



# The Voice of the Baby

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# Background to the project .

- Developing a broader understanding of Children's Rights and what this means for babies and young children and the realisation of their rights.
- Increasing interest in the 'voice' of younger children – 'how do you do participation with babies?'

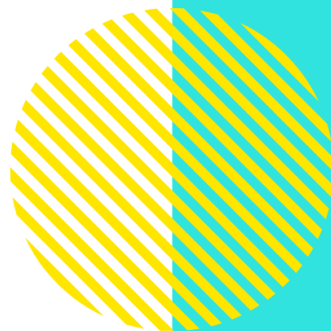


# Starcatchers Engagement Signals .



# Key tensions/debates in the research literature .

- Without rigid age limits—focus on children under 2 yrs (‘babies’)
- Articles 12 and 31
- Both articles—invite scrutiny and reflection in terms of meaningful implementation
  - Child-adult relations
  - Freedom/autonomy/interdependence/fluidity
- Babies—hard to find in rights research
  - Amalgamated under general ‘early childhood’ (Matheson 2023)
  - Challenging to envision babies as rights-holders
  - An assumed verbal, autonomous child (Hultgren & Johansson 2019)
  - Babies and young children as ‘not-yets’ (e.g. Aspan 2023)
- When included in rights research, usually in ECEC settings
  - Need for exploration of participation rights in other social contexts
  - The arts as a research method but rarely the context



# Phase 1

Review of the  
research  
literature

National survey  
(artists and arts  
companies)

Group interviews  
with Starcatchers  
Artists

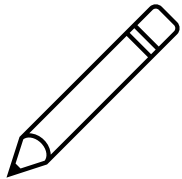
# Phase 2: Towards a framework



Observations of visits to 3 Starcatchers projects (7 sessions in total)



Rachel and Cara coded all 7 observations sessions individually ...



Transcribed rich descriptive observation data



... before collaborating to discuss developing themes



Artist Play Day to discuss findings / seek feedback

Data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (as described by Braun and Clarke 2022)

# The 5 Areas

## Curating the Space

creating permission for play and creativity

## Building Sensitive, Informed Relationships

warm, affectionate interpersonal interactions

## Navigating Identity

of yourself as the artist, the space, and the people within it

## Respecting and Validating

the complex communication of babies

## Making Time

for young children to be heard



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## Curating the Space: Creating Permission for Play and Creativity

**This area relates to the nature of the space itself, and the materials and experiences curated within it**

“I felt very at ease in the space, it felt very safe and welcoming”

“I’m yet to see the artists tell the children that they can’t do something”

“Although the artists mentioned being behind in getting it prepped, that feeling did not seem to be passed on to the families who arrived”



## Building Sensitive, Informed Relationships to Support Participation Rights

**This area relates to an affectionate 'hosting' approach to children and families, warm relationships, and navigating tensions around expectations**

“For example, one child walked across the bamboo tracks several times in a row quite purposefully (no shoes on) and seemed to be absorbing the sensation on his feet”

“[Mum] seems quite grateful to be offered a coffee and not like this is something which is offered to her very often”

## Navigating Identity

**...of yourself as the artist, the space, and the people within it**

“There were tutus available for the adults to dress babies in. There was a very interesting comment from one adult when she put the tutu on her (male) baby—she said: *‘It’s a good job your dad isn’t here—he’d have said ‘get it off!’*”

## Respecting and Validating Young Children's Complex Communications

**This area relates to artists tuning in, interpreting, and validating babies' verbal and non-verbal communication**

“[Artist] sat near her for a while doing quiet little things like quietly singing songs, gently tapping in rhythm when Abbie tapped on the ukulele, made a little person out of a leaf and made it sing a song...I got a sense of this as an enhancement or almost a parallel play that could offer something to Abbie but not taking over”

# Making Time for Young Children to be Heard

**Different facets of time: within each session, across sessions, babies' growth and change**

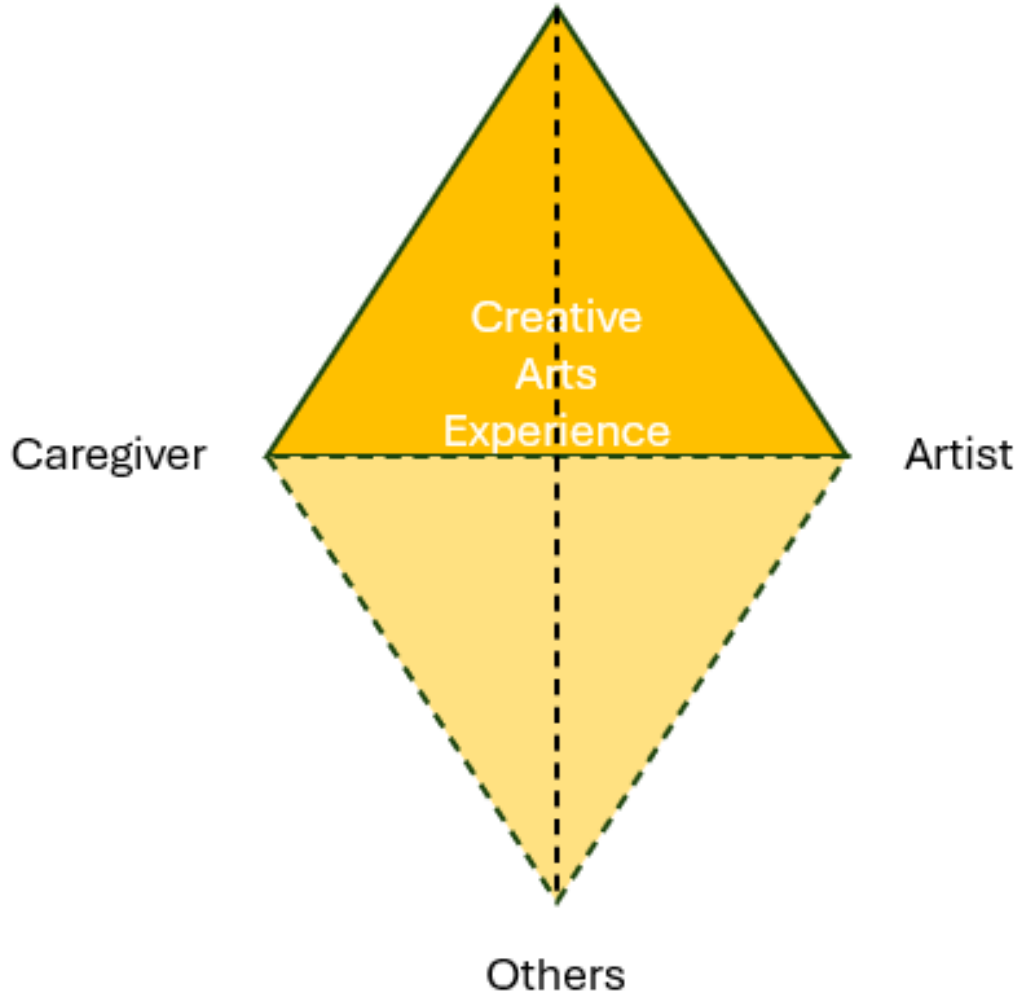
“He seems to know when the session is meant to end, as when we got to around noon, he starts looking a bit tired. He does some almost stereotypical behaviours: rubbing his eyes and cuddles closer to his mother [...] He seems to be clearly signalling that he is done playing”

“The older children seem to be more actively interested in playing with each other, though this takes time and only develops towards the end of the session”

# Kite Model of Participation

Relational,  
holistic, slow  
(Horgan 2024)

Baby or young child



Interdependence:  
Resists dichotomy  
between children  
and adults (e.g.  
Tisdall 2015,  
Lundy et al 2024)

Deep recognition  
of babies' voices,  
contributions,  
influence and  
agency (e.g.  
Hultgren &  
Johansson 2019)

Tensions are  
generative for  
deeper, ongoing  
reflection

# Sharing the Work .

- Phase One and Phase Two Reports
- Reflective Guide to the Arts
- Two journal papers under review
  - *Hearing The Voice of the Baby Through Participatory Arts: Enriching the Lundy Model of Participation*
  - *Getting to the art of the matter: Exploring autonomy and relationality in babies' right to be heard through the participatory arts*
- Voice of the Baby In Practice (Examples, Videos)
- Creative Skills Podcast
- Testing the Guide – it is an evolving resource: we want to understand how people use it, what works, what needs clarification



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# In practice – The Summerston Approach .



Summerston Childcare Centre approached Starcatchers looking for training and mentoring for their staff so they could strengthen their practice around children's rights and creativity.

We have been using a combination of training days and mentoring sessions, using the Reflective Guide to help ELC practitioners identify ways to listen and respond to the "voice" of babies and young children..

## WE TOOK THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO SUPPORT STAFF:

1

### Full Day training: Introduction

Sharing of working within an arts and early years context specifically focusing on the voice of the child within early learning and childcare.

- UNCRC and what children's rights look like birth-5
- Voice of the Child within Creative and Expressive Arts experiences
- Starcatchers Engagement Signals
- Professional discussion around planning and evidencing outcome

### Artist Mentoring: Observations

2

Summerston staff wanted to be inspired and to see how it works in action.

Starcatchers Artist Amy Hall Gibson and Pearl Kinnear delivered 2 sessions, and the staff used questions from the Reflective Guide as they observed the artists' engagement with wee ones.

Amy Hall Gibson session took a schematic play approach incorporating facial expressions exploring how babies voices influences the play within the space. Playing with size using small handheld cardboard boxes and hula hoops as opposed to massive ones to really experience those small sometimes overlooked engagements. Taking a sensory approach Foil Blankets were introduced to further explore babies voice within their senses – do they like being enclosed? Do they like the feel / sound?

Pearl explored visual art through body art. Little ones were able to express themselves through mark making, exploring a yes space to painting on their bodies as well as considering mark making whilst standing and how the freedom to move their bodies can impact on their agency in expressing themselves.

3

### Reflection

Reflecting on the experiences with the artists above – build the confidence of staff to release their own creativity with intentional planning around what the babies are telling them, looking at the 5 areas and how their environment, interactions and practice can be shaped through these.

Plan an experience together with Starcatchers Artist.

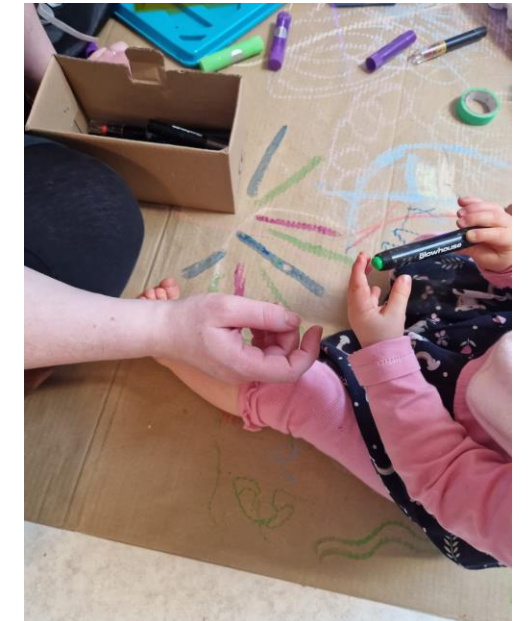
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### Next Steps

Deliver planned experience and reflect with team and Artist and identify next steps / ongoing support

If you are interested in this approach to professional development, get in touch with Amy or Heather at [info@starcatchers.org.uk](mailto:info@starcatchers.org.uk)

# In practice— Love Letham .



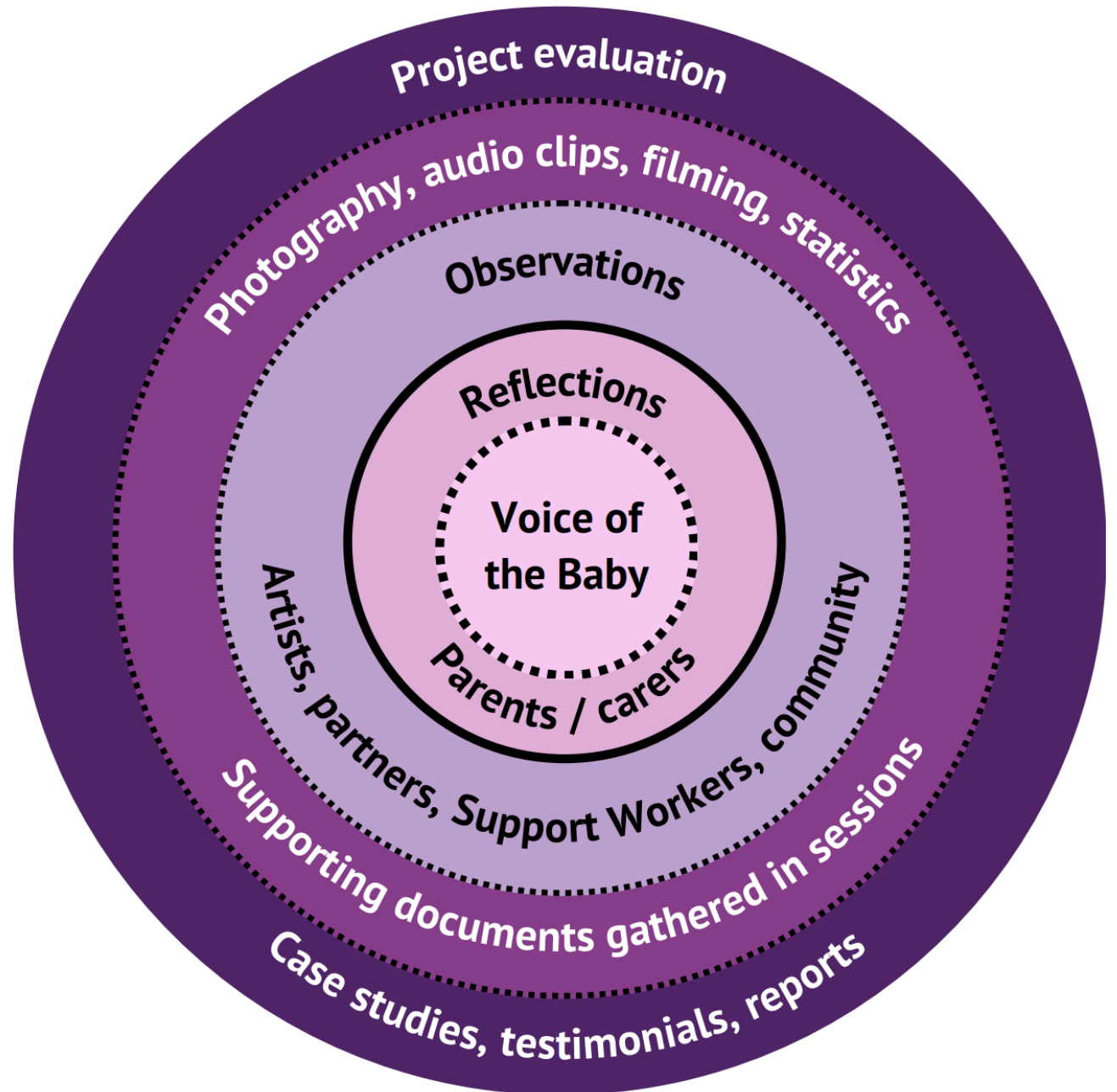


# Love Letham - A Strategic View .

Short term: in the moment, responsive planning

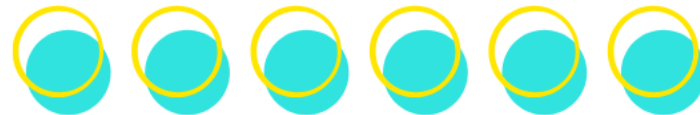
Medium term: shaping delivery of session, intentional planning

Long term: shaping strategic planning, consultation



# Stay tuned: Voice of the Baby Phase Three .

- Angus Nurture team
- The Baby Book project
- Artist residency in an ELC setting
- Aims:
  - To explore the ways the Voice of the Baby Reflective Guide and supporting resources are being trialled by professionals in the field of early years. This will include:
    - Arts sector and non-arts sector contexts
    - Artist and non-artist application of the Guide
    - Findings will support knowledge around the impact and relevance of the Reflective Guide for professionals who work with early years.



# Stay tuned: Understanding the experience of 0-2s within Early Learning and Childcare .

- Glasgow City Council – year long research-based project
- Aim: To Understand what the experience of babies and young children looks and feels like, how the needs, interests and “voices” of these children are being supported and included and how this impacts on the planning and delivery of care.



# Acknowledgements .

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