Froebelian approaches to literacy, language, numeracy and maths in a play-based P1 setting.

"Learning should be joyous, meaningful and relevant. It should inspire further learning, or it is nothing" (Tovey, 2017:126).

View of the Child

- Rich

- Resourceful

- Able

- Capable

- Trustworthy

- Epistemic boundedness

What you focus on is what grows

Individuals are diverse, complex and irregular, not fixed entities but full of surprise, possibilities and potentialities (Bakhtin, 1993).

Froebelian Principles

The integrity of childhood in its own right

The relationship of every child to family, community and to nature, culture and society.

The uniqueness of every child's capacity and potential

The holistic nature of the development of every child

The role of play and creativity as central integrating elements in development and learning.

The right of children to protection from harm or abuse and to the promotion of their overall well-being

Froebelian Principles Include…

Important Principles

▶ learning succeeds best when undertaken by a searching and self-active mind;

▶ freedom from rote learning opens the door to understanding;

▶ discipline is a non-issue in a well-conceived educational programme;

▶ that freedom for children to explore, choose and question can result in responsible actions and it is not in opposition to order and harmony;

▶ all learning has to start from where the learner is;

▶ a sound knowledge of children is a pre-requisite for successful teaching.

- a recognition of the uniqueness of each child's capacity and potential

- a holistic view of development

- an ecological view of mankind in the natural world

- a recognition of the integrity of childhood in its own right

- a recognition of the child as part of a family and a community

- recognition of the importance of play as a central integrating element in a child's development and learning

An environment which…

1. is physically safe but intellectually challenging, promoting curiosity, enquiry, sensory stimulation and aesthetic awareness

2. demonstrates the unity of indoors and outdoors, of the cultural and the natural

3. allows free access to a rich range of materials that promote open-ended opportunities for play, representation and creativity

4. entails the setting being an integral part of the community it serves, working in close partnership with parents and other skills adults

5. is educative rather than merely amusing or occupying

6. Promotes interdependence as well as independence, community as well as individuality and responsibility as well as freedom.

A pedagogy which involves

1.Knowledgeable and appropriately qualified early childhood professionals

2.Skilled and informed observation of children, to support effective development, learning and teaching

3.Awareness that education relates to all capabilities of each child; imaginative, creative, symbolic, linguistic, mathematical, musical, aesthetic, scientific, physical, social, moral, cultural and spiritual

4.Parents / carers and educators working in harmony and partnership

5. First hand experience, play, talk and reflection

6. Activities and experiences that have sense, purpose and meaning to the child, and involve joy, wonder, concentration, unity and satisfaction

7. Encouragement rather than punishment

8. Individual and collaborative activity and play

9. An approach to learning which develops children's autonomy and self-confidence.

Participatory Pedagogy Approach

Participatory pedagogies:

- answer to the complexity of early childhood education and answer to the child that is multidimensional and holistic (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2016).

- assert the rights of children and educators.

- are built upon a worldview that is: participatory – democratic - progressive

- assume the complexity of pedagogic doing.

- support a pedagogic transformation.

Participatory Pedagogy and Links with Froebel:

- It is a pedagogy of holistic and integrated nature.

- The child is a curious, competent, participant being.

- The educator listens to children, documents, attunes, provides companionship.

- Learning is realised in companionship of peers and educators.

- A pedagogic culture of encounter of voices.

- Experiencing error is valued as being a process of participation in the creation of answers.

- A culture of multiple possibilities: a curriculum that attunes the emergent and the planned professional intentionality.

- Relations and interactions are at the heart of a pedagogy which aims at children being, knowing, participating, learning and narrating.

Transmissive Pedagogy

- The child as a "not-yet-being".
- The educator is a mere transmitter of predefined contents to be memorised and organiser of predefined tasks.
- Learning is mainly lonely in an internal cognitive processing.
- A pedagogic culture of silence.

Pedagogy in Participation

- The child is a curious, competent, participant being.
- The educator listens to children, documents, attunes, provides companionship.
- Learning is realised in companionship of peers and educators.
- A pedagogic culture of encounter of voices.

Transmissive Pedagogy

- Experiencing error is seen as negative because it reveals lack of attention, understanding, effort.

- A culture of a single possibility: a *ready to wear single sized curriculum* (Formosinho, 1987, 2001)

- Interactions are minimised and instrumentalised just to facilitate the learning of contents.

Pedagogy in Participation

- Experiencing error is valued as being a process of participation in the creation of answers.

- A culture of multiple possibilities: a curriculum that attunes the emergent and the planned professional intentionality.

- Relations and interactions are at the heart of a pedagogy which aims at children being, knowing, participating, learning and narrating.

Core Provision

Real experiences (not everything is play).
High quality resources (open –ended resources).
Core provision, blocks, sand, water, clay, workshop area (crafts), outdoor area, media represent – small world imaginative play, IT resources, home corner, story corner, music, woodwork.
A gathering space.

Twelve Features of Play

- children use first-hand experiences from life
- children make up rules as they play in order to keep control
- children symbolically represent as they play, making and adapting play props
- children choose to play – they cannot be made to play
- children rehearse their future in their role play
- children sometimes play alone
- children pretend when they play
- children play with adults and other children cooperatively in pairs or in groups
- children have a personal play agenda, which may or may not be shared
- children are deeply involved and difficult to distract from their deep learning as they wallow in their play
- children try out their most recently acquired skills and competences, as if celebrating what they know
- children coordinate ideas and feelings and make sense of relationships with their families, friends and cultures.

Research suggests – in play-based environments children achieve greater success in literacy and mathematical knowledge / skills.

Suggate - 2006

'The rush to induce readiness and speed learning led to a desire by legislators to replace traditional play kindergartens (based substantially on developmental principles regarding active and concrete, rather than symbolic, learning for young children) with early-learning experiences that would hasten the acquisition of academic skills. The new policy was tested by creating a large number of these academic kindergartens and comparing their effects over a five year period against those of play-based kindergartens.

Teams of researchers from two different universities using different methods found that at the age of 10, children from 50 play kindergarten programs compared to those from 50 early learning programs did differ significantly, but not in the direction expected. Children who had attended play kindergartens were not only better adjusted socially and emotionally in school but also more cognitively advanced in reading, mathematics and other subjects tested, as well as excelling in creativity and intelligence, 'industry' and 'oral expression'. The researchers concluded that the effort to override developmental considerations had not succeeded, and the academic kindergartens were discontinued.
(Ewert and Braun 1978; Tietz 1987; Winkelmann, Hollander, Schmerkotte and Schumalohr 1979).'

Extract from *Curriculum Studies and the Traditions of Enquiry; The Scientific Tradition* by Linda Darling-Hammond and Jon Snyder, in *Handbook of Research on Curriculum* edited by Philip W. Jackson (McMillan, NY, 1992)

Case Study 1 - ***Transition from adult guided play to child led play in a Primary One classroom - This project looks to investigate the introduction of child led play in a structured P1 classroom.***

"In my classroom I had started introducing free flow play to a P1 class from April until June 2018. This was difficult as the initial classroom ethos had been set by a previous teacher and it was not how I would like the children to use the classroom".

Case Study 2 - ***Searching for Crocodiles and Finding a Lost Garden***
"Reflecting more deeply on my 'teaching', I could identify how prescriptive my teaching practice had become. Emphasis on adult direction and contribution was very visible and it was difficult to identify genuine, child initiated activity and involvement. There was certainly little evidence of play. This led me to explore the 'adult role' and Froebel's principle of 'Freedom with Guidance'".

Case Study 1

- *labelled homes for most resources, all at easy access for the children*
- *free play was possible as children could access all resources independently and did not have to request permission*
- *I also allowed the children to choose what resources they required after discussions on setting up classroom areas*

Case Study 2

- *a more 'responsive' style of planning that reflected children's interests and needs and also gave them more control of 'leading the learning.'*

" **'freedom for the child to act according to his ability and inclination'.. is based on the idea that children must be given the right kind of environment and this includes the element of freedom, which allows them to see relationships and draw inferences and to make decisions. This concept includes guidance, order and careful planning ......** "
(Liebschner 1992: 69-70).

Reflection

Case Study 1

"I would usually have pre- prepared activities for the children to do related to a discussion we had had around topic and literacy and numeracy focus for the term. Brehony (2000) would say that my previous method would have been "prescriptive" and over this term I have transitioned to a more principled practice" (Nawrotzki, 2006, in Bruce, 2012).
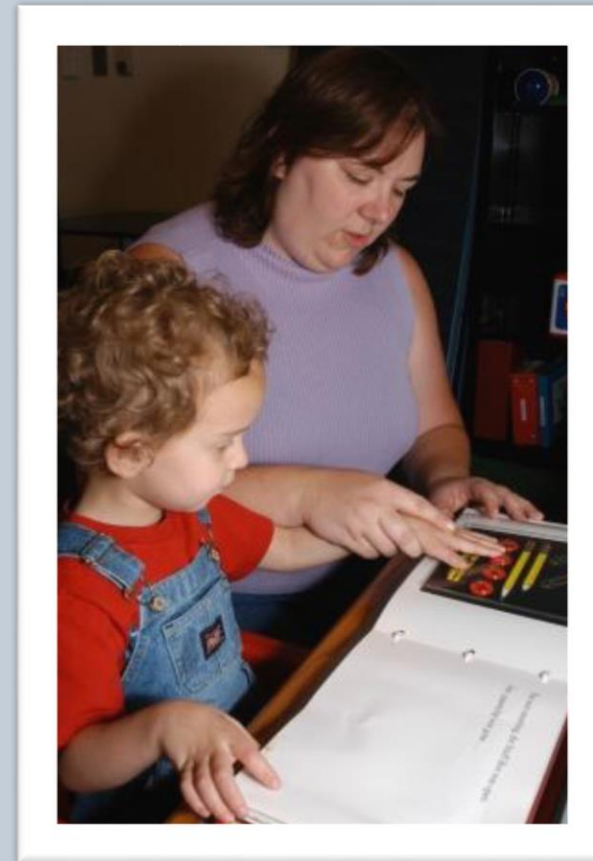
Case Study 2

"…*despite my own values and beliefs, my prevailing pedagogy was indeed far more teacher-led than child-led. I could identify where children were spending too much time in whole-class groups 'on the carpet' listening to me and reviewing their learning in 'plenary sessions'. School planning formats and guidance referred to published programmes of work, prescribed inter-disciplinary learning topics and all lessons were expected to have 'intended learning outcomes'. Schools dictate 'what children do and how'*

- *How do I capture the interests?*
- *Whose interests would be acknowledged?*
- *Would I respond only to those that chimed with my own and reflected wider imposed learning outcomes?*

"Schools tend to privilege certain types of knowledge. I was provided with information about the children in P2 related to attainment in literacy and numeracy at the end of P1. Learning in other areas was indicated in forward planning documents by highlighting the coverage of experiences and outcomes in the individual curricular areas. Other information indicated any additional support. All of this information is of course important but it tends to dominate, a deficit view of the child persists, and subsequently, only an 'adults' in schools' view is heard".

Case Study 1

For my mark making area I provided a variety of pens, pencils, oil pastels and crayons as well as playdough and dry sand and sticks. I provided prompts such as letter formation pictures, words and patterns for children to make. I used the experiences and outcomes and the curriculum pathways that my council provided to ensure the core skills are being experienced. The children did not vary much from the task I set out and they completed it quickly and with little interest or deep and meaningful concentration. They tried to form letters using whiteboard pens and whiteboards, they attempted to draw the lines and create patterns however there was no enthusiasm or discussion to have as it was pre-planned by myself. However, I did notice that often they would go off on their own direction with the materials I provided.

It then led to the children being leaders themselves and describing how to fold to create the envelope. This simple activity led to numerous conversations and demonstrations and opportunities for children to develop fine motor control, concentration and cooperative skills. Further, it promoted the literacy skills the children were motivated and self directed towards. Froebel states:

"Play is the purest, most spiritual product...[it brings]...joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest. A child who plays thoroughly with self active determination, persevering until physical fatigue forbids. " *Froebel, 1887, in Bruce, 2012).*

The play that I observed was **self motivated and freely led by the children**. They in turn, were determined and persevered to finish the task-developing a sound mind and emotional stability for use in difficult tasks later in life.

I noticed a lot more about children's learning.

By stepping back and observing the mark making area I realised that the children were drawing pictures to give to their parents and cutting them out.

I then provided envelopes and when these ran out I started showing the children how to make envelopes.

The motivation came from the children to create letters to take home to their adult- a purpose decided by the child. By providing the envelopes it encouraged more letters and notes to be written and sent home.

Some children were more intrigued by the cutting and folding involved in making the envelope.

From the child led play, I was then able to observe cutting skills and motor control, listening skills and comprehension when they were following instructions on how to make the envelope.

My observation notes over the course of the project have changed. Almy (1975) stated::

> ***"Records have value only to the extent that the staff puts them to use in guiding and instructing children"*** *p227.*

If my notes weren't going to help the child I am writing about, what is their purpose? I realised that I have previously worked my way through a tick list of skills and I always wrote down what a child could or could not do. This was another aspect that I changed to lead my classroom to be more child led. Initially, I started by selecting a few children to observe during play, at distance, and it gave me insight into their learning style (Bushnell, 1980).

My philosophy has changed in that I have moved away from structured lists with targets pre- planned on them and marking if children had achieved or not achieved. I have realised I now provide a rich learning context guided by the children and supported via my observations, so my observation notes are now completely focused on what that child can do and how they do it. This then gives me the knowledge to support the child in their learning environment now and in the future. I keep a record on post it notes and detail their learning experience next to photographs to document their learning as suggested by Irwin and Bushnell (1980).

Lepper and Green (1975) reported that children who expected a reward from completing a task were less interested in the task than children who completed the task on their own terms. In addition, their study into pre-schoolers also stated that children who knew they would be observed also joined in less than those who had no one watching. This supports children leading play, as they are more engaged, more motivated and driven by their own enquiries and curiosities rather than perform for the teacher or adult present.

*"**Children appear to be less likely to define and approach an activity as play if an adult is present**" (McInnes, Howard, Crowley & Miles, 2013). So when an adult is observing and interfering a child will quickly complete the task in contrast with fully immersing themselves in the activity until they have exhausted every possible purpose for it, as described by Froebel's definition of play (Bruce, 2012).*

Key conclusions from this study were that children must have access to all resources they can use independently, this leaves play uninterrupted and allows for creativity. The second key point is that notes taken based on what a child can do are more positive but also give you more information on how they learn. The teacher can then use this to provide opportunities to develop the child's knowledge and understanding using the child's learning strategy. It is a more personal approach to learning.

Finally, a balance of teacher and child led learning opportunities, with free play and structured play will provide children with the opportunity to lead learning down their own avenue as well as receive guidance, support and opportunity to extend their learning when working with a teacher. It is the balance of observing and responding to children's play and having a knowledge of how that child learns that will support children's development in early years, as the adult needs to know how to extend learning without intervening and leading.

Case Study 2

"H was excited to share her 'afternoon tea' experience with her granny and auntie. She recalled extensive detail, the food, the room, the waiters, the crockery and what she wore. Class very engaged. Discussion lasted 15 minutes as we tried to generate meaning about the concept of 'Afternoon Tea'………. The bell rang, the children headed out for morning break and that appeared to be the end."

"H had been playing with the magnetic board and letters for 10 minutes. She invited me over to look at the word she had made. I modelled the sounds slowly, H jumped in to finish, "groupon" she exclaimed, delighted with herself. I repeated it back, she detected the question in my voice. Grinning, she cried "Yes, groupon! My auntie gets lots of things on groupon, that's how I got afternoon tea!" She was happy and I was thrilled at the links she had made.

This would have been an easy situation to hijack and impose my literacy objectives and correct her spelling. H in her own time and space, made a connection with a family event and a word that was very meaningful for her. Through her own self-activity, she manipulated the magnetic letters, demonstrated a link to language ideas being explored in class i.e. the different ways sounds are represented by graphemes. H chose 'aw' despite the 'o' grapheme being the most familiar to her and available. H chose a word of her own, not one that had been dictated to her.

The above example can be linked to central tenets of Froebel's approach; his emphasis on play, imagination, and learning through self-activity, language and making connections.

The adult role is sensitive to the child's learning and development at their own pace. This is however challenging to maintain and resisting the pressures for a specific attainment

"I had allowed checklist type observations to become dominant in my practice. They were used for measuring and quantifying attainment and corresponded to 'what' had been decided in advance. The school reading record was a type of checklist. It travelled from school to home and back again each week. It indicated the pages of the 'reading scheme' book to be practised. There was space for teacher's initials, family's initials and a small comment. The comment box was rarely completed".

First hand experiences: Joining the Library

Following our weekly Monday visits to the library, I observed and made notes based on the children's personal book choices. It was a delight to 'gift' this rich first hand experience and observe them inhabit the space. The librarians encouraged children to stamp their books out and they became curious about her job. They grew in confidence as they made choices and began to explore away from the familiar accessible floor level picture books, to higher and higher, shelves. Libraries became forests of books! One day the librarian sensitively explained to one of the boys that he was unable to take out his particular book, as it was from the teenage section. He had been attracted to it because of the Japanese anime front cover and this was something he knew his older brother loved. He was surprised but not upset; these mysterious labels on book spines were intriguing and a whole new world was opening up! Soon children began reflecting and planning what book they were going to look for prior to our Monday visits. They excitedly shared it with friends, back in class.

"S loved the Solomon Crocodile story, she has taken it out 3 times. She expressed an interest in finding other crocodile stories. F knew there was another Solomon story but he hadn't read it yet. He said he would help S to find the 'other Solomon story', they searched amongst the picture books but to no avail. S recalled author's name "Catherine Rayner" and F explained the problem to the librarian, who checked the computer. "It's called "Solomon and Mortimer" but it's not in the library." I suggested there may be other types of books on crocodiles. The librarian suggested the animal section 'amongst the reptiles' and made her eyes go bigger. F said 'dinosaurs are reptiles' and off they went probing further and further.

"*Question after question crowds out of his enquiring mind – how? why? when? what for? – and any passably satisfactory answer opens up a new world for him*" (Lilley, 1967: 125 quoted by McNair in Bruce 2013 (p. 58).

In this library example above it is possible to see the knowledgeable adults gently guiding and extending the children's thinking; it also highlights the importance of interactions with peers in co constructing knowledge.

Connecting to family
Using the idea of the original reading record, I created a new reading journal. I wanted to share the wonderful library experience with parents and encourage the shared child's reading experience at home. I made a note of the individual's book choice and provided a small positive comment in their journal.

"Did you enjoy the book on foxes? I noticed it had a beautiful photograph of fox taken at night. My favourite nocturnal owl is a barn owl and in particular one called Plop!" (From child's reading journal)

Some families began to respond to the comments and added their own.

"S goes to her gran's every Wednesday now and left the Solomon book there. She absolutely loves it and would like to keep it a little longer. She's reading it to her wee sister and loves saying "Go away Sarah you're nothing but trouble"
(From child's reading journal)

"Observing children in this way allowed me to reflect not only their language and literacy development but also their preferences, emotions and important relationships: sometimes the extended family involved in child care would suggest and respond. Significantly it provided me with the opportunity to acknowledge the children individually and state how their choices were important and valued and respected".

Conclusion
MacDonald (2016) suggests
"*Teachers do not intend to erode children's curiosity; they do so by default, caught up in the incessant demands of an assessment driven curriculum.*"

Brogaard Clausen argues,

"*practitioners need resilience to manage these tensions. It is unhelpful for theory to be externalised and perceived as separate; rather there should be a reflective interaction between theory and practice and practitioners should be encouraged to explore existing theories, such as Froebel's, to support and extend their practice*" (Brogaard Clausen, 2015).

At the beginning of this study, I asked whether I was 'freer' than I thought. I now know I am, free to be led by the children to find crocodiles and gardens and everything in between.

Challenges

Adult: child ratio

Confidence

Training

Perceived pressures / real pressures

Assessments (teach to the test)

Busy adults / missing play

Parents perceptions / bringing parents with you

Ideal Froebelian Classroom (P 1-3)

Self registration

Play is visible

Children are learning in an educative environment

Participatory environment

Calming environment that is interesting

Children have ownership of the classroom – freedom to access the resources…

A balance of child /adult led

More staff, e.g., another practitioner trained in play, as well as the teacher.

Respectful of the disciplines – using the expertise of highly trained professionals.

Children learn from children, children learn from adults, and adults learn from children.

P1 -3 in the same space, no age hierarchies

Sensitive Observation

Early Level – P2 (alleviate pressures)

Cooking experiences

Community experiences, inside and outside classroom - bringing in experts

Indoors and Outdoors / Access to a space that is not a playground /Nature, growing their own vegetables etc.

No uniforms in a Froebelian environment

Names – first names

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