5th Global Conference on Innovations in Education
12 - 14 November 2026
Nottingham, UK

Sonic Wellbeing in Early Childhood: How Sound Shapes Emotional Worlds

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Abstract

This paper positions sonic wellbeing as an emergent and relational dimension of early childhood education, arguing that sound functions not merely as sensory background but as an affective and pedagogical force shaping young children's emotional lives. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from sound studies, learning psychology, and early childhood pedagogy, the paper explores how children's encounters with human, material, and more-than-human sonic environments contribute to emotional regulation, attachment, and resilience. Using pedagogical documentation and observational examples from early years practice, it examines how sonic textures, rhythms, and atmospheres support children's sense of safety, belonging, and co-regulation within educational settings. The analysis foregrounds the often-overlooked emotional work of sound in shaping predictable yet responsive learning environments and extends current approaches to wellbeing in early childhood education. The paper proposes sonic wellbeing as both a conceptual and practical tool for educators, offering a framework for recognising, interpreting, and cultivating the subtle ways sound mediates children's emotional experiences. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions in early childhood education, child and family education, and pedagogical innovation by highlighting how sonic relations shape children's capacities for living well with others in complex educational worlds.

Keywords: affect; early childhood education; emotional regulation; pedagogy; soundscapes