

Young Children's Voices

Gaps in Evidence

While there are a handful of dedicated practitioners and researchers in the field of early childhood who are exploring and expanding on the theme of babies' and young children's voices, there are still a few critical gaps in the evidence that require further attention.

First, the existing research does not adequately consider the application of this work specifically for babies and young children and families living in poverty. There is general acknowledgement that no 'one size fits all' approach applies when engaging with babies and young children, but it would be valuable to learn if particular methods of listening and participation are more suited to working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds or to investigating especially sensitive topics. Inequality impacts negatively on the ability to have one's voice heard, regardless of age. Enabling participation among the youngest children can prepare them to advocate for themselves as they grow older, and would ideally highlight their experiences in the present to push for social change.



There is also a missed opportunity to examine the role of parents when listening to babies and young children. The current literature is written primarily to support practitioners in settings to implement a more child-centric approach to early learning and care. There is also a focus on how researchers can incorporate babies and young children's voice into their work to make it more participatory and inclusive. These are incredibly valuable aims. However, there has not been a corresponding emphasis on supporting parents to listen to and foster the voice of babies and young children in the home. Given that we know that attuned and responsive parent/carer child interactions in the first 1001 days are the greatest predictor of future attainment and wellbeing for children, this area seems critical for further development. There is an opportunity to support parental skills to incorporate listening to babies and young children habitually. This can enhance the relationship between the parent/carer and the baby and young child, as well as promote interactions that support children's social and emotional, as well as speech, language and communication development. Such every day listening can enable sustained impact for children's wellbeing, confidence, participation and ultimately long-term outcomes. However, it is important that babies' and young children's voices are best understood in multiple contexts and through direct observation.



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The role of the parent should not replace the children's voice work of professionals. Instead, a focus on children's voices and perspectives can be made relevant within the home in day-to-day interactions, thus fostering empathetic and attuned parenting approaches. This can be achieved by practitioners building strong partnerships with parents and supporting parents' engagement in their child's early learning and development.

Finally, there is a need to evidence the impact of fostering babies' and young children's voice on their learning and developmental outcomes. Anecdotally and intuitively, creating an environment that values babies' and young children's experiences and contributions would lead to an increased confidence in their own capabilities and capacity to learn. However, these connections have not been directly made by previous research. Firmly establishing this link would provide greater incentive for systemic change within early years practice, and could lead to broader acceptance and implementation of strategies for listening to babies' and young children's voices. This could then be an enabler for a greater focus on and proper recognition of this crucial time in a child's life in both policy and practice.

