



Lullabies and songs have such power to soothe and entrance, and music is vital to human development, yet it is easy to overlook all this in the hubbub of an early years nursery environment.

The BABYSONG PROJECT (2013-2016) integrated playful, imaginative and spontaneous approaches into singing opportunities with regular interactions between baby room practitioners and the babies in their care.

*The Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities at Canterbury Christ Church University, presented its **Babysong Project** to baby room practitioners, managers, early years personnel and students at the *University Centre* and *Regional College* in Peterborough on 24th November 2016.*

The aim of the **Babysong Project**, supported by *The Ragdoll Foundation*, was to explore a closer approach to interactions between nursery practitioners and the babies in their care and to question what has been perceived as a growing functionalism in baby room practice. Though practitioners do sing in baby rooms, the **Babysong Project** investigated other components of the 'Spectrum of Song'¹ and the practitioners' need to develop their skills and confidence to engage in spontaneous vocalisation and song-making, as the value of 'stillness' and 'songs to soothe' has as much a place in baby rooms as action and play songs.

The *Canterbury Christ Church University* research was spearheaded by *Kathy Gooch*, Professor of Early Education, *Sacha Powell*, Professor of Early Childhood Care and Education, and *Vanessa Young*, Senior Lecturer (Education), who worked with their local baby room practitioners to develop ways in which singing and song could be incorporated into their everyday tasks and activities with babies.

Baby room work requires a great deal of physical attention to practical tasks of feeding, cleaning, helping babies to sleep, record-keeping, reporting to families, care-taking the environment and managing resources. The **Babysong Project** directed participants towards the possibility of accomplishing tasks in a reflective, responsive and carefully interactive way through 'singing' with babies, by providing space for practitioners to construct and deconstruct practices. One of the biggest challenges in the **Babysong Project** was to support practitioners to develop confidence and a sense of voice in their work with babies

to enable them to become sufficiently autonomous to respond in informed, individual and creative ways to the babies in their care.

The **Babysong Project** explored all aspects of the Spectrum of Song¹, practised 'motherese'² and sought ways to employ a range of vocalisations, through playful, imaginative and spontaneous approaches to 'singese'³ (singing) opportunities that could be integrated into regular interactions with babies. There is much evidence demonstrating the benefits to babies of close, attentive, responsive engagements with their adult carers as where this involves the human voice - in vocalisations, motherese, singese or song there is sustained eye gaze and increased alertness in babies .

During the **Babysong Project** it became clear that the majority of songs and singing that occurred could be categorised as 'play songs' or 'action songs' and were lively and active. Lullabies, or songs to soothe or comfort, were rare or invisible.

Lullabies and songs have such power to soothe and entrance, and music is so vital to human development, yet it is easy to overlook all this in the hubbub of an early years environment. When the idea of the importance of 'stillness' in a baby's day was introduced, the project participant groups were challenged by what they considered to be a contentious concept: the idea that they themselves should also be still. They reported that to be still frequently was not acceptable; to lie quietly with a baby, singing, humming, would be perceived as not working, not doing anything. Their role, it was suggested, was to be lively - to perform.

Professor Kathy Gooch said, *"We were pleased and proud to share the **Babysong Project** work with everyone at our workshop and presentation in Peterborough. We are now examining ways of drawing together the growing range of interest in the **Babysong Project**, research into baby room practice, singing with babies and closeness in care in order to provide a single point of contact for all those interested in the out-of-home care of babies, including arts groups as well those in the early years field. We are aiming to introduce materials and information on a new online **Babysong Resource**, which is currently in development"*.

Katherine Wood, Chair, The Ragdoll Foundation said, *"The **Babysong Project** has given the Ragdoll Foundation new insights into practices within baby rooms and when the research was shared at Peterborough Regional College and University Centre, we were pleased with the positive feedback and to see how much the students and practitioners attending were so engaged and enthusiastic."*

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For further information please contact:-

Mary W Hagger, HaggerPR representing The Ragdoll Foundation :
Tel: 01789 269368 / Mob: 07714 087848 Email: mary@haggerpr.com

Footnotes:

¹The Spectrum of Song defines musical communication in a very broad way covering a range of vocal utterances, not necessarily words, but human sounds (vocalisations)

²'Ordinary infant directed speech' becomes the musical speech of 'motherese' as mother-infant interactions through singing contribute to the babies' cognitive development and emotions as babies are hyper-sensitive to the rhythms, melodies and terms of speech, long before they understand the meanings of actual words.

³'Singese' is extended rhythmic and melodic phrasing that characterises and 'formal' songs learnt from our culture or acquired as finished products.

Resource: *The Baby Room Project: findings and implications' by K Goouch and S Powell in EYE, volume 17 No 1*

About Canterbury Christ Church University: Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities

Canterbury Christ Church University is a modern university with a particular strength in higher education for the public services. With 17,000 students across Kent and Medway, its courses span a wide range of academic and professional subject areas.

- 95% of our UK undergraduates were in employment or further studies six months after completing their studies*.
- We are one of the South East's largest providers of education, training and skills leading to public service careers.

*2013/14 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey

The Research Centre for Children Families and Communities is a vibrant research centre within the University, which is increasingly recognised internationally for high quality and innovative research and knowledge exchange within specified areas of the 'children, families and communities' agenda. The Centre sustains a reputation for ethicality and excellence in trans-disciplinary research, which aims to inform and provoke dialogue and debate, and works with diverse partners to design and undertake research and evaluation projects and knowledge exchange events; to support original studies at doctoral level; and to share our research insights.

About The Ragdoll Foundation

The Ragdoll Foundation is dedicated to supporting the creation, appreciation and awareness of imaginative and innovative content that reflects the world from a child's point of view.

Through a combination of grant giving and special initiatives the Foundation aims:-

To provide a space for alternative thinking, voices and practices, encourage self-confidence, innovation, risk taking the sharing of ideas.

To seek new creative solutions by combining perspectives, cultures and disciplines to promote new approaches to creativity and innovation.

To seek partners, collaborate and share knowledge by creating connections and being responsive to supporting co-operative ventures across sectors.

The Ragdoll Foundation was established in 2000 by Anne and Barrie Wood supported by Ragdoll Productions granting it 15% of the company shares. Ragdoll's back catalogue sold in 2013 to DHX Media, releasing funding for the Foundation. <https://www.ragdollfoundation.org.uk>