Froebel Trust

Research Insights: Full Report

Birth to Three

The evidence from Froebel Trust funded research projects

By Dr Zeny Melissourgaki

Contents

Executive Summary ..... Page 3

Introduction ..... Page 4

Research Insights: A Froebelian Perspective ..... Page 5

Relational pedagogy ..... Page 6

- Born Connected ..... Page 6
- Multimodal Communication Tools ..... Page 7
- Learning through relationships ..... Page 8
- Reciprocal relations ..... Page 8

Holistic Pedagogy ..... Page 9

- Communication bridges ..... Page 9
- Culturally imbued practice ..... Page 10
- Babies and the Natural World ..... Page 11
- Weaving a relational ecosystem ..... Page 12

Knowledgeable, nurturing educators ..... Page 13

- Slower pedagogy ..... Page 13
- Reflective pedagogy ..... Page 15

Practice constraints ..... Page 17

Reflections on the research ..... Page 19

Recommendations for practice ..... Page 21

Recommendations for policy ..... Page 22

Recommendations for research ..... Page 23

References ..... Page 24

Appendix 1 Output Evaluation Template ..... Page 26

Appendix 2 Summary of research projects ..... Page 27

This is an interactive document

Hover and click on the **links in bold** to jump to the relevant section of the report.

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the critical period of earliest childhood – from birth to three years. It presents the main findings of a review of projects funded by the Froebel Trust and discusses the implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers. In total, 31 outputs were reviewed.

Whilst the research reviewed demonstrates the diverse ways people, places and cultures construct and describe the first three years, for consistency this report refers to 'babies and toddlers'.

Key Insights

1. **How babies initiate connection:** Babies are active and competent communicators. They proactively initiate connection rather than merely reacting to cues, but these are not always noticed.
2. **The significance of singing:** Song is an important relational tool for the youngest children, particularly in the pre-verbal stage. It promotes connection, closeness, communication and confidence.
3. **Bridging the communication gap:** The relationship between family and setting is of paramount importance, because babies and toddlers enter a setting with established communication patterns and preferences.
4. **Learning to care:** It is through warm, responsive relationships with adults that young children learn what it feels like to be cared for and what it means to care for others.
5. **Cultures of care:** The ways in which we look after babies and toddlers are strongly shaped by cultural factors at the individual, setting and national level.
6. **Being with babies outdoors:** Despite the diverse learning, development and wellbeing benefits of regular access to natural environments, babies and toddlers are often excluded.
7. **Slow matters:** Slowing down creates space to notice the small cues, gestures, and meanings that are easy to miss in a busy setting.
8. **The importance of reflection:** Reflective pedagogy is particularly important for those working with babies and toddlers but, despite its demonstrated value, it remains rare in practice.

Implications

These insights highlight the need to bring the voices and needs of babies and toddlers into the heart of **practice**, **policy** and **research**. Whilst challenging, this review suggests that the implications of failing to acknowledge the current 'baby blind spot' across these areas are serious, and cumulative both for children, and those who care for them.

This is an interactive document

Hover and click on the **links in bold** to jump to the relevant section of the report.

Introduction

Why focus on earliest childhood?

The first few years of life have long been understood as laying the foundations for human cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, with lifelong consequences. Yet babies and toddlers have historically received less attention than older children in early years research and policy debates (David et al., 2003). Landmark publications such as the 1001 Critical Days Manifesto (Leadsom et al., 2013) have reignited interest in babyhood and toddlerhood, framing these years as a critical window of opportunity– with profound implications for individual children, their families, communities, and society as a whole.

The current government has placed early childhood development at the centre of its agenda, committing to give every child "the best start in life" (Department for Education, 2025). This includes modernising the early years system and expanding access to high-quality early education and childcare nationwide. Key initiatives involve delivering 30 hours of government-funded childcare for children from nine months old and creating additional places to meet rising demand.

While the proportion of babies and children up to three in formal early years settings has steadily increased (Department for Education, 2025), this expansion will accelerate the trend, with progressively more children spending greater time in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings.

The review process: a brief overview

In total, 31 project outputs were reviewed, most of which were journal articles or final reports for the Froebel Trust. Each output was rated for quality based on three evaluative criteria: clarity of study aims, soundness of methodology, and strength of analytic approach. Key information on geographical focus, participant characteristics, main findings, and implications was also extracted. Where a single research project generated multiple outputs, these were reviewed separately but compared for consistency, particularly if they raised distinct arguments.

A review template is available in Appendix 1<hyperlink in the interactive document>. The reader is further directed to Appendix 2 for a table summarising the research projects and outputs reviewed.

Research Insights: A Froebelian Perspective

This section discusses the main findings of the projects reviewed through a Froebelian lens. It draws out common themes across the studies, making links with key principles in Froebel's work.

Relational pedagogy

In Froebel's work and in the body of research reviewed, babies emerge as born connected to others, predisposed from birth to form relationships and connections with those around them and employing their innate relational competence to this effect.

Contrary to long-standing ideas that babies are passive receivers of care, helpless in their complete dependence on their caregivers to have their needs met, several research projects reposition babies as "competent social agents" (Guard, 2023a, p. 609) who are continuously in relationships with others (Cooper et al.. (2022).

Born connected

A baby's first relationships are typically with their caregivers, most often parents or family members. Eirinaki (2022) closely examined mother-infant pairs both in community settings (family homes and children's centres) and in a mother and baby unit (an inpatient facility for mothers experiencing mental health difficulties in the perinatal period). She used video to capture short interactions between a baby and their mother, focusing on maternal and infant behaviours such as vocalisations, gaze, touch, affect, and toy use.

Babies as young as a few weeks old were observed engaging in rich dialogical encounters with their mothers, through sophisticated turn-taking and reciprocity. This research offers examples of babies responding to maternal cues, but also intentionally directing communication to elicit responses, demonstrating an ability to receive as well as initiate and sustain interactions.

Despite any relational challenges, babies still persistently seek intersubjective engagement. For instance, babies of mothers with postnatal depression narrowed their gaze toward their mother, in a concentrated attempt to initiate an interaction; their play seemed to become be less exploratory as a result, their efforts reserved for achieving connection (Eirinaki, 2022)

Research on early relational experiences, from Bowlby's and Ainsworth's work on attachment to contemporary research such as Eirinaki's project (2022), have firmly established the foundational role of early caregiver relationships in child development.

"one of the most important findings [is the] association between maternal verbal behaviour and infants emotional well-being."

(Eirinaki (2022, p.333)

Young children carry their relational potential into the world, including early educational settings. Guard (2023a, 2024) carried out an ethnographic study in two private nurseries in England, following babies aged four to 11 months in their everyday interactions with educators. She used video recordings of ordinary baby-adult encounters, observation notes, and interviews with parents to capture how babies communicate in real time.

In settings too, babies emerge as active and competent communicators, who initiate proactively rather than merely react to social invitations. Babies demonstrate intentionality, persistence, and relational competence and are again shown to adjust their strategies dynamically, to match the availability of opportunities for communication in their environment and the adults around them. For instance, following a smile that was not responded to, a baby substituted with a gesture, a further attempt to engage the educator in the baby room.

Multimodal Communication Tools

Babies employ a wide range of communication tools. They engage adults through their gaze, to signal interest and connection; a baby's gaze can become sustained and committed, when adult attention is harder to get. Babies additionally attempt interactions and dialogically respond to being spoken to through their own utterances and vocalisations. Coos and babbles may be used to punctuate exchanges. They leverage facial expressions and body movements to signal needs and invite reciprocity. A smile, a frown, a baby reaching forward or a repositioning of their bodies are all then reconstructed as invitations to connect.

Babies may also offer a gesture or a toy as mediators, to create opportunities for shared focus with an adult. If these fail, they may cry. Crucially, as Guard (2023a, 2024) illustrates, babies strategically combine these modes of communication and are willing to work hard to meet their need to connect, escalating their efforts through vocalisations, gestures or object mediation when initial bids like gaze or smiles go unnoticed.

In these proto-conversations (Bateson, 1979), song becomes another valuable communication tool. This is conceptualised as a spectrum ranging from spontaneous vocalisations and "motherese" (infant-directed speech) to structured songs (Young et al., 2022). The "Babysong" project (Powell et al., 2013; Powell & Goouch, 2015) explored the nature and purpose of singing with babies 0-24 months and involved 52 nursery educators in southeast England. The project builds on the legacy of Froebel's Mother Songs, a set of nursery songs, rhymes and games Froebel created to support early parent-child interaction and child development.

Through professional development sessions, filmed practice, video recall, surveys, and discussions, the researchers found that singing fosters mutuality and intimacy, in the context of developing relationships between babies and early years educators. Singing was found to create qualitatively different interactions from ordinary talk, by providing opportunities for shared joy and a sense of being in the moment together. Educators also reported that babies responded with heightened engagement, demonstrated through eye contact, smiles and movements.

Song seemed to be particularly important in the absence of speech, providing a method of communication between educators and young babies in the pre-verbal stage (Powell et al., 2013). Through a process of exchanging vocalisations and mutual attunement of intentions and emotions, babies and caregivers co-create shared meaning in real-time musical dialogues.

Reviewing the "Babysong" project six years after its completion, Young and colleagues (2022) emphasised ways in which singing and song promote connection, closeness and communication between young children and their educators. Alongside performing group songs, imitating baby sounds, song-making and spontaneous vocalisations all fostered deeper mutuality with babies.

Research by Voyajolu (2021) provides further evidence for the use of song as a relational tool. The researcher observed short video clips of 44 babies as young as three months old and toddlers at home or in nursery. Singing emerged as a powerful communicative tool, enabling children to reach higher levels of musical engagement through social interactions with their caregivers. Babies and toddlers in this project demonstrated advanced interactive musicality, including turn taking and shared rhythm, during singing with others but not when alone. They also used song to initiate or sustain an interaction. In these contexts, songs are not mere management tools, for example distracting a crying infant, but a dialogical tool fostering connection.

Learning through relationships

These foundational relationships shape one's sense of self, others and the world and, as such, they are inherently pedagogical. Cooper and Quiñones (2020) vividly illustrate the pedagogical power of relationships through video observations in ECEC settings in New Zealand and Australia.

The researchers' analysis reveals that one-year-old toddlers initiate nurturing acts, such as feeding, rocking and soothing, in their play with dolls. These toddlers, the researchers argue, are enacting care in a way that mirrors the responsive care they receive from teachers and speaks to their internalisation of their experience of being cared for.

They are using their voice, non-verbal cues, body gestures and movement, to express their understanding of the caring role, as it is co-constructed with their educators during caregiving and play interactions. Moving from the position of cared-for to the position of being the one-caring (Cooper and Quiñones,2020, p.3), they are exploring the social roles of caring. Lived reciprocity within a relationship is transformed into proactive agency, as care is received, internalised and subsequently offered in relating to another.

"Findings show that toddlers engage teachers in co-creating caring actions while enacting and expressing care with dolls."

(Cooper and Quiñones,2020, p.1),

Reciprocal relations

Gaze, body movements, touch, affect, facial expressions, gestures, vocalisations, play and song all arise as rich communicative modes through which the youngest children actively and intentionally express their voices and perspectives in an attempt to relate to others. As such, the tools of communication babies and young children employ demand recognition as valid and meaningful, with babies positioned as partners in communication and regarded as being in parity in their dialogues with their caregivers. A relational pedagogy that places reciprocal relationships at its heart has the potential to transform early years settings into true relational ecosystems.

Holistic Pedagogy

All life is interrelated, Froebel argued, linking every child to their family, their community and the natural world, and thereby grounding his case for a holistic pedagogy. Each context contributes a distinct thread, but these are interlaced and interwoven in forming a unified relational whole.

Eirinaki (2022), Guard (2023a), Powell & Goouch (2015), Young et al. (2022), Voyajolu (2021) and Cooper and Quiñones (2020) all explore the relationships between the youngest children and their parent or educator, as part of an intricate and far-reaching web of interconnectedness.

Communication bridges

Holding the idea of unity in mind, communication between family and setting becomes paramount. Young children enter settings with established communication patterns. Personal meanings are attached to certain modes of communication, reflecting the child's unique experience (Guard, 2023a). Parental input is required for educators to identify or comprehend these subtle cues. Simultaneously, bidirectional dialogue proves essential, as babies expand their communicative repertoire in the setting. Sharing how a baby's voice manifests at home informs educators' attunement, while educators' insights enrich family understanding.

Elfer et al. (2018a) illuminate the ways gaps in communication can fragment the relational coherence between families and ECEC settings. Their study included discussion groups with nursery staff and interviews with parents of children 24 to 36 months old. The researchers provide evidence of sparse information exchange: parents remained uncertain about nursery routines, sharing little about home environments, while settings reciprocated with minimal information.

Powell & Goouch (2015) position song as a powerful relational bridge. Educators taking part in this study noted that song directly improves family relationships, transforming inherited repertoires, often passed down through generations, into shared tools for connection. At the same time, songs constitute a cultural artefact, embodying a family's cultural heritage. Children's songs and lullabies carry distinct linguistic rhythms, melodies, and lyrics reflective of familial origins, ethnic traditions and community practices. As such, they have the potential to spark curiosity and dialogue about home cultures and the power to improve intercultural understandings, when shared between a family and an ECEC setting. Unfortunately, this is not often the case, the researchers concluded.

"the project helped [educators] to look beyond the obvious, to introduce songs from their own histories as well as from contemporary cultures, while attending to babies, their interests, their cultures and their responses to song."

(Powell & Goouch, 2015, p.18)

Culturally imbued practice

Singing to a baby is in itself a culturally specific practice, Powell & Goouch (2015) remind us. The idea of pedagogies as embodiments of culture is further explored by Cooper and colleagues (2022). Their study analysed care practices for one-year-olds in England, USA, New Zealand and Hong Kong, through video observations of their care routines, including eating, sleeping or playing. The researchers filmed ordinary interactions, edited them to 15 minutes and screened them for group discussions with educators, families, and ECEC leaders.

Whilst the video footage revealed universal educator delight and warmth towards the children, analysis points to culturally diverse pedagogies, as caring practices are shaped by cultural values. The researchers noted cultural embodiments in routines and rituals (e.g., mealtime), in practices such as the involvement of families, in the national frameworks that guide daily practice, in how educators view and position themselves as professionals, and in the overall affective climate in an ECEC setting.

For example, there were varied interpretations of how freedom and guidance should be balanced for young children; freedom with guidance is an important precept in Froebel's work. Hong Kong settings often used more structured adult direction during routines like feeding, reflecting collectivist values where guidance prioritises group harmony and clear roles. In contrast, New Zealand examples showed looser, child-led flexibility that emphasized personal exploration and responsiveness to the child's immediate interests.

Cooper et al. (2022) reject the idea of "best practice" in favour of relational, culturally attuned support that recognises ECEC settings as historically, politically, and culturally varied.

"Our collective reflections and multi layered dialogue have led us to acknowledge meaningful pedagogy with very young children as a culturally-specific phenomenon."

(Cooper *et al.*, 2022, p.21).

Babies and the Natural World

Froebel's principle of unity and connectedness extends this relational foundation beyond human interactions to encompass the natural world, positioning nature not merely as a backdrop but as an active partner in children's holistic development. Froebel suggested that babies are born connected to nature because they are nature themselves. Yet a literature review conducted by Kemp and Josephidou (2020; 2023a) identified a dominant opposing narrative - that nature is risky and babies don't really 'belong' outdoors.

A survey of English babyrooms found marked variability in their outdoor provision, potentially compounding existing inequalities in access to natural environments. There was, however, a shared tendency to artificially separate babies from nature by removing natural features and replacing them with manufactured resources (Kemp et al. 2020; Josephidou et al. (2021). This limits the pedagogic richness of outdoor environments for babies including for sensory play or rest.

When outdoors, educators tend to take on roles of surveillance and control rather than facilitating active engagement with the natural world, to keep babies safe. This is despite evidence, which provide, (Kemp et al., 2025c)

An important link with culture re-emerges. The literature review by Kemp and Josephidou (2020; 2023a) calls attention to cultural variations in how spending time outdoors is valued using the practice of babies sleeping outdoors, which is common in Finland but a rarity in other parts of the Global North. Such cultural attitudes seem to influence parental perspectives about the importance of babies and toddlers spending time outdoors whilst in nursery (Kemp et al., 2025b).

Nature Engaging, Nature Enhancing (NENE) Pedagogy (Josephidou & Kemp, 2024; Kemp et al., 2025c) offers a Froebelian response to the marginalisation of babies from natural environments, reimagining the outdoors as rich relational spaces. Based on research and interventions in babyrooms across London, NENE pedagogy encourages early childhood educators to focus on 'being' rather than 'doing' when thinking about engaging babies with nature.

At the same time, NENE pedagogy repositions nature in a reciprocal relationship with humans, rather than as a source to be exploited for our benefit. It therefore encourages enhancing practices such as familiarising children with the local environment and its needs or increasing biodiversity through the creating of wild spaces and gardens.

Far from surveillants (Kemp & Josephidou 2020; 2023a), educators practicing within a NENE pedagogy are invited to be attentive, responsive, nurturing and questioning, prioritising the developmental value of outdoor spaces over safety fears. The evidence is that the health and wellbeing benefits of regularly spending time outdoors are experienced by children and educators alike (Kemp et al., 2025b).

"The project shows how a Froebelian understanding of nature engagement (NENE) can inspire and transform outdoor pedagogies even in challenging urban babyroom contexts."

(Kemp *et al,* 2025d, p.13)

Weaving a relational ecosystem

Collectively, the research projects reviewed converge to affirm Froebel's conviction that early years pedagogy thrives not in isolation, but through deliberate cultivation of the intricate relational ecosystems where children naturally flourish. A child's family, nursery and culture as well as the natural world form distinct yet interconnected threads. They are all essential to Froebel's vision of holistic pedagogy, with educators reimagined as weavers of interconnected thriving, ensuring every child unfolds within a coherent web of belonging.

Knowledgeable, nurturing educators

A relational and holistic pedagogy invites us to embrace children's innate desire and ability for connection and the relational nexus surrounding them. It further redefines early years educators as attuned facilitators.

Acknowledging significant constraints that limit educators' ability to practice as knowledgeable, nurturing educators, the reviewed research identifies two imperatives for this transformation: slowing down and reflecting critically.

Slower pedagogy

Early years settings often operate as busy environments, where rapid routines and multiple demands can threaten to undermine opportunities for attuned, responsive care. Home-nursery contrasts exemplify the impact this may have on babies and young children.

Guard (2023a) documents that, while rare one-to-one interactions with key persons mirrored parental descriptions of home voice patterns, offering babies the opportunity to communicate like they do at home, the nursery's interchangeable pace typically limited these, leaving babies struggling to adjust. This manifested in accelerated, dysregulated cries and movements, particularly among babies younger than 6 months old, firstborns, or those with shorter attendance who spend reduced time in nursery. Based on Guard's (2023a) observations, these babies resorted to crying in an attempt to regain the closeness they knew at home.

Voyajolu (2021) provides a different example of adjustment. Children in this study appeared to engage with music at more complex stages of development at home than in nursery. The researcher attributed this to the unhurried attention parents can offer their children at home, compared to the institutional haste of ECE settings.

Several research projects reviewed remind us how much can be missed when the pace is fast and, conversely, how much more can be observed by slowing down. The work of MacRae and MacLure (2021) provides a vivid demonstration of the value of slow pedagogy. Their project explored two-year-olds' sensorimotor learning using slow motion video. The researchers collected video recordings of the toddlers, in nursery, their home environment and community spaces. The material was co-produced with parents and educators, who were invited to film the children during ordinary everyday and play activities.

Slow motion clips were created from the original, normal speed clips, which participating parents and educators had the opportunity to rewatch. In watching back, they were encouraged not to observe but to tune into unexpected movements and ways in which bodies encounter each other in space. MacRae and MacLure (2021) provided multiple examples of perceptible micro-movements resurfacing as part of this process. For example, watching a two-year old's repeated jumps in slow motion also revealed tiny hesitations, knee bends, toe grips and subtle foot repositioning on each landing. Movements that had gone unnoticed during the original interaction transformed

into illustrations of a sensate and embodied form of knowing. Once again, home-nursery contrasts revealed freer sensorimotor engagement (e.g., jumping motifs) at home.

"By attempting to watch for the smallest of children's movements, we begin to glimpse not only how much these small movements do matter, but how they are also a sensate form of knowing."

(MacRae and MacLure, 2021, p.274)

The use of video emerges as a methodological innovation in the body of work reviewed, as multiple research projects used video as a means for close observation and slowing the pace of interactions. This represents a contemporary evolution of Froebel's naturalistic observations of babies and young children.

Alongside the slow-motion video methodology presented by MacRae & MacLure (2021), Guard's (2023b) Video Interaction Dialogue (VID) and Cooper and colleagues' (2022) Layered Interpretation of Video-cued Multivocal Elicitation (LIVME) warrant particular attention for their pioneering approach. VID uses edited video clips of attuned adult-baby moments to facilitate shared reflection between parents and educators. LIVME employs iterative slow-motion video review with educators to elicit thick descriptions of infants' micro-movements. While video accentuates slow pedagogy, it is not a prerequisite for it. Crucially, it is the possibility to immerse oneself in the interaction that seems to function as the catalyst for deeper relational understanding.

Elfer's (2017) adaptation of the Tavistock Observation Method (A-TOM) for use in ECE settings exemplifies the richness of attuning to the present moment in early childhood care and education. A-TOM describes a naturalistic method of observation grounded in psychoanalytic principles. As part of the project, a group of three researchers and three nursery leads undertook observations in three different nursery settings, following which they produced written narratives of their observations. Nursery educators were then invited to meet as a group, facilitated by one of the leads, to discuss the observations by scrutinising the written narratives.

Participants shared a sense of enthusiasm over opportunities to focus on the whole child and maintain a more rounded view, a finding that strengthens the link between slow pedagogy and holistic pedagogy. Micro-moments of joy or distress that could have gone unnoticed gained a platform of visibility, however it seems that the approach also brought visibility to children who had previously received little attention. Peer interactions were also noted, and ways in which individual children positioned themselves in relation to each other.

Elfer (2017) highlighted the contribution of A-TOM in enabling educators to get to know more about individual children and better understand them. He also discussed the significance of redirecting pedagogic focus "from the learning of the observer to learning about the child" (p. 441) by encouraging educators to tune into the child's cues. This shift aligns with Froebel's vision of children unfolding their potential in the presence of nurturing caregivers and in response to their receptive presence.

Coupled with Kemp et al.'s (2023) call to embrace slow ways of being with babies in nature and the emphasis placed by Cooper & Quiñones (2020) on educators' responsiveness to children's play expressions, the research projects discussed in this section advance slow pedagogy. That is one that prioritises unhurried rhythms, deep presence, and child-led pacing as a counterpart to institutional acceleration and enables attuned, relational practice. Guard (2025) theorises this as "adagio interactions", relational exchanges centred on presence, rhythm, intention, multimodality and ease that reclaim child-led rhythm from nursery haste. This holds particular importance for young children, given subtle ways of communication that do not rely on speech and may go unrecognised without deliberate attentiveness.

Reflective pedagogy

Approaches like the A-TOM, described by Elfer (2017), support educators in seeing the "whole child" (p. 439). At the same time, however, engaging in spaces like this seems to enable educators to see more of themselves as educators, extending the concept of seeing "the whole" from children to educators and illuminating their own professional subjectivity. Reflective spaces offer educators opportunities to examine and interrogate their own practice and connect with their own emotional experiences and responses; the impact of subtle emotional currents in daily pedagogic interactions has not received sufficient attention, Elfer (2017) remarks, as they have been sidelined by discourses of safety and learning outcomes.

Elfer and colleagues further explore the potential of spaces of reflection for educators in their work on Work Discussions (WD) groups (Elfer, 2012; Elfer et al., 2018a, 2018b; Elfer, 2023). WD groups are described as 90-minute, weekly or fortnightly forums where nursery educators present work challenges or cases for collective exploration of their emotional undercurrents. Containment and critical reflection are prioritised over problem-solving advice in the discussion.

Reflecting on their work, participating educators shared intense emotional strain beneath performative positivity, the perceived pressure to always appear cheerful. The opportunity to share such experiences with others seemed to comfort the educators and renew their tolerance for the discomfort generated in their work. Evaluating WD groups across several nursery settings, Elfer et al. (2018a) further added to the list of benefits. The researchers collected data through interviews with nursery educators working with two-year-old children and managers, as well as observations of children and interviews with parents. The findings include measurable child gains across multiple areas of development, improved relationships with parents, and educator reports of deeper child understanding and stronger team empathy.

WD groups represent a distinctive model for professional discussion, one that brings together Froebel's work on the value of reflection and psychoanalytic insights into psychological defences. Additional examples of reflective pedagogy are available in the research projects reviewed. Reflective conversations as part of reviewing video material produced were included in the discussion groups described by Cooper et al. (2022). The authors emphasise the need for educators to be reflective and open to differing perspectives in their work.

Kemp and Josephidou (2023b) stress the role of competent leadership in cultivating a culture of reflective practice within an ECEC setting. Young et al. (2022) recount complementary reflections by ECEC educators participating in the Babysong project. Being invited to engage in a process of critically evaluating their practice encouraged professional curiosity, brought different views in creative opposition and provided educators with opportunities to theorise their practice. Once again, participating educators seemed to appreciate the opportunity to listen to colleagues, ask questions of each other and think through their own responses.

The research projects reviewed provide compelling evidence of reflective pedagogy's far-reaching benefits: improving outcomes for children, strengthening family partnerships, deepening professional curiosity and enhancing quality of practice. At the same time, across the diverse reflective spaces examined, from A-TOM and WD groups to less structured group discussion forums, ECEC educators demonstrate genuine engagement, actively reflecting on and applying insights from these reflective opportunities. Yet, despite their demonstrated value, reflective practice remains scarce in practice.

"Ordinary human defences may lead professionals to avoid aspects of their work that they experience as upsetting or anxiety provoking"

(Elfer et al. 2018a, p. 4).

Relating to a baby or a toddler can be a source of joy and delight for educators, but the level of intimacy required may also be challenging; containing a young child's dependency is emotionally demanding. Some educators additionally named the weight of feeling that an entire family's problems are suddenly on their shoulders, in relation to the families of the children they were working with. Guard (2023a) also wondered whether relational invitations put forward by babies may be missed by educators because they may feel constrained in their ability to respond to those. Not seeing these invitations may thus be emotionally more palatable and protect professionals from being constantly aware of their limitations. Indeed, educators in Elfer's A-TOM groups (2017) voiced anxiety about what they may see as part of observing, particularly in relation to witnessing poor practice. Such defences, Elfer (2017) explains, become collective and consequently shape practice at an organisational level.

Organisational pressures provide an important context for challenges to reflective practice; these are explored next.

Practice constraints

So far, this report has made a case for an approach to pedagogy that places relationships at the heart of educational practice (relational pedagogy); understands children as intrinsically connected to their families, cultural heritage and the natural world (holistic pedagogy); tunes into interactions with babies and young children by slowing down the pace of practice (slow pedagogy); encourages professional curiosity and reflexivity in educators (reflective pedagogy).

Training and policy gaps

These essential pillars of Froebelian-inspired early years provision redefine educators as attuned facilitators who nurture babies' innate connectedness across human, cultural, and natural worlds. Yet it is paramount to acknowledge the organisational constraints that frequently make it difficult for individual educators to embody these approaches in everyday settings. Equally important is situating these challenges within the evolving socioeconomic and political context surrounding educational provision for young children.

A primary barrier to relational, holistic, slow, and reflective pedagogies may lie in gaps in access to targeted information and training. For example, Guard (2023a) emphasises that early childhood educators require regular, high-quality, in-depth training programmes on child development, including the subtle ways in which babies communicate and the significance of adults responding to their communicative efforts. Without this knowledge, such opportunities remain sidelined. Young et al. (2022) raise concerns that the educators most qualified in a nursery setting may be assigned to older children, which potentially deprives baby rooms of significant expertise. Educators may additionally lack access to dedicated spaces to bridge theory and practice; without concrete constructs from relevant theories to anchor their practice, they may lose confidence in their own practice-based evidence. The Babysong project illustrates the impact of having access to a theoretical framework: Powell & Goouch (2015) documented that exposure to Froebelian principles enabled educators participating in their study to articulate their intentions and actions with renewed confidence and boosted their assurance in using song as a relational tool.

The lack of relevant guidance at a policy level presents another challenge, one that is particularly evident in research projects exploring the role of song and that of nature engagement. While the value of singing has been researched and recognised in the home environment, Young et al. (2022) argue, its value has not been extended beyond the home in ECEC settings. Educators using singing are doing so without policy-backed rationale for its relational, emotional power. Similarly, Josephidou et al., (2021) expose scant policy support for the provision of access to outdoor spaces for young children. This leaves educators without clear directives around the benefits of engagement with the natural world. Consequently, roles and responsibilities are constructed in varied ways depending on priorities set by individual settings and distributed unevenly, without a way to monitor compliance.

Positivism and marginalisation

At the same time, existing policy frameworks warrant scrutiny for the values that underpin them. While individual educators may embody relational approaches, the prevailing culture may force them to depart from these professional values and their preferred ways of working. Educators across different research projects (Guard, 2023a; Powell & Goouch, 2015) expressed worries about being perceived as not working hard enough, if they were to take time to be with a baby in their care, lying quietly with them or engaging in longer interactions with them.

The need to be seen as busy aligns with neoliberal discourses around productivity, which have infiltrated ECEC settings and privilege education over care (Kemp & Josephidou, 2023b). Cooper & Quiñones (2020) strongly criticise approaches that artificially separate care from the curriculum and do not recognise care as an essential dimension of early years pedagogy, extending beyond a specified set of caregiving routines (e.g., feeding, cleaning etc). Focusing solely on what adults do, fails to acknowledge children as active agents and contributors to curriculum experiences.

The body of work reviewed for this report further criticises positivist approaches to early years education, which impose narrow, metrics-driven educational outcomes. Such approaches regard children's experiences as uniform (Cooper et al., 2022) and assume linear models of child development, with stages a child is expected to go through, one at a time and in sequence. This directly clashes with Froebel's patient principle of unfolding, the process through which a child's innate potential gradually emerges, where infancy and toddlerhood hold intrinsic value, rather than serving merely as preparatory phases for school readiness. It also contradicts findings by researchers such as Voyajolu (2021) who describe development, in this case musical development, as non-linear, occurring within as well as between stages, with significant overlap and continuation between levels. The work of Elfer (2012) documents ways in which managers feel limited by curriculum demands and are left struggling to balance relational care with performative accountability.

Such thinking marginalises infants and toddlers and silences their educators (Kemp & Josephidou, 2023b). It is in this context that caring acts and relationships are stripped down to their mere functionality: singing is rendered a tool to distract or quieten a baby (Powell & Goouch, 2015) and a dummy is offered to pacify a baby's demands for connection (Guard, 2023a). Expectations around professional performance add pressure on educators and it dictates what ought to be prioritised.

Educators may have little choice other than shifting towards organisational tasks, operating in fast-paced environments and prioritising service demands over children's needs (Guard, 2023a; Young et al., 2022). In this context, work with young children becomes overlooked and poorly understood (Kemp & Josephidou, 2023b). The policy paper on giving all children the best start in life (DoE, 2025) brings attention to early years educators feeling overstretched and undervalued, referring to them as "unsung heroes". The current policy and research interest in early years provision represents a unique opportunity to reconfigure practice, liberating it from identified constraints.

Reflections on the research

Methodological diversity

Many researchers grappled with methodological challenges in studying young babies and toddlers, frequently questioning optimal approaches. This tension brought methodological richness through a combination of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods designs and the use of diverse data sources: naturalistic observations (e.g., Powell & Goouch, 2015); video recordings (e.g., MacRae & MacLure, 2021); interviews with parents and/or educators (e.g., Elfer et al.,2018a); use of questionnaires (e.g., Eirinaki, 2022); and site visits (e.g., Josephidou et al., 2021). Some researchers (e.g., Voyajolu, 2021) combined sources, with data triangulation emerging as an important strength in the body of work reviewed.

Methodological innovations also emerged, such as Guard's (2023b) Video Interaction Dialogue, an approach seeking to capture dialogues between babies and educators in video, with selected clips of intersubjective moments between baby and educator then being played back to the educator, as an opportunity for discussion and reflection.

The child's voice

A recurring concern was how to manage the ethical issue of informed consent when seeking to understand the lived experiences of babies and toddlers. A big group of projects circumvented this dilemma by doing research with adults, parents, carers and educators. Others, like Cooper and Quiñones (2020), Guard (2023a) or MacRae and MacLure (2021), relied on parental consent coupled with children's assent, paying close attention to any signs of discomfort in the child.

Despite such genuine attempts to tune into babies' and toddlers' communications, the adult voice remains dominant in the projects reviewed, as the medium through which child voices are captured or interpreted. Another persisting drawback is the range of the methodological quality across projects, with overall standards that could have been stronger and more consistent throughout.

Sociodemographic gaps

A further important methodological limitation is that sociodemographic details did not seem to receive eno ugh attention in the projects reviewed. Overall, most studies provided little information on variables such as ethnicity or socioeconomic status, although some commented on the location of participating early education settings as a proxy for deprivation or ethnic composition of the local population (e.g. Josephidou, Kemp and Durrant, 2021). This sparsity makes it challenging to assess population representation, however in most cases this was not acknowledged under study limitations. It also raises the question of how we understand markers of identity in babies and toddlers; demographic information is routinely provided in research with older children and adults.

Geographical and cultural limitations

The absence of sociodemographic details becomes particularly significant when considered alongside restrictions related to the geographical focus of the research projects reviewed. The studies included in this review exhibit a predominantly UK-centric geographical focus, with empirical work concentrated in England, with both rural and urban areas represented. Two literature reviews (Kemp & Josephidou, 2023a; Kemp et al.. 2025c) broaden the lens to babies' and toddlers' engagement with nature in international contexts, primarily Global North nations (e.g., Norway, Finland, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), with limited Global South representation (e.g., Chile, Ghana). The work of Cooper and colleagues (2022) offers an empirical counterpoint. The researchers explored pedagogies of care for 1-year olds across four countries (England, USA, New Zealand, Hong Kong); here again, the Global North remains dominant, while the Global South is under-represented. Cooper et al. (2022) exemplify the importance of culture by illustrating how culture shapes our understanding of concepts like play and relevant pedagogical practices. This highlights a need for more diverse cultural perspectives and explicit links made with early childhood pedagogy.

"meaningful pedagogy with very young children is a culturally-specific phenomenon"

(Cooper *et al,* 2022)

Recommendations

For practice

- Babies' and toddlers' voices and needs should be at the heart of practice. In conversations with colleagues, managers, families, and other stakeholders, educators can be vital advocates for child-centred pedagogy.
- One-to-one interactions should be prioritised during and beyond care routines, like nappy changes or feeding. Taking time to slow practice down can ensure communication cues – including gaze, vocalisations, movement, use of toys, affect, facial expressions and gestures - are consistently responded to.
- Discussing home communication patterns with parents can support settling and transitions. Regular communication with children's families alongside close observations can help educators learn more about their communication preferences.
- Responding to babies' unique voice is a core pedagogical principle that recognises them as equal and competent communication partners.
- Relational practice underpins stable relationships within professional teams and with children and families.
- An expansive definition of song includes spontaneous singing, lullabies, rhythmic play, and face-to-face sound imitation. This transforms singing into a relational and communicative tool, rather than a way to manage and introduce tasks.
- Play is an expression of development for children. Educators are encouraged to respond gently to babies' and toddler's play scripts. Care-related and other toys should be freely available, to support children's explorations.
- Outdoor access should be supported, consistent and maintained year-round. Understanding the benefits of nature-based pedagogies for young children's holistic development can help educators to challenge beliefs that it is less important for babies and toddlers.
- Available outdoor spaces can be enhanced through the introduction of natural elements for multi-sensory stimulation. There is value in 'being' outdoors as well as 'doing' activities.
- Shared reflective spaces allow educators to reflect on their own emotional responses to the work and offer and receive support and guidance from colleagues. Managers and leaders should support a culture of professional reflexivity in early childhood settings.
- Observation creates opportunities to shift the focus from adults to the children and their individual experiences.
- Educators are encouraged to model positive values through everyday caregiving practices. Understanding how their own cultural and organisational values shape their practice and being curious about the heritage and values of the families they work with is an important part of professional reflexivity.
- While organisational pressures are acknowledged, educators are encouraged to create moments of stillness with babies and toddlers, resist performativity demands and use their observational and reflective skills to identity and address departures from child-centred practice.

Recommendations

For policy

- Educators have raised significant concerns about the effects of performativity. There is a need to interrogate ways in which existing policy and guidance may inadvertently prioritise efficiency and productivity over child-centric pedagogy.
- Such discourses which emphasise metrics and monitoring potentially overlook children's multimodal learning dimensions, undermine child-led practice, and disrupt a child's natural developmental pace.
- Policy should adopt a rights-based approach, enshrining babies' right to a voice in early childhood frameworks and guidance. Babies and young children should be seen as active agents in early years pedagogy, able to initiate and contribute to curriculum experiences.
- Statutory guidance should emphasise the importance of relational practice and opportunities for sustained one-to-one interactions with responsive educators for the youngest children. Close relationships should be seen as an everyday part of practice.
- Regular training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is needed to support educators in understanding how babies and toddlers communicate.
- Ratios should be protected and key person continuity mandated, in line with evidence on the importance of early life relationships for babies and young children.
- Strong working relationships and communication with families should also be encouraged, as well as collaboration between educational and clinical settings, to ensure that the needs of all young children, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, are met.
- Curriculum policy should acknowledge care as part of early years pedagogy and recognise care acts as rich relational opportunities, beyond their practical functionality. Pedagogies of care are acknowledged as dependent on cultural context.
- The emotional demands associated with early childhood practice should be acknowledged, and educators offered the working conditions, pay and professional development opportunities that match their professional skills.
- Reflective practice should be supported within all early childhood settings. Deep professional reflection and avoidance of simplistic solutions require supportive systems and workplace cultures that prioritise and enable this practice.
- Policy should expand singing guidance to emphasise the affective potential of song alongside educational purposes and musical outcomes.
- The pedagogic value of the natural environment should be acknowledged in policy. Practice should depart from the current risk averse position that problematises the natural environment by exclusively considering hazards to also incorporate ways in which babies benefit from spending time outdoors, for example with regards to their health, sensory development and emotional well-being.
- Since access to the outdoors and high quality natural environments is socially and culturally stratified, early childhood settings could play a key role by developing inclusive nature-based pedagogies. Policy should mandate explicit outdoor provision standards to reduce setting variation, address inequalities, and support early childhood settings in becoming sites of social inclusion and nature restoration.

Recommendations

For research

- Research on early years pedagogy should position itself as complementary to practice. Research validates and grounds educators' practice, while practice is recognised as spearheading research and research innovation.
- Future research should continue to strive to elevate babies' and young children's voices beyond the mediating adult lens. Future research should explore innovative methods to capture their perspectives, building on the established value of video, ethnography and naturalistic observation.
- To enhance confidence in findings, future research should build on the strengths of combining deductive and inductive methods, collecting multiple forms of data, employing qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods methodology and data/findings triangulation across stakeholders.
- Future research in early childhood could further advance methodological innovations such as slow-motion video, Layered Interpretation of Video-cued Multivocal Elicitation (LIVME), and Video Interactive Dialogue (VID).
- Further research is required to examine young children's experiences in ECEC settings. Future research should focus on emotional and relational dimensions, therefore moving beyond school readiness. This may be particularly important for babies entering settings from nine months old, as ECEC provision expands. In this context, it would be important to acknowledge the personal, institutional, and sociopolitical dimensions shaping early years pedagogy.
- Further research on models of reflective practice such as the WD group and A-TOM could inform decisions about appropriateness, feasibility and potential for scaling up in early years settings.
- Further research is required to advance outdoor pedagogy in ECEC settings. Future research should include empirical studies on engagement with the outdoors and the importance of interacting with nature, focusing specifically on young children. This should incorporate documenting current outdoor provision in early years settings.
- Further research in song, instrumental play, musical development may consider how these are being integrated into ECEC settings and for what purpose.

References

Bateson, M. (1979). The Epigenesis of Conversational Interaction: A personal account of research development. In M. Bullowa (Ed.) Before Speech: The beginning of Human Communication, pp. 63-77, Cambridge University Press.

Cooper, M., & Quiñones, G. (2022). Toddlers as the one-caring: Co-authoring play narratives and identities of care. Early Child Development and Care, 192(6), 964-979. **https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1826465**

Cooper, M., Siu, C. T. S., McMullen, M. B., Rockel, J., & Powell, S. (2022). A multi-layered dialogue: Exploring Froebel's influence on pedagogies of care with 1-year-olds across four cultures. Global Education Review, 9(1), 6-23. **https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/eb281585-29ae-40ac-882f-92c09e57113d/content**

Cooper, M., Siu, C. T. S., Powell, S., Rockel, J., & McMullen, M. B. (2025). Pedagogies of Care with One-Year-Olds: Exploring Froebelian Connections in Four Countries. Bloomsbury Publishing.

David, T., Goouch, K., Powell, S., & Abbott, L. (2003). Birth to three matters: A review of the literature. Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education. (2025, July 10). Childcare and early years survey of parents. GOV.UK. **https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/childcare-and-early-years-survey-of-parents/2024**

Department for Education. (2025, September 11). Giving every child the best start in life. GOV.UK. **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life/giving-every-child-the-best-start-in-life**

Eirinaki, V. (2022). The impact of postnatal depression on mother-infant interaction and infants' communication skills: A video-based analysis. [Doctoral Dissertation: University of Roehampton]. **https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/the-impact-of-postnatal-depression-on-mother-infant-interaction-a/**

Elfer, P. (2012). Emotion in nursery work: Work Discussion as a model of critical professional reflection, Early Years, 32(2), 129-141. **https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2012.697877**

Elfer, P. (2017). Subtle emotional process in early childhood pedagogy: evaluating the contribution of the Tavistock Observation Method. Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 25(3), 431–445. **https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2016.1276471**

Elfer, P., (2023). The well-being of babies, children under three and staff leaders in daycare. In T. Bruce, P. Elfer, S. Powell, & L. Werth (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook of Froebel and Early Childhood Practice (pp. 170–178). Routledge.

Elfer, P. (Ed.) (2024) Talking with Feeling in the Early Years, London: Routledge.

Elfer, P., Greenfield, S., Robson, S., Wilson, D., & Zachariou, A. (2018a). Developing close, thoughtful attention to children and families in the early years pedagogy: Evaluating the impact of Work Discussion Groups as a model of professional support and reflection. The Froebel Trust. **https://www.froebel.org.uk/research-library/developing-close-thoughtful-attention-to-children-and-families-in-early-years-pedagogy**

Elfer, P., Greenfield, S., Robson, S., Wilson, D., & Zachariou, A. (2018b). Love, satisfaction and exhaustion in the nursery: methodological issues in evaluating the impact of Work Discussion groups in the nursery. Early Child Development and Care, 188(7), 892–904. **https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1446431**

Froebel, F. (1887). The education of man. (W. N. Hailmann, Trans.). Appleton & Company. (Original work published 1826).

Guard, C. (2023a). Hearing the voices of babies in baby-educator interactions in Early Childhood Settings. [Doctoral Thesis: University of Roehampton]. **https://files.froebel.org.uk/production/documents/GUARD-Final-submission-Awarded-2023-to-send.pdf**

Guard, C. (2023b). 'It's the little bits that you have enabled me to see'. Reconceptualising the voices of babies using the video interaction dialogue model with early years educators. Early Years, 43(3), 606-625. **https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2023.2190498**

Guard, C. (2025). Adagio Interactions – Rhythmic, Relational Being with Babies in Early Childhood Education. New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education, 27 (1), 21-28. **https://www.auckland.ac.nz/assets/arts/our-research/documents/First-Years-Journal-2025%20Volume%2027%20Issue%201.pdf**

Josephidou, J., & Kemp, N. (2024). Developing nature engaging/nature enhancing pedagogies for babies and toddlers. New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education, 26(1), 23-28. **https://oro.open.ac.uk/103766/**

Josephidou, J., Kemp, N., & Durrant, I. (2021). Outdoor provision for babies and toddlers: exploring the practice/policy/research nexus in English ECEC settings. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 29(6), 925–941. **https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1985555**

Kemp, N., Durrant, I., & Josephidou, J. (2020). Making connections with their world: Outdoor provision for under-twos in early childhood settings in Kent. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/44b0JVA**

References

Kemp, N., & Josephidou, J. (2020). Where are the babies? Engaging under twos with the outdoors. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4etkIVH**

Kemp, N., & Josephidou, J. (2023a). Babies and toddlers outdoors: A narrative review of the literature on provision for under twos in ECEC settings. Early Years, 43(1), 137-150. **https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qz5jn160gVSdGU_r2Pcf10zysOdNwh7t/view?usp=sharing**

Kemp, N., & Josephidou, J. (2023b). Creating spaces called hope: the critical leadership role of owner/managers in developing outdoor pedagogies for infants and toddlers. Early Years, 43(3), 641-655. **https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2023.2235913**

Kemp, N., Josephidou, J., & Bolshaw, P. (2023c). From weeds to tiny flowers: Rethinking the place of the youngest children outdoors. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4uGFLc2**

Kemp, N., Josephidou, J., & Bolshaw, P. (2025c). 'Tiny humans' outdoors: understanding the factors that mediate opportunities for babies and toddlers. Children's Geographies, 23(2), 219-236. **https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2025.2479683**

Kemp, N., Josephidou, J., Bolshaw, P., Durrant, I., & Plowright-Pepper, L. (2025b). "The babies, they've noticed": An evaluation of a Froebelian inspired nature-based pedagogy in urban babyrooms. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/44aZLIW**

Kemp et al (2025d) Developing Nature Engaging & Nature Enhancing (NENE) pedagogies for babies and toddlers in urban babyrooms. Final Report. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/3QIxOFj**

Kemp, N., Josephidou, J., Bolshaw, P., & Plowright-Pepper, L. (2024). Looking for the wow and the wonder: Supporting babies to be outdoors in urban early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4v9xEWq**

Kemp, N., Josephidou, J., Durrant, I., & Bolshaw, P. (2025a). Making memories together... The importance of the outdoors and nature to babyroom parents. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4xF2BUi**

Leadsom, A., Field, F., Burstow, P., & Lucas, C. (2013). The 1001 critical days: The importance of the conception to age two period.

MacLure, M., & MacRae, C. (2021). Final report: Open Call Research Grant, Listening-2: Investigating sensory-motor learning in two-year-olds. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4vfZobU**

MacRae, C., & MacLure, M. (2021). Watching two-year-olds jump: video method becomes 'haptic.' Ethnography and Education, 16(3), 263-278. **https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2021.1917439**

Powell, S., & Goouch, K. (2015). Principled Encounters in Daycare for Babies: Froebel's Legacy. Froebel Trust. **https://bit.ly/4vZ16i6**

Powell, S., & Goouch, K. (2023). Mother's songs in daycare for babies. In T. Bruce, P. Elfer, S. Powell, & L. Werth (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook of Froebel and Early Childhood Practice (pp. 170-178). Routledge.

Powell, S., Gouch, K., & Werth. L. (2013, November 1-2). Seeking Froebel's 'Mother Songs' In Daycare for Babies [Paper Presentation]. TACTYC Annual Research Conference, Birmingham, UK. **https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Seeking-Froebel's-mother-songs-in-daycare-for-Powell-Goouch/27128aa974730a865fb9ba13c1e7c392683038de#citing-papers**

Voyajolu, A. (2021). Mapping emerging musicality: Exploring the trajectory of musical development in the early years using the Sounds of Intent framework [Doctoral Thesis: University of Roehampton]. **https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/5774355/Mapping_emerging_musicality.pdf**

Young, V., Goouch, K., & Powell, S. (2022). Babysong revisited: communication with babies through song. British Journal of Music Education, 39(3), 273-285. **https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051722000298**

Appendix 1 Output Evaluation Template

Overarching Evaluation Question: What, if any, new knowledge or insights has the project or output generated about Froebelian Education	
Descriptive Data (all outputs)	
Title of Output	
Type of Output	
Available Metrics (citations, downloads)	
Author(s) + affiliation	
Links with other outputs	(from same and different projects)
Year of publication	
Geographical Focus	
Participant characteristics	(e.g. educator/parents/children; age, socio-economic background, ethnic background)
Type/s of context/environment	(e.g. ECE setting, home, community, other)
Evaluative Criteria (all outputs)	
1. Does the project/output have clear aims and the potential to address these? (i.e. are they re-alistic in number, size, scale?)	Yes/No If yes, what are the study aims
Please rate study aims	Good, Fair, Unclear, Poor
2. Is there a clear justified methodology?	Yes/No If yes, what methodology does the study use?
Please rate soundness of methodology	Good, Fair, Unclear, Poor
3. Are knowledge claims underpinned by robust evidence (i.e. is there a clear analytic process? Is sufficient data included?)	Yes/No If yes, what analytic approach is used?
Please rate the robustness of evidence	Good, Fair, Unclear, Poor

Overall output rating	
• Good - positive assessment against all three questions. • Fair - positive assessment against most of the questions; no negative assessments. • Unclear - unclear quality in ac-cordance with all the ques-tions. • Poor - negative assessment against one or more of the questions.	
Knowledge Contribution (only for outputs rated good or fair)	
Key Findings Please cut and paste key information from findings/results/ discussion /conclusion that could be relevant.	
Implications for policy	
Implications for practice	
Implications for research (methodological innovations)	
Caveats and other comments	

Appendix 2

Projects	Main outputs produced
The effect of maternal postnatal depression on infants verbal and non- verbal communication skills	**Eirinaki (2022)** The impact of postnatal depression on mother-infant interaction and infants'communication skills: A video-based analysis
Listening-2: Investigating sensory-motor learning in two-year olds	**MacRae & MacLure (2021)** Watching two-year-olds jump: video method becomes 'haptic
Hearing Infant Voices	**Guard (2023a)** Hearing the voices of babies in baby-educator interactions in Early Childhood Settings **Guard (2023b)** 'It's the little bits that you have enabled me to see'. Reconceptualising the voices of babies using the video interaction dialogue model with early years educators. **Guard (2025)** Adagio Interactions - Rhythmic, Relational Being with Babies in Early Childhood Education.
Developing Close, Thoughtful Attention To Children And Families In Early Years Pedagogy	**Elfer (2012)** Emotion in nursery work: Work Discussion as a model of critical professional reflection **Elfer et al. (2018a)** Developing close, thoughtful attention to children and families in the early years pedagogy. **Elfer et al. (2018b)** Love, satisfaction and exhaustion in the nursery: methodological issues in evaluating the impact of Work Discussion groups in the nursery **Elfer (2023)** The well-being of babies, children under three and staff leaders in daycare. In The Routledge International Handbook of Froebel and Early Childhood Practice **Elfer (2024)** Talking with Feeling in the Early Years
	Elfer (2017) Subtle emotional process in early childhood pedagogy: evaluating the contribution of the Tavistock Observation Method
A life 'in and with nature?' An exploration of outdoor provision in baby rooms	**Kemp & Josephidou (2020)** Where are the babies? Kemp et al. (2020) Making connections with their world. Outdoor provision for under-twos in early childhood settings in Kent. **Josephidou et al. (2021)** Outdoor provision for babies and toddlers: exploring the practice/policy/research nexus in English ECEC settings **Kemp & Josephidou (2023a)** Babies and toddlers outdoors: a narrative review of the literature on provision for under twos in ECEC settings **Kemp & Josephidou (2023b)** Creating spaces called hope: the critical leadership role of owner/managers in developing outdoor pedagogies for infants and toddlers **Josephidou & Kemp (2024)** Developing nature engaging/ nature enhancing pedagogies for babies and toddlers

Projects	Main outputs produced
A Froebelian inspired nature pedagogy in urban babyrooms	**Kemp et al. (2023c)** From weeds to tiny flowers. **Kemp et al. (2024)** Looking for the wow and the wonder. **Kemp et al. (2025a)** Making memories together. **Kemp et al. (2025b)** "The babies, they've noticed". An evaluation of a Froebelian inspired nature-based pedagogy in urban babyrooms. **Kemp et al. (2025c)** Tiny humans' outdoors: understanding the factors that mediate opportunities for babies and toddlers **Kemp et al (2025d)** Developing Nature Engaging & Nature Enhancing (NENE) pedagogies for babies and toddlers in urban babyrooms.
Principled Encounters in Daycare for Babies: Froebel's Legacy	**Powell et al. (2013)** Seeking Froebel's "Mother Songs" in Daycare for Babies **Powell & Goouch (2015)** Principled Encounters in Daycare for Babies Froebel's Legacy **Powell & Goouch (2023)** Mother's songs in daycare for babies. In The Routledge International Handbook of Froebel and Early Childhood Practice **Young et al. (2022)** Babysong revisited: communication with babies through song
Mapping emerging musicality exploring the trajectory of musical development in the early years using the Sounds of Intent Framework	**Voyajolu (2021)** Mapping emerging musicality: Exploring the trajectory of musical development in the early years using the Sounds of Intent framework [Doctoral Thesis: University of Roehampton].
Exploring Froebel's Influence on Pedagogies of Care with 1-year-olds across Four Countries	**Cooper & Quiñones (2020)** Toddlers as the one-caring: co-authoring play narratives and identities of care **Cooper et al. (2022)** A Multi-Layered Dialogue: Exploring Froebel's Influence on Pedagogies of Care with 1-year-olds across Four Countries **Cooper et al. (2025)** Pedagogies of care with one-year olds.

About the author:

Dr. Zeny Melissourgaki is a Clinical Psychologist, working with parents and children in an Early Years service in the NHS. Zeny has an interest in translating psychological principles for real-world application, the connection between mental health and social inequalities and the healing power of human relationships. Zeny worked with the Froebel Trust on the Research Insights project, which synthesised studies on babies and young children from birth to three years old.

About the Froebel Trust:

The Froebel Trust funds research into children's learning from birth to eight years and champions early childhood education.

Find out more about our work at **froebel.org.uk**

Froebel Trust
Clarence Lodge
Clarence Lane
Roehampton
London SW15 5JW

w: **froebel.org.uk**
t: 020 8878 7546
e: **office@froebeltrust.org.uk**

Find us on social media:

Facebook **TheFroebelTrust**
Instagram **@FroebelTrustUK**
LinkedIn **linkedin.com/company/the-froebel-trust**

Listen to the Froebel Trust podcast: **www.froebel.org.uk/training-and-resources/podcast**

This guidance was first published by the Froebel Trust in June 2026

ISBN: 978-1-0687257-4-6