

Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University		
Unit of Assessment: C23 Education		
Title of case study: Birth to three: transforming education and care for the youngest children		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Lesley Abbott	Professor	1983 - 2008
Ian Barron	Professor	2000 – 2020
Michael Gallagher	Reader	2014 - present
Abigail Hackett	Research Fellow	2016 – present
Rachel Holmes	Professor	2000 – present
Liz Jones	Professor	2000 – 2014
Maggie MacLure	Professor	2003 – present
Christina MacRae	Research Fellow	2016 – present
Lisa Procter	Lecturer	2016 – 2017
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 - 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No (but the continuing programme of research is developed from, and builds on, a case study submitted in 2014).		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>A sustained, collaborative research programme has transformed curriculum and pedagogy for the under-threes, in co-production with nurseries, families, local authorities, health professionals and arts organisations. The pioneering Birth to Three Matters framework set the national policy and training agenda, and influenced the practice of every early years professional in England. It is still used by professional leaders and practitioners seeking training resources and an alternative approach to currently much narrower official curriculum guidance. Our continuing programme of research provides strongly-theorised holistic findings that support multi-sensory and culturally-appropriate work. It has improved best practice, validated caregivers' expertise and helped practitioners resist the narrowing of curriculum aspirations for the under-threes.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>A body of high-quality work over 20 years has transformed the research base underpinning curriculum and pedagogy for the under-threes. The research team members are world leaders in the development of theory and practice in early childhood and are key participants in international collaborations and colloquia. In the assessment period, this group has published a total of 93 journal articles, 45 book chapters and four books. A portfolio of ESRC-funded doctoral studentships, several held in collaboration with research users, highlights the quality of the research and prepares the next generation of research leaders for the field. Co-production methods have brought parents and practitioners into the heart of the research process, including co-publishing with the research team. The research is shaping a new and vital curriculum and pedagogic approach that is resistant to recent instrumental policy drift and a loss of focus on the specific needs of the youngest children. Key findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The two-year old curriculum needs to be broadened and anchored more securely in children's experiences [a, b]. 2. Sensation, affect, movement and place are key dimensions of a holistic framework. They play a vital role in early development and underpin language and literacy [c, d]. 3. Museums and galleries are important sites for multi-sensory and embodied engagement with very young children [e, f]. 		
<p>Strand 1. Birth to Three Matters and beyond: replenishing the research base</p> <p><i>Birth to Three Matters</i> [1] (2001-3) developed the first national framework for effective early years practice. Linked projects addressed training and qualifications. B-3M was incorporated into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008. The original B-3M research identifies four key 'aspects' of successful early childhood practice: a strong child; a skilful communicator; a competent learner and a healthy child [a]. Subsequent projects have fleshed out the holistic theory underlying the four aspects, with findings on embodiment and sensory experience [b, c;</p>		

2, 3, 4], and sense of place [5, 6, 7]. Parental and practitioner voices have been strengthened through more inclusive models of co-production [b, c; 3, 4, 5, 6].

Strand 2. Two-year-olds in the nursery

This strand addresses the often-unacknowledged needs and experiences of disadvantaged two-year olds with funded places in nurseries, and challenges a narrow focus on language skills development. *The Sensory Nursery* [b, c, 3], our researcher-in-residence project with a local nursery and children's centre, reveals the hidden significance of affective and embodied encounters in a multi-cultural nursery. *Listening-2* [b, c, 4] discloses subtle processes of adult-child 'attunement' in sensory-motor learning. *The Emergence of Literacy in Very Young Children* [d, 6] radically reconceptualises early literacy as being grounded in sensation, movement, relationality and spatiality. The international collaboration *KINDKnow* [7] takes this work forward, investigating sustainability and place-based learning. Four further projects [8, 9, 10, 11] have developed immersive activities and professional development opportunities to help practitioners draw out the educational potential inherent in movement and sensory experience.

Strand 3. Under-threes in museums and galleries

A series of interdisciplinary collaborations with Manchester Art Gallery (MAG), Humber Museums, Z-Arts and Curious Minds, an Arts Council Bridge organisation, incorporates art, curatorial and educational practice to augment the research programme's focus on the creative, sensory and expressive dimensions of early development and learning. The current programme builds on previous projects *Young Children in the Art Gallery* [12] and *The Secret Life of Objects* [13]. *Listening In and Out of More-than-Human Worlds* [b, 2] reconceptualised the role of affect and embodiment in listening, with Z-Arts. *The Clore Art Studio Evaluation* [14] identified new directions for family use of the gallery space. *How Do Families Experience Our Museums?* [e, f, 15] formulated best practice for work with families and young children, and developed the [APSE Framework and evaluation Toolkit](#) for Humber Museums Partnership. *Senior Leaders in Cultural Organisations SLiCE* [8] developed practices to support early learning through music and movement, with nursery school heads and five cultural organisations. *Affecting Space* [f, 16] brings together the research team, health professionals, art gallery staff and SureStart practitioners to interrogate materials and matter in order to re-design the family space at MAG in collaboration with the gallery.

3. References to the research

- a. Abbott, L. & Langston, A. (2005). Birth to three matters: A framework to support children in their earliest years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 13(1), 129-143, DOI: [10.1080/13502930585209601](https://doi.org/10.1080/13502930585209601).
- b. Gallagher, M., Prior, J., Needham, M. and Holmes, R. (2017). Listening differently: A pedagogy for expanded listening. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(6), 1246-1265, DOI: [10.1002/berj.3306](https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3306)
- c. MacRae, C. (2020). Tactful hands and vibrant mattering in the sand tray. *Journal of Childhood Literacy*, 20(1), 90–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798420901858>
- d. Hackett, A., MacLure, M. and McMahon, S. (2020). Reconceptualising early language development: Matter, sensation and the more-than-human. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, DOI: [10.1080/01596306.2020.1767350](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1767350).
- e. MacRae, C., Hackett, A., Holmes, R. and Jones, E. (2017). Vibrancy, repetition, movement: Posthuman theories for reconceptualising young children in museums. *Children's Geographies*, DOI: [10.1080/14733285.2017.1409884](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1409884)
- f. Hackett, A., Holmes, R. and MacRae, C. (eds) (2020). *Working with Young Children in Museums: Weaving theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Indicators of quality: key research grants:

1. *Birth to Three Matters* 2001-3 (GBP917,000, DfES, Esmée Fairbairn, L. Abbott, R. Holmes)
2. *Artist in Residence: Listening in and out of more-than-human worlds*. 2017 (GBP15,000, Leverhulme Trust, M. Gallagher).
3. *The Sensory Nursery: The life-world of two-year olds*. 2016-19 (GBP174,000, Manchester Met Strategic Opportunity Fund, C. MacRae)

4. *Listening-2: Investigating sensory-motor learning in two-year olds*. 2019–20 (GBP36,740.77, Froebel Trust, M. MacLure, C. MacRae)
5. *Odd: Feeling different in the world of education*. 2018–21 (GBP294,050, AHRC, AH/R004994/1, R. Holmes, A. Ravetz, K. Pahl)
6. *The Emergence of Literacy in Very Young Children: Place and materiality in a more-than-human world*. 2017–2020 (GBP250,446, British Academy, A. Hackett)
7. *KINDKnow*. 2018-2021 (GBP14,000, Norwegian Research Council, A. Hackett with University of Tromsø).
8. *Senior Leaders in Cultural Education (SLiCE)*. 2018-19 (GBP10,000, Curious Minds North West Arts Council Bridge Organisation, R. Holmes, C. MacRae, et al.).
9. *2-Curious: Big Life CPD Network*. 2017-2018 (GBP4,500, Big Life, R. Holmes, et al.).
10. *Performance-Based Practice in Dialogue with Early Years Practice*. 2018 (GBP6,000, Curious Minds North West Arts Council Bridge Organisation, C. MacRae, R. Holmes, A. Hackett, C. Arculus)
11. *2-Curious: More than words*. 2017–2021 (GBP84,000, ESRC Collaborative Studentship, C. MacRae, R. Holmes, C. Arculus).
12. *Young Children in the Art Gallery* 2004-2005, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, GBP19,400, L. Abbott and R. Holmes.
13. *The Secret Life of Objects: An Artist Residency in an Early Years Classroom*, AHRC AH/H008403/1, 2009- 2010, GBP24,735, C. MacRae
14. *The Clore Art Studio Evaluation*. 2014 (GBP2,000, E. Jones, R. Holmes, Manchester Art Gallery)
15. *How Do Families Experience Our Museums?* 2016-17 (GBP12,000, Humber Museums Partnership, A. Hackett, L. Procter, C. MacRae)
16. *Affecting space: An interdisciplinary ethnography at Manchester Art Gallery*. 2018 – 2022 (GBP84,000, ESRC Collaborative Studentship, A. Hackett, R. Holmes, R. Boycott-Garnett).

4. Details of the impact

Strand 1. Birth to Three Matters

In 2015, ESRC selected B-3M as one of its [50 'landmark contributions'](#) that 'put the care and education of children firmly on the public agenda'. There has been renewed uptake of the framework by EY professionals dissatisfied with current EYFS and non-statutory guidance for the under-threes. A Manchester Metropolitan-hosted seminar 'Does Birth to Three Matters Still Matter?' (29.02.20) received overwhelmingly affirmative responses (56 invited attendees; 168 respondents to a follow-up survey). Respondents valued its ethos, accessibility and competence-based approach. It was used to facilitate conversations with parents, for staff training and induction, and in undergraduate and doctoral education. B-3M "*shapes every day for our youngest children in nursery. It forms the basis of what we do and our ethos*" (Nursery Manager). "*It shaped how we think about learning in the baby room*" (Proprietor, Montessori Nursery). "*We have been using it to develop a programme for our babies*" (Childcare Development Manager, Commercial Nursery Chain). *Nursery World* subsequently commissioned an article on the contemporary significance of B-3M ([Holmes, 2020](#)) [A]. B-3M is offered as an under-three curriculum in multiple UK nurseries, commercial nursery chains and in nurseries overseas (e.g. [Italy](#), [Egypt](#), [Dubai](#) and [Denmark](#)). It is offered as a resource on [The Foundation Years](#) website (DfE/NCB) and essential reading in the Pearson BTEC First Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development. The national [Early Years Coalition](#), which is developing alternative non-statutory guidance for the EYFS entitled [Birth to Five Matters](#), honours B-3 Matters in its name, and invited the research team to provide specialist Birth-to-Three input across multiple working groups [B].

The research has shaped workforce development and accreditation. Manchester Metropolitan provided EY Teacher Status accreditation for the DfE (2013-2016), and led ten HEIs in the training of Early Years Professionals (2012–2014) and Teachers (2015-6) for the National Council for Teaching and Leadership. A total of 1,090 EYPs and EYTs were trained. Barron chaired two QAA reviews of the [Early Childhood Studies Subject Benchmark Statement](#) (2014/2019) and the additional Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies at Level 6 (2018–2019). All 50 UK UG degree courses are required to be compliant with the benchmark statement. Led by Barron, the Early Childhood Degrees Network secured the 2020 reclassification of early childhood graduates as 'professionals' in the [UK Standard Occupational](#)

[Classification](#) (SOC2020, vol. 2: The Coding Index). This significant change finally recognises the competencies of EY graduates and the status of university EY degree programmes [C].

Strand 2. Two-year-olds in the nursery

MacRae's work on *The Sensory Nursery* "brought a new level of quality in all the staff team. Being able to see, share, be more reflective, thinking in a positive mind set" [room leader]. The research was featured in *Nursery World* ([18.03.18](#)). *Listening-2* led to changes in adult-child 'attunement' and documentation at home and nursery [testimonials]. 90 participants attended an online [Froebel Trust seminar](#) (June 2020) on *Listening-2*. MacRae was interviewed by the very well-regarded website [Early Years TV](#) (10.04.20). This CPD resource was viewed by practitioners and professionals from 40 countries and had 2,104 unique views in the first week of its release. One viewer remarked "I will now view pictures and videos sent in by parents in a totally new way". During the COVID-19 pandemic, *Listening-2* maintained online contact with parents and practitioners to help them curate their personal stories of lockdown and reflect upon their engagements with their children [D].

Hackett's research on the multi-sensory and embodied dimensions of early literacy in an outdoors initiative, in collaboration with Thrybergh Dalton Children's Centre, led to significant changes in pedagogy and attainment by 1-2-year olds on EYFS language assessments [Hackett, MacLure & McMahon, 2020, d above]. An exhibition at Clifton Park Museum (Sep-Nov 2019) for communities, families and local authority decision-makers saw 7,166 visitors over eight weeks. Hackett's place-based, relational methodology has been taken up by Rotherham Council (RMBC) Arts and Heritage services as a key element of its new approach to co-producing services and physical spaces with young people, and will form part of the Children's Capital of Culture 2025 [E].

The research on performance-based practice [10 above] was developed into an interactive dance experience for babies, '[Duvet Dancing](#)' by Anna Daley and Anne O'Connor (Primed for Life, funded by Curious Minds), touring 12 community, health and arts venues across Morecambe, Heysham and Lancaster, involving 84 participants. Duvet Dancing was presented at the People Dancing's national event (November 2019), Penn Green Research Nursery, and children's arts festivals. It was featured in *The Visitor* (Morecambe), *The Lancaster Guardian*, *The Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, BBC Radio Lancashire, and [Nursery World](#) (07.04.20). "I am much more able to professionally articulate my interest in non-verbal performance work with early years." (Anna Daley, artist) [F].

The '2-Curious' projects [9, 11 above] led practitioners to change their attitude to habitual ways of working. "2-Curious was like an inside wake-up call. To help us look within, beneath and beyond the routines we're so busy in." (Big Life Nursery practitioner). "The spark of enthusiasm and joy of what we did here; I've been able to take it back to my own nursery context to explore further." (Big Life Nursery practitioner). [G]

Strand 3. Under-threes in museums and galleries

The museums and galleries research [12, 14, 15, 16] has transformed early years provision, curatorial and educational practice across the UK. *Working with Young Children in Museums* (f above) is the first book to provide such guidance for UK museums. MacRae and Hackett gave keynotes on national best practice events for the museum cultural sector: including Hull (Sept, 2017), University of Cambridge (Dec 2017), Leeds (Oct 2018) and Newcastle (May 2019). They produced [guidance for museum professionals](#) working with early years audiences. The research has reshaped practitioners' understanding of early years work in museums and influenced the design of space and activities for very young children and their families. The [Humber research](#) by Hackett, Procter & MacRae on families' use of museums prompted North Lincolnshire Museum, Ferens Art Gallery and Sewerby Hall to develop dedicated spaces for under-fives, directly increasing the numbers of family visits in 2014-2017, from 739,348 to 1,421,942 (documented in an external evaluation report, [Mair Health, 2018](#)) [H]. Hackett (with Yamada-Rice) also developed the IVE (formerly CapeUK) [Creative Families Award](#), a framework and resources for museums seeking to enrich the experiences of very young children and their families. The Clore Studio evaluation for MAG led to Manchester Metropolitan's pivotal involvement in the gallery's redesign of their strategy and flagship interactive space for families and practitioners. This redevelopment is expressly underpinned by the research team's previous

and concurrent museum and gallery research, at the request of Katy McCall, Family Learning Manager, “MMU’s research really informs what we do in the gallery... feeds us things that extend our thinking ... developing an emerging and experimental gallery space for families and early years providers... So exciting to be part of a team, in the city. Makes us stronger in times of austerity” [I]. This collaboration is reflected in the edited publication with curators, the family learning manager, and an ESRC White Rose DTP PhD student (Holmes et al, f above). MAG is the most visited museum in Manchester.

The research has underpinned new initiatives including an [outreach project with young mothers](#) and a practitioner residency project on young children’s use of the museum and botanical gardens at the Fitzwilliam, and a new [Toolkit](#) for early years audiences at the Museum of London. These organisations are leaders in their region, meaning the research is cascaded through peer-sharing (e.g. the [early years network](#) for London museums, and including a special issue of *GEM’s Journal of Museum Education* on early years audiences by the Fitzwilliam) [J]. When MAG closed in lockdown, the *Affecting Space* team [16] contributed to a [virtual platform](#) to enable parents to do ‘stay and play’ activities at home, supported by the production of [100 baby activity boxes](#), distributed to 60 parents with babies, and 40 2-year olds, whose funded nursery provision had been halted by the pandemic (testimonial). These have now been commissioned for all babies in the city with 3,000 kits to be sent out via Sure Start centres. [I].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Strand 1. Birth to Three Matters

[A] i ESRC, [50 achievements – Birth to Three Matters](#), 2015; ii Birth to Three Matters survey data; iii Nursery World, ‘[Interview – Professor Rachel Holmes](#),’ 28 July, 2020.

[B] i Details of UK and overseas nursery websites offering B-3M curriculum; ii Foundation Years website, ‘[Early Years Foundation Stage \(practice\) – Birth to Three](#)’; iii [BTEC First Diploma in Children’s Care, Learning and Development](#), 2016; vi Birth to Five Matters website, ‘[Working Group](#).’

[C] i QAA, Subject Benchmark Statements, Early Childhood Studies, [2014](#) and [2019](#); ii Office for National Statistics (ONS), UK Standard Occupational Classification, [SOC2020, vol. 2: The Coding Index](#).

Strand 2. Two-year olds in the nursery

[D] i Testimonials, Martenscroft Children’s Centre and Nursery School: Head Teacher, parent and room leader; ii Analytics, Early Years TV.

[E] Testimonial, Projects and Development Manager, Clifton Park Museum.

[F] i Anna Daly, testimonial, ii ‘[Duvet Dancing](#)’ website; iii Nursery World feature, 2019; iv Testimonial, Head of Programmes, Curious Minds.

[G] The Big Life Group testimonial (joint) Divisional Director of Children and Families (2016-18) and Head of Longsight Children’s Centre.

Strand 3. Under-threes in museums and galleries

[H] i Freedom to Explore: Engaging under-5s in Museum, Gallery and Heritage Spaces, Humber Museums Partnership, 2017 (toolkit); ii Mair Health, Humber Museums Partnership, [Under-Fives Project Evaluation](#), March 2018; iii Testimonial, Museum, Arts and Heritage Manager, Rotherham Council and Lead for Humber Under-Fives Project.

[I] Testimonial, Head of Family Learning, Manchester Art Gallery; ii [Manchester Art Gallery: Research and Practice](#) – multi-professional blog documenting the research.

[J] i Testimonial, Education Officer, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; ii Wallis, N and Noble, K, [UCM Nursery in Residence Project, End of Project Report](#), July 2018.