledge and understanding were appreciated and valued, as well as challenged, and conveyed through verbal and non-verbal contributions; musicality; body language and movement; as well as exploratory and creative play with the voice, spaces, resources, materials and peers.

Ethical considerations included both pre- and post-project reflections on power, authenticity, interpretation and transferability from our little group to the worlds of work in which the participants were frequently constrained in terms of professional autonomy.

A spectrum of 'Song'

The key focus of the Babysong Project was clearly song itself as a vehicle for 'communicative musicality', and ultimately for promoting meaningful interactions between our practitioners and the babies in their care to move relationships beyond mere 'functionality'. As touched on above, a key consideration was to explore what was actually meant by the notion of 'song'. Savage and co-authors observe that: 'The human capacity for song entails vocal production learning: the ability to imitate and learn vocal patterns beyond our species-typical repertoire of screams, laughter, and so on' (Savage et al., 2021: 5). Early in the project, it was clear that participants already had a wealth of nursery rhyme and play-song repertoire at their fingertips which was regularly drawn on in their practice. While we wanted to embrace these 'received' or 'known' songs of the culture, we nevertheless wanted to move beyond conventional ideas of 'song' and include recognition of a wide range of musical vocal utterances which could foster 'communicative musicality', even utterances that simply had the potential to become musical, to take on the characteristics of music. Multiple repetitions of a spoken phrase for example, can cause it to sound sung rather than spoken (Deutsch et al., 2011). To that end a 'Spectrum of 'song'' was created (Figure 2) to express the idea that musical communication can be broadly defined.
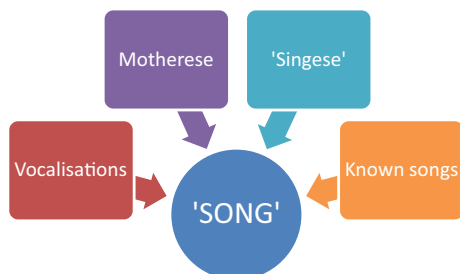

Figure 2. The spectrum of 'song'.

'Song' in this context covers a range of vocal 'musical' utterances. These utterances, or *vocalisations*, include any sounds that can be made with the human voice. They are not dependent on words, but rather on the sheer joy of exploration and experimentation of timbres, pitches, dynamics tempi. As we have seen, ordinary speech, exaggerated in pitch movements in particular, accompanied by big gestures and facial expressions, can become the musical speech of *motherese* which, in turn can be manipulated into the spontaneous, extended rhythmic and melodic phrasing that characterises what Dionyssiou calls *singese* (Dionyssiou, 2009). What we originally called 'formal songs' are those that we learn from our culture or that we 'acquire' as 'products'. These have been renamed '*known songs*' in the latest iteration of the framework (see: Young, 2017, 2018 for previous iterations). Whilst these were an essential part of the repertoire, in order to validate the more informal, spontaneous aspects of musical **communication** it was important that practitioners saw them in the broader context of 'The Spectrum'. Within our sessions therefore, we wanted to particularly highlight these first three components – vocalisations and motherese as potential material for 'singese'. In workshop style, we explored making *vocalisations* and experimented with ways of turning *motherese* – through playful, imaginative and spontaneous approaches – into *singese*, with a view to integrating them into regular interactions with the babies.

During the Project, it felt important to not only develop the conceptual understanding of the practitioners in this way, but also to nurture the kind of confidence needed to engage in these kinds of interactions. The practitioners came from varied backgrounds and often lacked formal qualifications, musical training and experience. Much had to be done therefore to develop **confidence** (Figure 1). Above all, we needed to boost the skills and confidence of participants in the kind of spontaneous vocalisation and song-making that communicative musicality involves. We sought to do this practically as described, with a view to not only gaining first-hand experience across The Spectrum of 'Song' (Figure 2), but also to developing awareness of and alertness to every opportunity for interacting with their babies. Participants were then encouraged to apply their learning in their own baby room settings.

We had some success with this:

> '*I noticed when I did that thing about imitating the sounds of the babies, he started imitating my sounds and was looking at me as if to say, 'let's have some more'. His started to become more and more high pitched and excited and we began to experiment with different sounds and communicate with each other and we had a great time together.*'
>
> Babysong participant comment in Barnes (2016).

Clearly the success of such a project is entirely dependent on the willingness, engagement and skills of the participants in the first instance. It was crucially important in this context that participants realised the value of their existing generic skills in observing, listening and communicating effectively with young children. These skills together with a confident and perceptive knowledge of the child would enable them to recognise opportunities for musical engagement in the first place, and then to capitalise on those opportunities.

Engaging participants as learners

Our direct focus in The Babysong Project then was the practitioners themselves. Indeed, in all our Baby Room projects we had sought to discover who baby room practitioners were, their levels of training, what their practice looked and sounded like, and what they understood about baby room practice. We were aware that where practitioners did have qualifications (including to degree level) and/or experience, they were mainly deployed to work with older children in daycare settings, they were mainly deployed to work with older children. We were also aware that baby room

'practitioners', and Babysong 'participants' displayed an evident hunger for participation in a project to further their own learning. As already mentioned, The Babysong Project design required a specific, collaborative, form of learning encounter. From the beginning it was a priority to establish ourselves (tutors/researchers) as co-learners rather than 'experts' in practice. It was very clear that participants had experience in practice which was invaluable to this 'insider' learning community and to the Project. This was essential in establishing a respectful knowledge-building community.

The intention was to share with participants relevant research information in relation to the care and development of babies, with a focus on the importance of singing with babies in their care. At the same time, we were at pains to make it clear that, as participants in the project they would be expected to be active in terms of their own development and the development of their practice, rather than simply recipients of information. A key element of this kind of approach is that of dialogic engagement (Goouch & Powell, 2013). The Vygotskian notion of talk as enacting thought – making sense of thought – through language, through talk encounters was central to this way of working (Vygotsky, trans. Kozulin, 1991). Although 'time for dialogue' sounds like a very simple pre-requisite for a project, in practice it is complex and difficult to achieve, and the temptation is always to provide a 'course' with predetermined content and predetermined outcomes.

In this project, although there were patterns of engagement, a timetable of sorts, over time this invariably became shaped by pursuance of the participants' interest in sharing stories. Participants were asked not only to recount their everyday practice but also to engage in critical evaluation of it through their recounts, thus beginning to both question the 'everydayness' of their encounters with babies and theorise their practice. For example, while many reported that they 'constantly' sang with, around and to babies in their care, they were challenged to consider and explain why they did so, what or who influenced this practice, why particular songs and rhymes had been chosen, and what the babies did in response. The value of this model – acknowledging the significance of practice knowledge, while creating a critical, and sometimes creative space for different views and alternative ways of looking at practice opportunities – has become a significant feature of the Baby Room Project work more broadly and was applied to the Babysong Project specifically. It has variously been described as 'rumination . . . chewing the cud of experience' (Claxton, 2000: 39–40); developing 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998); and offering opportunities to discuss our 'ways of seeing' practice, considering influences and acknowledging that ways of working are ' . . . affected by what we know or what we believe' (Berger, 1972: 8). For example, many participants were familiar with 'motherese' as an intuitive conversational practice with babies without knowing the term itself, and without knowledge of associated research or the connections with musical dimensions such as pitch, rhythm and tempo, and those between music and language development. Such knowledge is important – as both support for practice and support in partnerships with families. Essential requirements for this way of working are time – for practitioners to be away from their setting, the creation of a trusting environment to develop confidence and the opportunity for continuity of engagement. The Babysong Project sessions provided an additional layer of expertise, offering pathways into research literature and discussing evidence from different fields of research to entice participants into dialogic practices; to find their place amongst it; to establish meaning; and to find ways to articulate it in their own terms.

In the Babysong Project, singing together, which sometimes included making unfamiliar or playful sounds that might not have been previously construed by participants as 'singing', was an additional element to consider. As the project progressed, expectations of the participants as learners were raised and some found this challenging. They were invited to go further from their everyday practices, to engage babies and themselves (importantly) musically, while simultaneously we were challenging their notions of 'song'. If 'human understanding is a kind of quest . . . interrogative in form . . . .and premised on uncertainty' (Nixon, 2012: 111) then this project helped by questioning fixed notions, challenging the limitations of existing repertoires, and debating ways of engaging in the intimacy of baby room practice. This, by its nature, frequently

involved the discomfort of uncertainty – with discussions, suggestions, theories, research evidence but without a template or design for practice. Participants were tempted away from the familiar – from what they described as the 'everydayness' of practice (in this project that was frequently nursery rhymes) towards a different understanding of what was essentially 'communicative musicality' (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). This constituted a new layering of professional knowledge to support their personal engagements with babies.

Discussion

'Change' is both personal and organisational (Shaw, 2015). Our focus had to be ostensibly focused on the personal as it was with individuals that we were directly working. Furthermore, the notion of professional identity cannot be separated from that of personal identity. Professional identity is not simply a matter of a role being adopted in the context of an occupation; it is about who we are (Lightfoot & Frost, 2015).

A key challenge with the project related to learners' engagement. While the majority of participants were enthusiastic learners, one or two had clearly not enlisted of their own volition, but rather had been required to attend – they were 'conscripts' rather than 'volunteers'. As previously mentioned, this potentially had a profound impact on the level of their involvement in each session as well as any potential impact on the babies in their care and more broadly with their colleagues in the setting. 'Wittingness' is the term used by Peters (Peters, 1966) in his seminal discussions of Ethics and Education, in relation to intentions and the deliberate nature of choices. And so the wittingness in this project, or indeed any development opportunity, is concerned with accepting provisions for learning and development and the ability to reflect on these, conceptualise them, nourish, accept or reject aspects and to employ a reflexive metacognitive approach to related experiences and encounters.

Within the musical context of the project, having a positive attitude to vocal work, and a willingness to go beyond tired repertoire were more important than musical skills *per se*. **Confidence** was very relevant here (Figure 1). Some participants were a little inhibited about singing and experimenting with their voice, especially at the beginning of sessions. This was not helped by some patchiness in attendance when participants were kept back to cover absent staff, the gap between sessions meaning that there was a danger of inhibitions being felt anew at each session. Given the constraints, our participants mostly engaged enthusiastically, but we were aware of the challenge of sustaining this over and beyond the course of the project. As in all projects of this kind, the time to talk, to engage in 'professional gossip', is overwhelmingly significant, and confidence grew over time, as did their ability to narrate their practice and reflect critically on experiences. This ability to listen to each other's experience of practice, respond to stories, ask questions of each other and think together about those experiences are competencies that developed and became evident through the period of the Babysong Project.

Ways in which implications for renewed practice were gathered and enacted, and opportunities to disseminate new ideas to the wider communities in their setting – **Communication** (Figure 1) – were also in evidence by the end of the Project.

The Babysong Project evaluator noted:

> 'Many [participants] remarked that they had discovered things in themselves they did not expect – an ability with song or . . . keeping notes or expressing themselves. They knew they had gained new knowledge . . . there was an important discovery of their own creativity.
> Babysong participant comment in Barnes (2016: 13).

The range and reach of any project of this nature, however, is dependent upon the extent to which learning is taken back into the setting. The evaluation indicated that the growing confidence of participants did indeed enable this to happen.

> 'Discovering unrecognised creative strengths had the effect of giving them not just confidence but the capacity to contribute more in their settings. Almost all participants had run staff meetings by the end of the Project – "it's no good if we keep all the information to ourselves".
>
> Babysong participant comment Barnes (2016: 13).

There were, of course, a number of constraints. Support for the developing involvement or understanding of participants was limited mainly to project sessions and a culminating conference, and therefore, while seeds of exploration and learning could be offered, it would be difficult, as with any learning context, to ensure that, following germination, any *sustained* learning took place. It is the case that our focus had to be ostensibly focused on the individual, but individuals are situated in specific settings or organisations with their own, often long-established cultures that inevitably shape their thoughts and actions. If 'Change' is both personal and organisational, a key question is where any 'change' is located – in the practitioner's head or in the organisational setting? The desired transformational learning within an individual needs to translate into situated practice.

A further challenge was concerned with agency and levels of autonomy which, in turn, relates to **Confidence** (Figure 1). Caring for babies and young children, often for as long as 50 hours a week, is a huge undertaking and carries with it a very high level of responsibility that is rarely appropriately acknowledged or rewarded. Accompanying this responsibility are often very low levels of autonomy (Osgood, 2006; Robson & Fumoto, 2009). Practitioners, for example, have reported that they might arrive for work after a weekend to find that their room, without consultation, had been reorganised. This is not a minor issue. It impacts on many levels, organisationally and emotionally. In Babysong sessions, discussions included the need for babies to experience stillness and quietness to foster **Closeness** (Figure 1). An interesting distinction is that 'play songs' direct attention outwards to care-giver, whereas 'lullabies' direct attention inwards (Rock et al., 1999/2010) – an important characteristic in encouraging closeness. Participants were encouraged to 'lull' babies and introduce lullabies (and not only to encourage sleep); to observe and listen closely to babies; to engage individually in face-to-face contact when possible, imitating and extending the sounds their babies made and observing and interacting with their responses. All of this seemed to be at variance with some in-setting requirements at times. Participants spoke of being required to 'jolly up', to be lively and full of movement, a sense that a key part of their role was to perform to and 'entertain' the babies. A crucial point was that they felt that they were judged on the *visibility* of this behaviour. This relates to the notion of 'performativity'. Osgood (2006) talks about the managerialist construction of 'professionalism', which values masculinised attributes that run counter to the beliefs and practices of early years practitioners. She suggests that this poses a very real threat to their professional integrity. New kinds of knowledges are called upon by educational reform – a teacher who can maximise performance and set aside irrelevant principles.

> The increased demands to demonstrate competence mean that professional judgement is subordinated to the requirements of performativity, and what is produced is [a] 'form of ventriloquism' ... or what Butler (1990) argues is 'enacted fantasy', wherein practitioners feel compelled to cynically comply to the demands of performativity.
>
> Osgood (2006: 5).

Performativity seemed to be a key issue that emerged from the project. Lightfoot and Frost (2015) suggest that educators' 'storied' perceptions of their professionality, which is multi-dimensional

and complex, cannot be reduced, as performativity suggests, to simply a list of personal characteristics, responsibilities and duties.

Another challenge was to do with organisational and management commitment. Most of the participants were enthusiastic about putting theory into practice back in their settings and reported being given time at staff meetings to disseminate Project learning and new ideas for practice – **communication** (Figure 1); indeed, some of the managers reported on the influence of the Project within the baby room and beyond. This was to prove tricky, however, in terms of sustainable practice. While managers were tolerant and often encouraging about the ideas their practitioners were bringing back, we were aware of sending participants back into their settings as 'hero-innovators'. Such innovations are prone to failure (Georgiades & Phillimore in Burden 2006). Innovations learned from the sessions and introduced by enthusiastic individuals seeking to share their new-found enthusiasm could meet with an unresponsive audience of colleagues if support and nourishment were not actively and strategically provided by the manager.

Shaw (2015) highlights the criticality of leadership and the attributes of leaders during any change. With this awareness, the original Project design had included strategies for involving managers which were intended to involve visits to settings, information news sheets and opportunities to meet together and with the Project Leads – **Connections** (Figure 1). In the event, this happened only in a very limited way. The daycare business is busy and plans often need to change at a moment's notice, calling managers and leaders away to other diary commitments. This is a significant limitation on any potential impact on both participants' practice and the setting. A question we have asked ourselves is the extent to which we equipped our participants to review and reflect on practices with a view to trialling new approaches and ways of effectively incorporating song, singing and singese in their settings, given these constraints.

Connection and indeed **Communication** (Figure 1) were to become significant in a further way. As we have already learned, babies need to hear songs that reflect and value their family, community cultures and heritages, as well as learning to recognise and respect those of other people (Dyke, 2019).

> *Because songs are variable, complex, and memorable, two people knowing the same song likely acquired this knowledge via social learning – and thus are likely to share a common socio-cultural history.*
>
> Savage et al. (2021: 5).

Awareness and validation of home 'repertoire' then would provide valuable information about a shared socio-cultural background for practitioners and managers in early years settings. Savage and co-authors (2021) call for further investigation into the benefits of music in terms of social learning, rather than that which simply involves the individual. During the Babysong Project, we became increasingly aware of the potential for 'song' to go beyond the setting to provide meaningful ways of making connections between baby rooms and nurseries and the families and cultures of the infants in their care. We know that songs, redolent of the culture, play a significant part in most families. This shared repertoire grows as it is repeatedly performed within family units and cultures, bringing a sense of pride in mutual understanding and a sense of belonging (Gratier & Apter-Danon, 2009). Remembered songs and stories serve to act as a bridge between past experiences and present situations, between personal identities as expressed in their home languages and more formal expressions of belonging, parent and child both being active agents in shaping their relationship through these means (Cali & Sole, 2017). The work of the Peep Learning Together Programme (LTP) (Street & Abbas, 2017) provides an interesting model here, as does the *Lullaby Project* (now called *Sing My Story*) initiated by Angeline Conaghan (https://groundswellarts.com). The *Lullaby Project* evaluator wrote:

There is little doubt that the Lullaby Project (now called Sing Our Story) has been of great importance to the scores of families that have been involved in it. It has built confidence, established, and enriched contacts, positively contributed to language learning and supported parenting and family building.

Barnes (2019).

https://groundswellarts.com/research-and-publications/

Beyond the song as product, or 'known' repertoire, the more improvisatory nature of 'singese' is clearly significant here too:

...the tuneful 'doodles' emerging in parents' chatter and the sing-song patterns of their communication with babies and toddlers can be helpful both in regulating a baby's mood..., as a resource for play and dance... and invention...

Street and Abbas (2017: 80).

It is clear to us now as we reflect on the Babysong Project that this is an aspect ripe for further development.

Conclusion

The Babysong Project it seems was a significant endeavour in using 'song', in its widest sense, to establish closer, meaningful relationships in baby room settings. We looked at the importance of making **connections** not only between babies and practitioners but also with other professionals, parents and carers, as well as the family and societal cultures of the babies' families. We sought to connect with the memories and immediate needs of both participants and their babies. We explored what was meant by meaningful **communication** through 'song' – wherever it took place – in the baby room or at home; whoever it involved – participants and their babies, the babies' and their parents or carers; and importantly between participants and other significant adults in the baby room. We put a high value on finding opportunities for **closeness** with babies, intimate encounters, being in the moment through 'communicative musicality'. Additionally, we wanted to develop **confidence** – not just that of the participants, but also that of the babies (Young, 2018). Whilst the scope and reach of the project was clearly limited, it confirmed the ambition that we should be prepared to justify, foster and fiercely support these precious moments of musical communication.

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