

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Canterbury Christ Church University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education (25)
<b>Title of case study:</b> Early Childhood Education and Care for Children from Birth to Three
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

This case study describes the impact of research into early childhood education and care (ECEC), highlighting significant findings, outputs, pathways to change and impacts for early education and care services for children under three. Impacts have been substantial, including increased awareness of this 'phase'; improved access to professional development; democratic practitioner participation and improved practitioner knowledge. Additionally, influence on policy debate about childcare, changes to organisational policies and practices in the public sector, and commercial development in the private sector, are described. The reach of the impact ranges from individual to organisational levels and local to international contexts.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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From the mid-1990s, Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) has been developing an international profile for research concerned with early childhood from birth to three years, and related education and care provision. Research led by Tricia David (Professor of Early Childhood Education, 1995-2003), Kathy Goouch (appointed 1992) and Sacha Powell (appointed 2003) (both currently Readers at CCCU) have contributed to a strong track record and portfolio of professional education and international research for ECEC, evidenced in RAE 2001 and 2008. Studies have resulted in publications intended to share and apply research findings to positively influence early years' research, policy and practice.

David, Goouch and Powell were commissioned in 2002 by the (then) Government's Sure Start Unit to conduct a literature review, to inform the development by Manchester Metropolitan University of a *Framework to Support Children in their Earliest Years: Birth to Three Matters*. Its originality was the focus on ECEC for children under three and the multi-disciplinary review. Its significance stemmed from the creation of positive and holistic conceptualisations of young children's development which shaped the Framework's innovative design. This signalled a departure from domain-specific, 'age and stage' linear models, which had often reflected deficit views of young children's development. Published as a standalone text (David et al 2003), the Review was also integral to the Framework.

The reconceptualisation of young children's interactions as skilful and competent attracted attention from colleagues within Shanghai Education Commission, which instigated a five-year project to develop integrated care, health and education services for children under three. In 2003, David and Powell were invited to work with the Shanghai team, beginning a process of collaborative research and practitioner exchanges, examining how holistic understandings of young children's development might apply in Chinese contexts. A further collaboration with ECEC colleagues from Beijing Education Commission ensued (Powell and Goouch, 2004, 2005), focusing on play and learning. Analysis of questionnaires and discussion groups involving 250 Chinese ECEC educators led to the theorising of play in ECEC contexts as a continuum of socio-culturally accepted/rejected behaviours and dispositions, published by David and Powell in 2005 and 2010, and Goouch in 2008. An ecological perspective shaped the findings of the studies, drawing attention to the evolving political, historical, social and cultural beliefs affecting provision for young children.

In 2004, David's lead editorship of BERA *Early Childhood SIG's Review* of early years' pedagogy, curriculum and adult roles, drew attention to a need for competent, skilful staff and conceptual and practical integration of education and care. In 2006, Powell and Goouch observed and recorded leadership case studies, incorporated as best practice exemplars in the *Early Years Professional Standards* published by CWDC. The process revealed the relative isolation of staff working with babies and, together with another key finding from *Birth to Three Matters Review* concerning the paucity of research in this 'phase', prompted *The Baby Room Project* (2009-12), funded by the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation. Goouch and Powell's critical ecological study highlighted a 'hidden situation' of policy confusion (Powell 2010), political disadvantage and inadequacy surrounding

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practitioners 'caring' for babies and sparse talk practices (Goouch and Powell 2012, 2013). This led Powell and Goouch to a study in 2013 of singing as a pedagogical tool to support intimacy and babies' talk.

**3. References to the research**

David, T., Goouch, K., Powell, S. and Abbott, L. (2003) *Birth to Three Matters. A Review of the Literature Compiled to Inform the Framework to Support Children in their Earliest Years*. Nottingham: DfES/Sure Start Publications (RR 444). ISBN: 1 84478 027 9

Goouch, K. (2008) Understanding playful pedagogies, play narratives and play spaces. *Early Years: International Journal of Research and Development*, 28 (1) 293-102.

Powell, S. (2010) Hide and seek: values in early childhood education and care. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58 (2) 213–229. REF2, CCCU.

Powell, S. and Goouch, K. (2012) Whose hand rocks the cradle? Parallel discourses in the baby room. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 32 (2) 113-127. REF2, CCCU.

Goouch, K. and Powell, S. (2013) Orchestrating professional development for baby room practitioners: raising the stakes in new dialogic encounters. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 11(1) 78-92. REF2, CCCU.

Goouch, K and Powell, S. (2013) *The Baby Room, Principles, Policy and Practice*, Maidenhead: Open University Press. REF2, CCCU.

**Quality of the research**

All cited outputs involved peer review. The body of work has resulted in invitations for keynote addresses at international conferences and seminars since 2008 and examination of related doctoral theses. Professor David was awarded the prestigious *Nursery World* Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011 for her significant and substantial contribution to the ECEC field and sector and appointed honorary professor at Sheffield University. The *Baby Room Project* has attracted interest within different international contexts where colleagues wish to replicate its design (for example, Scotland: Professor Aline Wendy-Dunlop, Strathclyde University; Republic of Ireland: Rita Melia, Early Childhood Ireland). Dr Powell was invited to join TACTYC's Executive Committee and Froebel Trust's Research Committee to contribute specialist birth to three research and policy knowledge; and Dr Goouch was invited as a specialist early literacy advisor to contribute to the Government's Social Mobility group in 2013 and to present at an ECEC World Congress in Mexico (2013). In addition, all three are regular reviewers for international journals including *Early Years*, *JECR*, and *Children and Society*.

**Funding**

The early years' research has been supported by a series of grants:

DfES (2002) *Birth to Three*, £30,000 (David),

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/RR444>;

Shanghai Education Commission (2003, 2005), £22,000 (David and Powell);

Beijing Education Commission and British Council (2004, 2005), £25,000, *Developing Early Childhood Provision* (Powell and Goouch);

CWDC (2006), *Case Studies of Early Years Leadership*, £6,000 (Goouch and Powell);

Templeton Foundation (2008-10), £250,000, Early years character and values strand, led by Powell, part of the *Learning for Life Project* (Director J Arthur, Birmingham University, CCCU until 2010) <http://www.learningforlife.org.uk/research/research-projects/foundations-of-character-developing-character-and-values-in-the-early-years/>;

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (2009-10), *Baby Room* Phase 1, £46,132; and (2011-12) for *Baby Room* Phase 2, £74,490 (Goouch and Powell);

Universities' China Commission (2009), Collaborating with Baoshan Family Centre, £650 (Powell);

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Froebel Trust (2013) *Mothers' Songs in Infant Daycare*, £4,997 (Powell and Gooch); Surrey, Hampshire and West Sussex LAs (2013-4), *Improving Provision for Two Year Olds through Research-Led Development*, £20,787 (Gooch and Powell).

**4. Details of the impact**

(Corroborating sources in numbered brackets)

**Impact on policy (England):** This ECEC research has created change in political awareness, understanding and policy formulation. The significant contribution of *Birth to Three Matters Review* resulted in conceptual categories being integrated into the first national 'curriculum' for children from birth to five in England (EYFS, 2008). Reported as 'significant' in its own right (Brooker et al., 2010:5-6), the Review was cited in the Report on the Evidence for the (Tickell) *Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage* (2011:7) and described at the 2012 Froebel Conference by Professor Tina Bruce, as 'the definitive reference source on children from birth to three'. The *Baby Room Project* has also informed policy and debate. As a consequence of her involvement with the project, the President of Early Education in the British Association for Early Childhood Education established a new Baby Room Special Interest Group (1). The research has been cited in national organisations' responses, such as the National Children's Bureau (2), countering Government proposals to relax childcare ratios (*More Great Childcare* (2013)) and shifted the focus from 'young children' to 'babies and young children' in the (2012) Nutbrown *Review of Childcare and Early Education Qualifications*. Gooch and Powell met with officers for the then Children's Minister, Sarah Teather MP, in 2010 to discuss baby room concerns. The research was cited during the Fabian Society's debate on Childcare at the House of Commons (February 2013), and an invitation was made to provide a summary of the work, which is included in their report (2013), informing the Labour Party's Policy Review (3).

**Impact on policy (overseas)** is evidenced by Professor David's report on ECEC in the Netherlands ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)), integral to the OECD publication, *Starting Strong II* (2006). Professor David was an invited rapporteur for the OECD's study of ECEC in member states, as part of the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education.

**Impact on professional practice (UK and beyond):** Professor David was commissioned to design and write the early childhood education materials for the National College for School Leadership's course, Learning Centred Leadership. Collaboration with the Shanghai Education Ministry in 2003-5 informed the development of Baoshan Early Learning Centre, its new birth to three programmes (2008) and materials for practitioners and parents (4). Following a presentation by Gooch and Powell at EECERA 2011, attendance at the *Baby Room* Conference in 2012 and ongoing discussions at the Global Gathering for Early Childhood in Ireland (2013) delegates from Early Childhood Ireland undertook to establish a baby room project in Eire (5). The principles and findings from the project, following publication in the *Baby Room* book (Spring 2013), are also influencing the design of a new approach to training early years' professionals, amalgamating vocational and higher education in Germany (6).

Locally, practitioner participants in the *Baby Room Project* from two local authorities (LAs), directly involved in the care of more than 370 babies per annum, have been promoted, or have registered for Foundation Degrees or other qualifications. The strong impact on practitioners' self-confidence, ability to respond reflectively to the challenges of their work and environments, and increased attunement to babies in their care, can be evidenced by professionals in the field (7). Articles in professional as well as academic journals have disseminated findings, and development days for front-line practitioners, managers and advisers have focused on the professional identities of baby room staff. The annual *Baby Room* conference for practitioners has attracted over 100 delegates each year. A bespoke online network, The *Baby Room NING*, has provided baby room staff with direct access to policy and research information, associated critique, dialogue, networking and support, as well as a collective 'voice' for responding to Government consultations. The Project's reach and significance has been helped by unsolicited publicity in *Nursery World*, the professional publication with the highest circulation figures in the UK, where the NING has been described as a 'successful method' (2010) and the project a 'wonderful initiative' (2012) (8).

**Impact on ECEC service delivery:** *Baby Room* case study enquiries at Medway Council in 2012, structured and supported by professional development sessions, have had a direct impact on culture and practice at local authority level, encouraging a shift in focus of the advisory team's work towards different observational practices, and a reassessment of respective roles and responsibilities (9). The positive impact on the knowledge of advisors and culture of advisory work in Medway led to a commission by three further LAs (West Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire) for a bespoke research-led development programme for their early years' advisors and leaders in 2013, focusing on provision for two-year-olds. Kent LA also commissioned bespoke 'birth to three' programmes from CCCU for its early years' leaders in 2012 and 2013, following dissemination of the project's early findings, involving practitioners for the first time in a research-led programme of M Level CPD, specifically focusing on birth to three provision and practice.

#### **Impact on a commercial organisation with clients in the UK and beyond**

In addition, the research has led to changes in one company's awareness of the lack of attention to the professional knowledge of people who care for babies. Following interviews with Gooch and Powell about research findings from the *Baby Room Project* in 2012, Community Playthings created a free training booklet and DVD for practitioners: 'What Happens in the Baby Room?' (10). 9,476 copies have been downloaded so far and 16,918 printed copies distributed (13.11.13).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Early Education Baby Room Special Interest Group, <http://www.early-education.org.uk/content/1360> (President, Early Education, the British Association for Early Childhood Education). **(Contact ID.1)**
2. National Children's Bureau (2013) NCB response to Government proposals to relax staff to child ratios in early years' settings. London: National Children's Bureau. [http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/884471/ncb\\_briefing\\_on\\_relaxation\\_of\\_ratios.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/884471/ncb_briefing_on_relaxation_of_ratios.pdf)
3. The Fabian Society (2013) *Building the Case for Universal Childcare*, Fabian Women, <http://www.fabianwomen.co.uk/2013/07/fwn-childcare-booklet/>
4. Director of the Baoshan Early Learning Centre, Shanghai. **(Contact ID.2)**
5. Head of Practice, Early Childhood Ireland. **(Contact ID.3)**
6. Programme documentation and associated correspondence, Darmstadt University, Germany. **(Contact ID.4)**
7. Headteacher, Hythe Bay Primary School and Children's Centre, Hythe, Kent. **(Contact ID.5)**
8. *Nursery World*, articles July 2010 and March 2012 by L. Roberts, <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/article/1017223/social-network-baby-room-staff-expands>  
<http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/article/1120274/editors-view---needs-look-babies>
9. Medway Report on *The Baby Room Project* (2012), Early Years and Childcare at Medway Council.
10. Community Playthings (2012) *What Happens in the Baby Room?* Free Booklet <http://cdn.communityplaythings.com/~media/files/cpuk/library/training-resource/babyroom.pdf>