

# **Investigating the Relevance of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Kindergarten Songs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Infant Classroom**

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Friedrich Froebel, creator of the kindergarten, published “Mother Songs and Games” in 1843. The song themes range from (i) sense-discrimination and experiences of change, (ii) form, size and connectedness, (iii) a fascination with the moon and stars and (iv) the development of a moral sense. Accompanying each song are a picture, a written verse and a commentary. Other kindergarten song books appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most notably Eleanor Smith’s volumes, “Songs for Little Children”. The latter contain guidelines for teachers on how to organise games to be played while singing. Little has been written about this material since the 1980s and it risks becoming an archival curiosity. The current study emerges from song writing workshops in which student teachers examined some of Froebel’s and Smith’s songs. Due to the difficulty of accessing the original material, a digitisation project was initiated, the first task being to produce interactive music scores for the Froebel College Moodle. A discussion arose about the appeal of the songs, their singability and their educational purpose. An over-arching research question was posed: “How are the songs relevant in our classrooms?” Six undergraduate and three postgraduate students participated in a qualitative study, which involved (a) the classifying and arranging of the original songs, (b) the creating of a dedicated wiki page, (c) the testing of the original songs with Infant classes and (d) the composing of new Froebelian songs for young children. Data were collected through the development of teaching material, classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Findings are presented in the form of participants’ reflections, video clips of classroom singing and music scores generated in the project. Finally, plans for the ongoing development of the digitisation project are outlined.

**Key words:** Froebelian, Songs, Relevance, Infants, Classroom, Games, Composing, Teaching, Digitising, Notation