

“Mothers’ Songs” in Daycare for Babies

AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH PROJECT FUNDED BY THE FROEBEL TRUST

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WHAT IS THE PROJECT ABOUT?

Between May and September 2013, this pilot project seeks to understand the place of singing as an operational or pedagogical tool in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings with a specific focus on daycare for the youngest children – babies from birth to eighteen months of age.

The research applies a Froebelian perspective and will attempt to foreground Froebel’s ideas and practices relating to singing with babies in the analysis of data gathered through a ‘song audit’, filmed observations of practice in seven baby rooms and subsequent discussions using the films and Froebel’s writings as prompts for reflection.

The project began with four propositions, which link to Froebel’s own writings:



Friedrich Froebel

PROJECT PROPOSITIONS

1

SINGING CAN ENHANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTIMACY / ATTUNED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BABIES AND THEIR CARERS.

FROEBEL’S IDEAS

You long to nourish your baby's feelings, to stir the pulses of his heart. ...In some way, in some slight degree, you must make him feel the love which inspires all you do. Hence, as the little play goes on, you begin to sing; and love, the melody of the heart, is revealed in the melody of the voice.’ (*Mottoes & Commentaries* 1895 p. 74)

2

SINGING SUPPORTS BABIES’ LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT.

‘The influence of the word is yet more heightened by the law of movement (the rhythm) and by the singing tone (the mother's way of singing), because, in this way, the word has an influence on the mind, on the thought, by means of the feeling.’ (*Education by Development* 1899 p. 52-53)

3

SINGING CAN FACILITATE BETTER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BABIES’ CARERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND INTERCULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS.

Our mothers and nursery governesses share more largely in the life of the children, it would seem, than do yours in Gera. Several mothers with us take definite parts in the games, others copy out the songs that we sing, and I believe that many games are repeated in the family circle at home. (*Froebel's letters* 1896 p. 90)

4

SINGING IS NOT ONLY GOOD FOR BABIES BUT CAN ALSO BE GOOD FOR PRACTITIONERS’ SENSE OF WELLBEING.

‘Recall the feelings which were wakened in you by the sight of your firstborn child. Remind yourself of the thrill with which, as he lay cradled in your arms, you noted his feeble and aimless movements. Are not these feelings, with their tender and yet peremptory incitement to nurture, worthy of being themselves nurtured? Is not their nurture essential to the well-being of your child and the peace of your own soul?’ (*Mottoes & Commentaries* 64)



The 'Song Audit'

We used an online survey to ask people who work with babies to tell us what they sing to / with babies and the origins of the songs they cited.

Many respondents told us that singing was accompanied by a range of activities or 'props', such as song cards or bags containing objects relating to songs; it was also often accompanied by song-specific actions (e.g. rolling arms to 'Wind the Bobbin Up', clapping and so forth).

Singing was said to have a range of purposes or uses: for example, lullabies or classical music to encourage sleep, songs (some made up or improvised) to accompany particular routine activities like washing hands or to indicate imminent activity such as tidying up, circle time, gathering the children together, songs used to welcome new children, and songs to prompt concentration.

All the respondents reported having many songs within their everyday repertoire. Although traditional nursery rhymes were not the only kind of songs that were listed, they formed the vast majority and were common to all respondents' answers:

"Five little monkeys jumping on the bed, Five Little Monkeys swinging through the trees, 5 little ducks, Horsey, Horsey, Twinkle Twinkle, Frog Song, Wind the bobbin up, Wheels on the bus, Build a little house, Bob the builder, Peter Rabbit, Five little men in a flying saucer, Incy Wincy Spider, Miss Polly, Round and round the garden, This little piggy, Pat a cake, Dingle dangle scarecrow, Old macdonald had a farm, Mum and dad and uncle john rode on a horse all day long, Tommy Thumb, Mary Mary quite contrary"

Alternatives included theme tunes from children's TV programmes – "Bob the Builder"; traditional lullabies "Hush Little Baby", "Skye Boat Song"; occasion songs, such as happy birthday (in English, French and Spanish), made-up songs, humming and 'crooning' with the babies.

We asked respondents to tell us how they knew the songs they sang / where they learnt them. The majority told us that they had heard the songs during their own childhoods (from parents, family members, at school) and learnt others from their colleagues at work.

WHAT DO YOU SING WITH BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO COMPLETE OUR SONG AUDIT SURVEY?

OBSERVING SINGING IN NURSERIES

We will be making two visits each to seven nurseries, all of which have given us consent to film 'everyday' practice. These observations will include, where possible or where relevant, observations grouped into three categories (*adapted from research about practitioners' interpretations of infants' behaviours by Degotardi and Davis, 2008*): 'free' play time; timetabled routines such as snack or lunch; and structured / pre-organised musical or singing activity times.

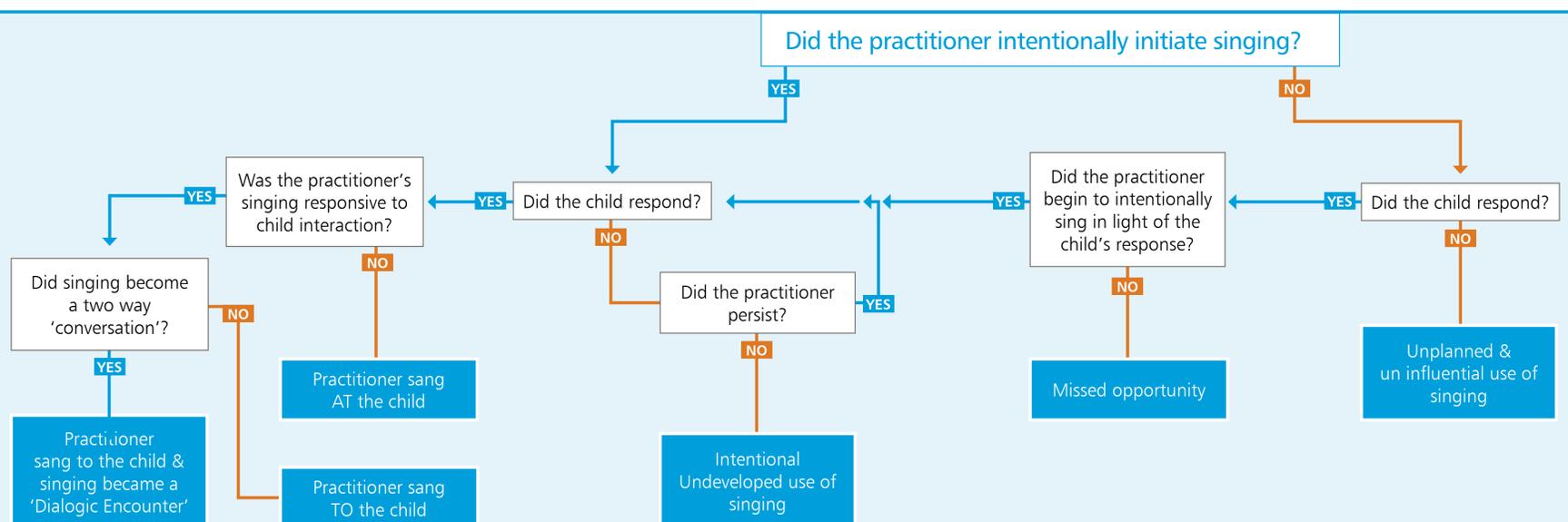
The second visit will involve research conversations prompted by reflections on edited filmed observations to explore the practitioners' explanations of their rationale for any singing – When and why does it happen? What prompted the singing?

What purpose(s) does it serve? Was it intended to serve such purposes at the time? How is singing theorised by practitioners? The visits will be followed by a discussion group where practitioners will be invited to consider, refine, challenge and theorise the findings from a preliminary analysis of the observed singing practices and the practitioners' explanations about their rationale.

OBSERVATION ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

An initial framework for analysis of the observed practice has been derived from the work of Trevarthen and Malloch (2000) on infants' musicality and Trehub and Nakata (2001-2) on emotion and music in infancy.

This has been conceptualised in the following diagram:



ANALYSIS OF REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

A framework consisting of Froebel's principles and ideas about singing will be used as an analytical map to assess whether and / or the extent to which (a) there is evidence that today's early years singing practices observed in this study reflect a Froebelian approach to babies' care and development; (b) what similarities and differences exist between Froebel's explanations (of the purposes or uses and motives for singing with babies and any benefits it brings to the baby and carer) and those of today's baby room practitioners.

REPORTING

The findings will be reported directly to the nurseries involved in the project in summary form; to the Froebel Trust, which has funded the research; and in future conference presentation(s) and journal article(s).