



Research Centre for
Children, Families and Communities

BABY SONG





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WELCOME

We are delighted to have this opportunity to remind you of the importance of singing with babies.

In the following pages we would like to tell you briefly about our Babysong Project, supported by the Ragdoll Foundation, and introduce you to some of the materials and information that we're hoping to include as we develop our new on-line Babysong Resource.

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WHY SING?

Have you noticed what people often do when they're 'introduced' to a new baby? Something happens to their voice, indeed to their whole demeanour. They might say something like: *"Hello beautiful – aren't you gorgeous? Yes you are... oh yes you are...oh yes you are!"*

Their voice becomes generally higher and gentler; certain words are stressed and there are often a number of repetitions.

A characteristic of this kind of speech is that it has exaggerated 'ups and downs' in pitch. This 'Infant directed speech' is called 'motherese'. The speech is often accompanied by larger, exaggerated movements of the head and facial expressions.

Why do we do this? It's something that many people do quite intuitively, unaware of the wealth of research evidence that highlights this phenomenon as a crucial part of communicating with babies.

Mother-infant interactions through singing contribute to the babies' cognitive development and regulation of emotions, they support the babies' memory, language learning and attentiveness.

It seems that the reason we all talk like this is that we sense that babies are hyper-sensitive to the rhythms, melodies and timbres of speech long before they understand the meanings of actual words.

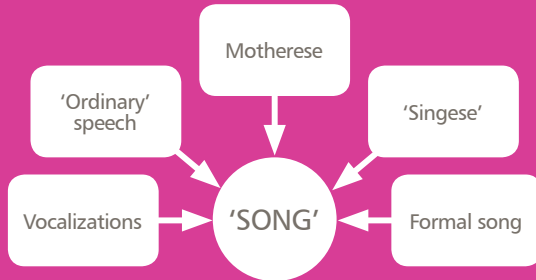
Indeed, there is a weight of evidence to show that babies much prefer listening to Infant Directed Singing than to normal speech.





WHAT IS SONG?

What do we mean by song? What do we mean by musical communication? The *Spectrum of 'Song'* below illustrates that musical communication can be defined in a very broad way.



'Song' in this context covers a range of vocal utterances. These utterances don't necessarily need words – they can include any sounds that can be made with the human voice ('vocalisations').

'Ordinary' speech can become the musical speech of 'motherese', which in itself can be turned into the extended rhythmic and melodic phrasing that characterises 'singese'. But what about songs themselves?

'Formal' songs - those that we learn from our culture or that we acquire as finished 'products' - form an essential part of our regular repertoire too.

However, we know that these are already being sung in baby rooms. What we are particularly interested in therefore are the other components of the spectrum.

It is also important to develop the kind of confidence needed to engage in these kinds of interactions. As well as understanding what is involved, practitioners need to develop the skills and confidence to engage in this kind of spontaneous vocalisation and song-making.

THE BABYSONG PROJECT

The Babysong project, funded by The Ragdoll Foundation, emerged from previous Baby Room research undertaken by the team at the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities.

A key aim of the Babysong project has been to develop a closer, more intimate approach to interactions between practitioners and the babies in their care, and to challenge what was perceived as a growing functionalism in baby room practice.

During the project, we worked with local baby room practitioners to explore ways in which singing and song could be incorporated into their everyday tasks and activities with babies.

We explored all aspects of the Spectrum of Song. We practised motherese for example, and sought ways to turn a range of vocalisations - through playful, imaginative and spontaneous approaches - into 'singese' (or singing) opportunities, integrating them into regular interactions with the babies. This was at the heart of the project.

The choice of repertoire also seemed to be important. When we asked our participants to brainstorm and collate the songs that they commonly used in their babyrooms the collection was huge in terms of the sheer number of songs sung. However, on categorising them into play songs or lullabies, it emerged that there were very few lullabies.

Consequently, we discussed the value of 'stillness' and songs to soothe, including vocalisations and improvisations. Although we heard from practitioners of one or two vignettes of stillness arising in their baby rooms, it seems that 'closeness', and 'being still' with babies can be problematic in baby rooms in day-care contexts.





PRACTICAL STRATEGIES

So what can practitioners do to capitalise on the power of singing and song in their communications with babies? A key element involves developing an alertness to the baby's waking state, and looking for every opportunity to engage with babies using components of the 'Spectrum of Song':

- Listen out for and **imitate** any of the baby's vocalisations. Exaggerate, repeat, make bolder. Leave space for the baby's responses. Create a '**musical dialogue**'
- **Take turns** to make up a sound - copy and 'play' with it. Change it slightly each time in a kind of '**sound ping pong**'
- **Mirror** the baby's actions and add some matching sounds
- **Mirror** the baby's **utterances or vocalisations** (for example, a yawn) and add actions and gestures
- **Play** with sounds. Use exclamations such as 'Ouch!' or 'Yippeel!' or 'No!' or 'Yay!' or 'Ugh!'; Repeat in a playful way. Exaggerate the pitch/volume/tempo...
- **Convert** instructions or suggestions into 'singese'. For example, 'Let's go and get some lunch'; or 'shall we change your nappy?'. Repeat and make into a kind of chant or chorus;
- **Convert songs**: for example, turn play songs into lullabies
- **Enjoy** precious moments of closeness and stillness with babies in your care and hum or coo very quietly.

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

Young V. (2016 in press) You sing, I sing, we both sing, we all sing: Communicating with babies through song in: Goodliff, G., Canning, N., Parry, J., and Miller, L. (in press) *Young Children's Play and Creativity: Multiple voices*, Maidenhead: Open University

Young V. (2015) Be Still: The Babysong Project, *Nursery World*, Issue 22, 13 July 2015

Goouch K. and Powell S. (2016) Babyroom Workers: Care in practice in (Eds Carmen Dalli and Jayne White) *Policy and Pedagogy with Under-threes: Cross-disciplinary insights and Innovations*, London: Springer

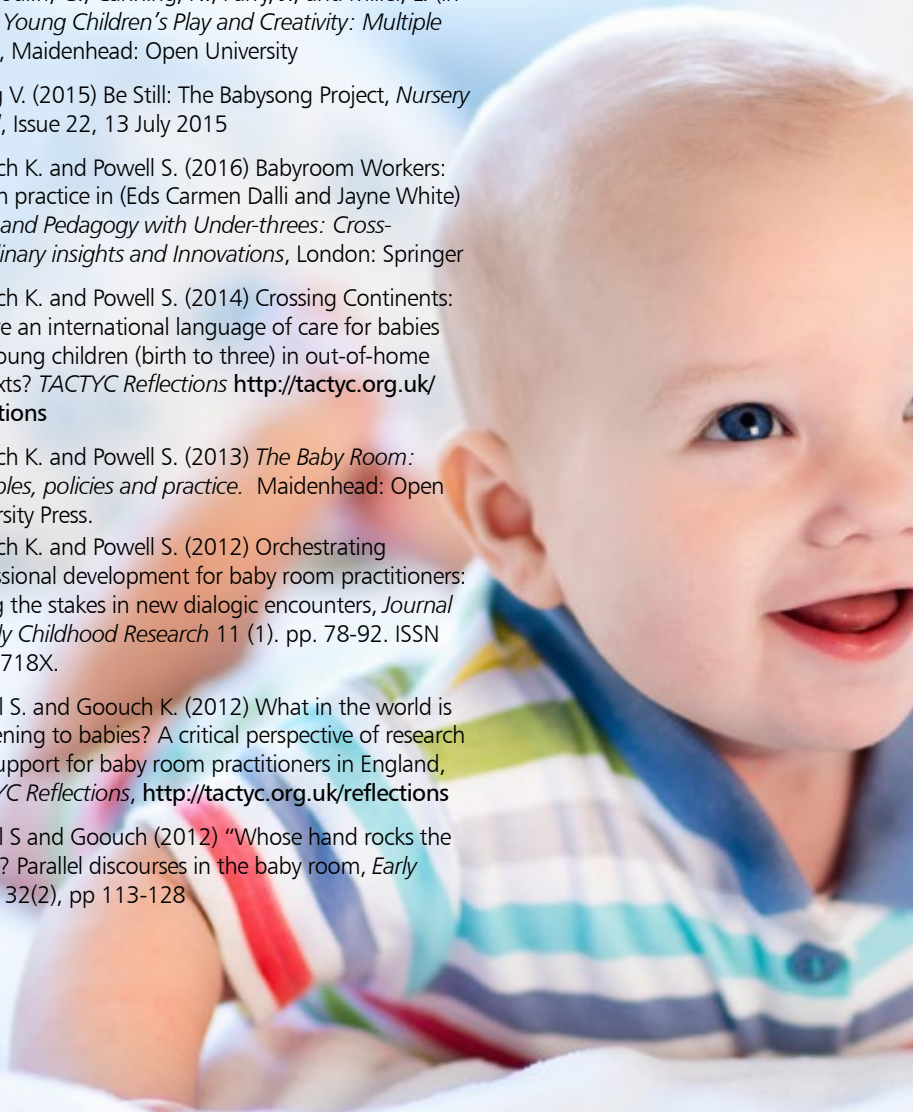
Goouch K. and Powell S. (2014) Crossing Continents: Is there an international language of care for babies and young children (birth to three) in out-of-home contexts? *TACTYC Reflections* <http://tactyc.org.uk/reflections>

Goouch K. and Powell S. (2013) *The Baby Room: principles, policies and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Goouch K. and Powell S. (2012) Orchestrating professional development for baby room practitioners: raising the stakes in new dialogic encounters, *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 11 (1). pp. 78-92. ISSN 1476-718X.

Powell S. and Goouch K. (2012) What in the world is happening to babies? A critical perspective of research and support for baby room practitioners in England, *TACTYC Reflections*, <http://tactyc.org.uk/reflections>

Powell S and Goouch (2012) "Whose hand rocks the cradle? Parallel discourses in the baby room, *Early Years*, 32(2), pp 113-128



ABOUT US



Vanessa Young is Senior Lecturer (Education) at Canterbury Christ Church University. She has a number of roles across the Faculty of Education, involving teacher education, but her principal interest is in primary music with young children. She has been involved in a range of consultancy work within the field of music education, including membership of a number of national working parties for music education and during the last year, and has had a significant role in a London project on creative music making in the early years. For the past few years, she has been working closely with Sacha Powell and Kathy Gooch on the 'Babysong Project'.

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Sacha Powell's first degree was in Modern Chinese with Japanese. Her interest in early childhood education and care began when she taught English as a foreign language to four-year-olds in Beijing and Taipei (1987-1988). Sacha is Director of the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities and Professor of Early Childhood Care and Education at Canterbury Christ Church University. Since the award of her Ph.D. on 'Constructions of Early Childhood in China' (2002), she has been involved in many funded research projects, including 'Birth to Three Matters'; 'Learning for Life: Foundations of Character'; 'The Baby Room'; and 'Babysong'. In 2014 she was a visiting scholar at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

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Kathy Gooch is Professor of Early Education in the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities at Canterbury Christ Church University. Kathy's career in education began in the 1970s as a teacher in London schools, later focusing on teaching very young children in school and kindergarten. She now enjoys researching and writing about babies and young children, their literacy beginnings, and the people who care for them and help them to learn. She has contributed to conferences across the world and has been developing international research collaborations to contribute to understandings of international discourses of care. Kathy's research and publications are particularly focused on very early communication and interactions between adults and babies.

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The Ragdoll Foundation

The Ragdoll Foundation was established in 2000 by Anne and Barrie Wood, supported by Ragdoll Productions. It 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.

www.ragdollfoundation.org.uk

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If you would like more information on any of our research projects, or would like to contribute to future projects, please contact us:

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