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A Call to Rewild Froebel's Kindergarten



(Figure 1. Author's own photograph, 2019).

'It is enough to make one pause, take a deep breath, and contemplate the social nature of the forest and how this is critical for evolution' (Simard, 2021: 5).

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Introduction

Opening Declaration:

For many years I have learned, played and found joy with children in a forest setting, both through a professional role in an established kindergarten and in the home education sphere. Through this personal experience it has become possible to open the discussion that early years education in England today could become a model through which future citizens are equipped with all that is needed to transform the ecological uncertainty humanity faces. It is suggested that through the experience of childhood in natural surroundings, children lead their own play, they uncover the secrets and the miracles of the natural world, and they gain a sense of their position in the 'wholeness' of the system. Through such a childhood, the necessary intelligences our ecologically minded future citizen requires - that of creativity, confidence, and mental, physical and spiritual strength - could be cultivated.

The call to rewild Froebel's kindergarten is to fully acknowledge the entangled connections between parent, practitioner, child and environment. This entanglement has been observed over two decades of experience. I acknowledge the potential limitations of such a particular study, however, through the seminal creation of the kindergarten by Friedrich Froebel; the more recent research of Robert Hart, Suzanne Simard, Jayne Osgood and Donna Haraway; augmented by the biographies of two original female Froebelian educators, I have discovered that the events I have witnessed, and the practitioner worldviews I have knowledge of, can be seen as a shared experience within contemporary practice.

The call to rewild Froebel's kindergarten becomes possible through two dependent and intertwined methods; firstly, through the revaluation of the practitioner as 'mother figure' within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), perhaps paradoxically, as a feminist call to arms. Secondly, to break the chains of conformity clamped to the practitioner via the government's patriarchal accountability requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS). For this to happen, it requires a regeneration of trust. In this case, for society to regenerate trust both in the feminine energy of the professional 'mother figure' and additionally in the integrated unfolding of learning and development at the ECEC child's own unique pace. Such freedoms would allow not only the transformative early years space to recognise the diversity of skills and competencies of both the practitioner and child, but also the acknowledgement of life's interconnected and complex relationships.

Coming generations, through the freedom of the rewilded kindergarten, would have the opportunity to develop valuable knowledge, skills and passion for the interconnection of life on Earth. This would give vital strength to humanity's ability to engage in environmental protection in the inevitability of climate change.

Chapter One

The Preparation of the Ground

This chapter will set out key terms and evidence for the position of the argument. It will also introduce the proposed application of the evidence and the reasoning behind the range of the vision.

The ecological term to 'rewild' is assumed to mean the enhancement or re-creation of past systems, that are future orientated (Brown *et al.*, 2011 and Arts *et al.*, 2016). This is assumed despite the global uncertainty for the future of natural habitats. The method of rewilding envisioned is not 'passive rewilding', defined as being a substantial reduction or halt in human interference, and an allowance of the natural recolonisation of species (Sandom *et al.* 2016:10). Passive rewilding for this application is too prolonged. For this reason, an active and functional approach to rewilding is adopted, using the permaculture principles of the forest garden system, first patiently explored in England in the 1990s by Robert Hart (Girardet, 2001).

The creation of a forest garden imitates 'pristine nature', it encapsulates the late and stable stage of ecological succession (Almers *et al.*, 2017: 255). It will be explored as a method of 'gardening pedagogy' (Almers *et al.*, 2017). Such a method would equip young children with a holistic worldview that includes themselves as part of the entangled whole, and echoes the Froebelian approach to ECEC, as a desire for 'unity' is present. The harmony of such an undertaking serves as a panacea to the atomistic nature of England's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), where, arguably, individualistic goals are achieved in isolation, with little regard for the wellbeing of the whole.

This call to arms holds the wellbeing of the whole at its heart and positions itself not as a romanticised or retrospective longing for the restoration of halcyon days gone by, but as a progressive tool - with substantially reduced systematic interference - with which to transform ECEC within today's context. It looks to future climate volatility and ecological uncertainty and suggests there to be an urgency for it to be populated by a diverse array of individual humans, equipped - through their transformed ECEC education - to rise to the challenges of future ecological unpredictability, confidently, cooperatively and creatively, mirroring their ECEC experience.

In 2004, environmental educator David Orr stated that the world's forests mirror humanity. Our fractured and unstable society is revealed to us in the poor state of the world's forests (Orr, 2004:64). Overall, 'we' destroy tens of millions of acres of forest every year (Perlin, 1989 cited in Orr 2004:64). Yet such destruction is committed with our knowledge. We have been violent towards ourselves for too long, a return to a healthy and biodiverse forest is now urgent (Hart, 2010). A return to the appreciation of the natural diversity of young children living within ECEC is also deemed urgent and is represented as a return to the biodiversity of the forest, away from the kindergarten 'monoculture' that England's EYFS creates (Orr, 2004:64). Such an approach adopts an entwined nature and human connectivity. This concept is in part rooted in Friedrich Froebel's educational theory, and can be noted as present within his original 1885 text - *The Education of Man*.¹

¹ The use of the word 'man' as opposed to 'the human' should be noted as being contextually relevant within its time and place in history.

The concept of connectivity is also found within Suzanne Simard's 2021 text – *Finding the Mother Tree*. Simard proved, after many years of research, the truth in an ancient story of the people of the Skokomish Nation, from the eastern Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. The story told of whole forest communication - despite species diversity - and recognised the symbiotic nature of the forest. The story claimed, 'there is an intricate and vast system of roots and fungi that keeps the forest strong' (Simard, 2021:281). Simard proved not only was there a fungal network, an association between the fungi and the plants, but that trees 'Communicate and send carbon, the building block of life, not just to the mycorrhizas of their kin but to other members of the community. To help keep it whole ... Conveying their life energy, their wisdom, to carry life forward' (Simard, 2021:277).

Sustainable gardener Robert Hart (1913-2000) described mycorrhiza as being:

A mass of fine fungal threads ... which envelops and, in some cases, enters plant roots ... to supply the plant with phosphorus, an essential nutrient which is a constituent of the nucleic acids that carry genetic information. In return the plant feeds the fungus with sugar and nitrogen (Hart, 2010:11).

Scientifically, Simard discovered the relationship plays an important part in the plant's nutrition and soil chemistry. Holistically, she discovered it to behave as a mother would towards her child, the passing on of information to ensure the storing of essential nutrients and the energy to enable survival (Simard, 2021).

The application of Simard's mycorrhizal network of forest relationships can be applied to ECEC. It is argued that a connective, symbiotic approach in today's

kindergarten is more representative of the entanglements of life and relationships. Through their participation in a rewilded kindergarten, young children can become co-creators, can experience their interdependent part in the whole system and gain a sense of place, and their ability to transform it (Almers, 2017). A return to the underlying principle of 'unity' within a Froebelian education can be sensed, but such a return is reconceptualised for today's children and, importantly, is future orientated.

Reasoning

This future orientated vision is viewed through an unashamedly feminised lens; such reasoning is two-fold. Firstly, the ECEC workforce when reported in 2019 was 92.6% female dominated (Education Policy Institute, 2019: online). Secondly, as professor of education Jayne Osgood cites, Sevenhuijsen's (1998) 'feminist ethics of care' demonstrate that there is an essentialist view that work within the kindergarten is 'feminine' in character. This can arguably be demonstrated in the emotional weight of the energetic labour that is required of the kindergarten assistant, consisting of empathy, love and compassion. The children require nurturing or 'mothering' (Osgood, 2010:126 and Osgood, 2012:8).

Mothering was pulled into the public sphere by Froebel (1782-1852), and career opportunities for women flourished through Froebel's kindergarten movement. However, according to education historian Jane Read, who cites Catherine Prelinger as stating the 'flourishing' was only within the: 'possibilities of contemporary circumstances' (Prelinger, 1984 cited in Read, 2003:30). Froebel can be seen as the catalyst that emancipated many women, yet, arguably in a

particular and limited capacity (Read, 2003). Despite the changes in cultural and political conditions and consequently social discourse since then, the female narrative remains the same today: the ECEC woman has the potential to be viewed as a professional, often shouldering large responsibilities and accountabilities relating to her profession yet is still part of an oppressed group (Cohen, 2008:10). It will be discussed that the mothering required, and the value of 'the mother figure' within the setting, is left awkwardly in the shadows, unacknowledged, as the patriarchal control of the sector pushes ever forward. Yet in the kindergarten, the 'mother figure', her valuable work and the symbiotic relationships she encourages, is vital, and can be seen as part of the holistic entanglement of connectivity required by the children for their future lives.

Range of Vision

This study acknowledges that 'mothering' is a universal nurturing skill, a 'flavour of love' (Olorenshaw, 2016:104). Indubitably it can be provided by any human of all ethnicities and nationalities. This study defines 'the mother figure' within the kindergarten as the child's main nurturer, or care giver when attending the setting. Within the EYFS this is deemed as the child's 'key person' (Department for Education, 2021:6 and 9). However, in the spirit of feminist reclamation, the pronouns she/her will be used when referring to the mother figure, as activist Vanessa Olorenshaw declared 'We must be able to speak our name; we must be able to celebrate our work and demand that it be valued' (Olorenshaw, 2016:105). 'We', as previously stated, is the numerically dominant 92.6% of the ECEC workforce.

'We' promote a Froebelian approach to ECEC as a more alternative and fashionably 'child centred' option. This is often depicted by Froebel's 'gifts and occupations' in practice (Bruce, 2012). Such practicalities will not be addressed here. Instead, the fundamental unity within the 'garden' element of the kindergarten will be assessed in both a metaphorical and pedagogical sense. Over time, revisions and replications of the Froebelian approach to ECEC have meant that the true understanding appears to have been lost, and a reductionist view predominantly held (Palmer and Read, 2020:180). Therefore, original experiences of two female Froebelian educators will be offered through Elise Van Calcar (1822-1904) and Alice Buckton (1867-1944). Both approaches are characterised by each woman's own life experiences. It will be noted that it was the Froebelian women educators themselves that organised their own 'mycorrhizal'² connections and promoted the possibility of a place for women, as mothers, in the public and professional realm.

Approach

The lack of value attributed to mothering today and a reductionist approach to Froebelian education, can be seen as just two of the many current predicaments within the ECEC sector. To address these predicaments, it is suggested that the kinder gardeners rewild Froebel's kindergarten. Here, a newly created method of early education is proposed; that of the 'kinderforst'.

The kinderforst is represented by, and functions within, a transformative biodiverse forest, which enables the children and practitioners to fully immerse

² See Page 7 for explanation of 'mycorrhizal'

themselves in the system of which they are both parts. Biodiversity is promoted within the holistic system and its health-full harvest, both directly in food and products, and indirectly in the spiritual connection to the whole gained by the participants. The system is co-created in the human and non-human symbiotic relationship (Hart, 2010).

The kinderforst promotes a substantial reduction in the linear and systematic management of ECEC (as exemplified through the EYFS). This is suggested to be replaced by the acceptance of, and trust in, the entanglement of relationships experienced within the children's lives and the kinderforst. The kinderforst practitioner's energy can be directed towards her vital 'emotional labour' of cultivating and supporting symbiotic relationship connections, to promote learning and understanding during this vital window of opportunity in a child's life (Osgood, 2010:130). An extension to this concept is applied through Donna Haraway's posthuman research; she suggests 'staying with the trouble'. She implores us to ignore 'technofixes' and opt instead for the cultivation of kin and 'oddkin' relationships (Haraway, 2016:4). Such a perseverance between species is possible in the kinderforst. Immersion in the forest would make the child's observation of links and complexities between human and non-human relationships conceivable. This valuable knowledge is vital for future life use and for the potential protection of the planet's forests (Haraway, 2016). 'Staying with the trouble' suggests an interconnected approach to ECEC, and the mother figure's role, that is ethically sustainable. The kinderforst allows children to grow to their full potential and flourish in the symbiotic support, to experience and to know their place in the wholeness of the ecosystem. The kinderforst can

therefore be seen as a healthy approach to self, others and planet, and can prepare humans for the volatility and uncertainty of the future.

This chapter has touched upon just two of the problems that face humanity today: the degradation of certain groups of humans and of our planet. It has suggested that degradation can be seen as mirrored in the kindergarten in England today. Yet, this was not Froebel's intention. This will now be addressed, in the creation of the kinder garden.

Chapter Two

Froebel's Legacy: The Creation of the Kinder Garden

The Garden

This chapter will utilise the prepared ground and proceed with the creation of the kinder garden. The benefits of gardening and the traditional garden will be discussed, before a more sustainable alternative will be explained. Froebel's outdoor learning intentions for the kindergarten are defined, and his legacy of female emancipation is critiqued through the gardening of two Froebelian educators.

The garden was - and is - the perfect means through which to express Froebel's pedagogy. He asserted:

Out-door life, in open nature, is particularly desirable for young people; it develops, strengthens, elevates and ennobles. It imparts life and a higher significance to all things (Froebel, 2005:309).

In the traditional garden, individual beds and plants that require particular care, tended well and often, romantically offer a place of beauty. The garden brings both pleasure and produce and can be seen as beautifully representative of Froebelian pedagogy.

A pleasurable and productive garden is described in two studies cited in 2012, by Freeman *et al.*, that of Gross and Lane (2007) and Kiesling and Manning (2010). Together they create a list of benefits the traditional garden gives: escapism, ownership and identity; connectedness to nature; a way to show one's duty of care towards the environment and nature; social relationships, and both mental

and physical health promotion (Freeman *et al.*, 2012:137). However, the traditional garden requires cultivation, control and confinement in order to be aesthetically pleasing. A more sustainable method of gardening, that of the permaculture approach, creates a space in which to place hope, not only for a good season's growth, or yield of crop, but more philosophically – a peaceful connection to the wellbeing of the whole (Hart, 2010).

The wellbeing of the whole was urgently sought by Australian Bill Mollison in the early 1970s (Hart, 2010:1). Mollison's suggestion that the global planting of trees was both pressing and crucial, was taken up and extended by Robert Hart in England, who envisioned fruit bearing trees in suburban gardens as part of the solution. This eventually resulted in the permaculture forest garden (Hart, 2010:1). Herbert Girardet describes the forest garden system as being 'a celebration of the myriad [of] interactions of life; for it was based on profound observations, both intuitive and scientific, of how different life forms interact in order to stimulate and support one another' (Girardet, 2001: no pagination). This is not a linear concept. The forest garden does not require human domination. It is a highly complex self-supporting system and can therefore be feasibly positioned as feminine in its essence, Mother Earth in miniature.

A forest garden stimulates and supports as a whole system, the permaculture gardener understands and communes with the land, atmosphere and water routes of the site (Hart, 2010). Practically, it is also interpreted as non-linear, and is planted with vertical storeys as well as the horizontal. The lower tiers consist of perennials that require minimal maintenance along with herbs and salads, whilst the canopy of fruit and nut bearing trees provide symbiotic support and shelter, benefitting wildlife and human life equally (Hart, 2010). As opposed to the

traditional garden, there is minimal human interference required in the 'ordered diversity' of the forest garden (Hart, 2010:4). Governed by the laws of plant symbiosis, it is not a uniform or controlled space. Such a garden does not only assist with food production and potential self-sufficiency, but also provides the tenders of the garden with a spiritual connection to the whole. Hart writes: 'It is a way of life and it also supplies people's spiritual needs by its beauty and the wealth of wild life that it attracts' (Hart, 2010:4). The spiritual element of the forest garden can be seen to ensure that 'the whole is more than the sum of its parts' (Hart, 2010:11). It exudes respect for growth, the beauty of community and systemic harmony, qualities that enrich the human experience, and that are all imbedded within a Froebelian education.

The Fertile Soil

Froebelian education reflects all that Froebel held dear as a child. Through the consistent reflection on the intricacies of his own motherless childhood, Froebel sought to educate using the elements he observed that would encourage personal growth (Lilley, 2010:5). Utilising his experience, he valued self-directed play, was respectful of children and placed nature and community at the heart of his educational movement (Smedley and Hoskins, 2018:1203).

Froebel's thinking was influenced by The Enlightenment (Bruce, 2012:6). He centralised relationships, and believed that through education, man could 'be guided to understand himself, to be at peace with Nature and to be united with God' (Froebel, 1826 cited in Lilley, 2010:50). The education of self, one's relationship to community and a spiritual connection were all interconnected for

Froebel and fundamental to his pedagogy (Bruce, 2012:7). Children were, for Froebel, to be respected as human beings and valued as members of the community (Smedley and Hoskins, 2018:1203). He rejected the separation of subjects and learning by rote in favour of first-hand interrelated experiences within the natural world and self-directed play. The interconnectedness of life is also represented within Froebel's pedagogy, through his deference to unity both within the child, within learning, and the child's placement within the community, as such, Froebel can be seen as a pioneer (Smedley and Hoskins, 2018:1203).

Despite how much of a pioneer he may have been, Froebel has been criticised by contemporary educational historians such as Kristen Nawrotzki, who asserts a Froebelian education to be 'pre-industrial, mystical-romantic' (Nawrotzki, 2006:212). However, as a product of his contextual time and place in history this is to be expected. As historian Kevin Brehony contended in 2006, a pantheistic outlook, that is a belief in God's existence in all things, including adults and children, was popular at the beginning of the twentieth century (Brehony, 2006). The overarching principle within Froebel's pedagogy can be seen as an emphasis on, and encouragement of, the unity of God, nature and humans. This belief was, as Nawrotzki contends, both spiritual and mystical, and indeed, is very much of its time (Brehony, 2010 cited in Smedley and Hoskins, 2018:1203). Nonetheless, this does not render it unusable today.

Froebel's outside space was representative of his pedagogy. The child not only had a piece of land to tend themselves, but this land was placed within the communal gardens to encourage a sense of curious comparison, joint endeavour, and connection (Bruce, 2012:71). Physical details of the garden design, such as the pathways created at just the right width to allow children to walk together, give a

beautiful sense of respect for children within his design (Liebschner, 2001). Such details represent the unity to be created within the child through their early education, allowing for a duty of care, community collaboration and production, a kinder garden paradise.

For Elise Van Calcar (1822-1904), described by Nelleke Bakker as a maternal feminist deemed the 'most important pioneer of educational reform ... in the Netherlands', the kinder garden was not a paradise, but a place to be 'worked upon intensely' (Bakker, 2013:155). Her approach was based on the idea that children's morality had to be embedded. Van Calcar's 'intense work' can be likened to work within a traditional garden, requiring the dedication of skilled gardeners to control nature, and ensure its aesthetic appeal.

'Intense work' on children's learning and development can certainly be felt in ECEC settings today. The controlling kinder gardener operates within the measurement, goals and evidence required by the EYFS (Department for Education, 2021). This confining style of learning appears to be in juxtaposition with a Froebelian education, yet Froebel's legacy can clearly be seen as embedded within the eclectic mixture of pedagogic methodologies utilised in ECEC settings today (Nawrotzki, 2006:209). Despite the loss of the sense of trust in the child and the unity or interconnectedness of learning for today's child, the setting's garden or the outside space is still deemed crucial. The individual's learning is also accepted as being deeply meaningful and lasting when it has taken place outdoors (Bruce, 2012:4). More overtly, Froebel's acknowledgement of the individuality of each child (Cavanagh, 1939 cited in Nawrotzki, 2006:219) forms part of the overarching principles of the EYFS today (Department for Education, 2021:6).

The Gardening

The well-tended garden, exemplified in both Van Calcar's approach and the EYFS, represents the human's desire to do battle with nature, to control it and to elicit conformity (Freeman *et al.*, 2012). The two processes, the desire to make beautiful, to contribute to a wholesome whole, alongside the human desire to confine and control in order to achieve this, sit in juxtaposition with each other. Sir Ken Robinson's educational metaphor clarifies this point eloquently; he asserted that it is not the gardener that makes the plant grow. The job of the gardener is to create the optimal conditions for growth (Robinson, 2008: online). Robinson's understanding can be applied to the process of rewilding, a return to a state of trust in natural processes, the allowance of connection between each individual component, and a sense of connection to the whole. Such a rewilding within today's ECEC would necessitate trust in the very nature of diversity within our species, and the revaluation of the mother figure, as a gentle nurturer, and connection maker, rather than an enforcer of projected outcomes.

The Role of The Mother Figure

Froebel's legacy consists of proposals that were socially radical for the time, yet this does not render him a feminist. He did not seek to promote the women's movement; however, he recognised the then gender-differentiated roles of parents as equal. He stated:

To women belongs the subjective element in education, the
awakening and the culture of the inner mental world ... to man
belongs the objective element, the outlook over the external world

and the comprehension thereof. Both these spheres of culture are alike essential (Froebel, 1891 cited in Read, 2003:19).

The, then recent, revolutionary European wars, meant that Froebel deemed society in need of radical change in order to heal its fractures and improve its stability. He saw the mother and child relationship as esteemed, and essential to the healthy growth of young children (Read, 2003). Despite the disagreement voiced by contemporary educationalists, such as Pestalozzi, whose assumption was that this core connection belonged within the private sphere of the household, it was not so for Froebel; he believed that 'spiritual motherhood' was transferable to the public realm of the kindergarten. The assignment of such an important educational role to women, ensures Froebel's proposals can be seen as radical for the time. The kindergarten movement had an observable effect on the lives of many middle-class women, who from the mid-1830s sought to break conventional bonds and create for themselves a working role in society (Read, 2003). Yet this must be seen as the first emergence of promising shoots in relation to the gradual process of gender equality. Froebel had no desire to 'make her learned', just to achieve for women the: 'development of her best and noblest qualities' (Froebel, 1897 cited in Read, 2003:20). Froebel's acknowledgement of the value of mothering must, therefore, be seen as historic and culturally contextual.

'Biographical mode as an analytical tool' (Read, 2003: 17).

Alice Buckton (1867-1944) was among the British women to benefit from the development of the mother figure in the public sphere within the Froebelian

education movement. Buckton discovered a passion for Froebelian education, as many women did; Brehony argued that this was perhaps due to the lack of dogmatism emanating from the movement (Brehony, 2006). She travelled to Europe to investigate other methodologies and met house mother of Pestalozzi-Froebel House, Annette Schepel. The two women became lifelong friends and arguably clandestine lovers, living together at Tor House, later to become Chalice Well in Glastonbury, Somerset (Mathivet, 2006:270). In 1913, Schepel and Buckton opened 'The Chalice Well Training College for Women' offering traditional crafts, drama and the education of children. Buckton referred to the garden at Chalice Well before her death in 1944, stating: 'I must preserve this "Mother Centre" so to speak, so that in all the days to be, men and women will find refreshment here' (The Chalice Well, 2022). Buckton's 'Mother Centre', held in trust today, is a living sanctuary and 'World Peace Garden' (The Chalice Well Trust, 2022: online). The garden continues to allow visitors to experience their unity with nature, in a gentle, unhurried and holistic Froebelian style. Despite it not being purposefully planted as a forest garden, one can sense when there, that the gardening does not control and confine, it works with natural processes, acknowledges the interconnected whole, trusts and allows specimens to grow to their full potential (*Spring Equinox Gathering*, 2022).

From this biographic evidence, the assumption can arguably be drawn that Buckton was somewhat unconventional for the time. Read argues that women such as Buckton, due to their newly acquired public persona as kindergarten teachers, struggled with their notions of self-identification. Read suggests that the networking that took place, provided them with opportunity, training and employment along with a more coherent sense of self and group (Read, 2003:18).

This lack of coherent identity, and the tension between the gains of social freedom at the expense of certainty, could conceivably be seen as exasperated for Buckton, regarding her publicly undisclosed relationship with Annette Schepel. Arguably, the lack of coherent professional identity can still be observed as influencing the ECEC practitioner today.

Buckton, as an individual biographic example, represents the female experience of the Froebelian movement in England at this time. Middle class women, financially supported by the families, were able to travel, to explore and to make networks of educational contacts, themselves. As Read contests, these networks allowed: 'the interchange of ideas for personal development as well as the potential to bring about change' (Read, 2003:17). As Froebel can be perceived as providing the foundation of the kindergarten movement, there is implication of a patriarchal underpinning. These women were *granted* the freedom to sell their innate mothering qualities rather than educate themselves, however, as historian Catherine M. Prelinger contends, it was the women who liberated themselves: 'What appears to the historian to be no more than cooperation in support of patriarchy is in fact the innovative pursuit of self-interest, autonomy and power as women themselves perceive it within the possibilities of contemporary circumstances' (Prelinger, 1984 cited in Read, 2003:30). This pioneering group of women united and upheld each other, rather like Simard's mother trees: 'they somehow enhanced the health of their kin. And not only their kin, but of strangers too ... promoting the diversity of the community' (Simard, 2021:286). The nurturing and supportive 'mycorrhizal' connections between the Froebelian women recognises and upholds their diversity as a group.³ ECEC today, and

³ See page 7 for the definition of 'mycorrhizal'.

society at large, has a moral obligation to recognise and support diversity within both the professional mother figures, and the young saplings of our species, just as Buckton's experience exhibits.

This chapter has opened the idea that the intense linear energy of traditional gardening, Van Calcar's approach, and the EYFS are representative of each other. A more sustainable way of gardening, Hart and Buckton's essentially more feminine path, is deemed a more sustainable, future orientated model.

Chapter Three

The Contemporary Gardeners: The perennial predicament of a 'cash crop' approach

The ECEC Kindergarten Today

This chapter critiques the current situation for women employed within ECEC, the standards they work within, the social discourse they endure and how it affects the children in their care. It also critiques ECEC practice today and the reductionist use of 'a Froebelian approach' within mainstream ECEC.

The liberation experienced by Buckton was only possible for some women, not all. A classed situation continues to be exemplified today by the existence of a void, socially and economically, between the relatively more affluent families who use ECEC, and those less affluent who work within it. As Strober *et al.* contend, what is often hidden from the view of ECEC users, is 'the inadequate training, poor salaries and long hours, which leads to low staff morale and high staff turnover' (Strober *et al.*, 1995; Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2006 cited in Osgood, 2012:20). Families pass the care of their children to the less affluent and take advantage of the government's early years education (EYE) funding, which provides 15 hours of EYE for their child each week, at no cost to the family. In Hampshire EYE funding is currently set at a base rate of £4.56 per hour (Hampshire County Council, 2022: online). This low rate inevitably means the economics of child rearing within a setting forces the professional mother figure's wellbeing and development onto the back burner, whilst more immediate financial necessities are taken care of. It appears that the women offering the professional mothering experience low levels of appreciation and sense of

personal value. Additionally, due to the expectation of conformity and accountability through the EYFS, they also experience high levels of stress.

The children experiencing their care from such controlled and stressed mother figures, also suffer under the system. As will be discussed, Arne Naess identifies that it is not possible for the mother figure to experience her feelings invisibly; her stress, upset and frustrations will be sensed by the children in her care (Naess, 1986). It can therefore be suggested that the current system benefits neither the mother figure, nor the child, but rather the business owner and essentially the government. This was substantiated by author and senior lecturer in education, Simon Boxley in 2016, before the current revision to the EYFS. He contended that 'the capitalist state does not invest in early education out of altruistic concern in the wellbeing of children ... Rather, the state wishes to see a return on its capital' (Boxley, 2016: online). This desire for a return of capital can be observed in the high level of accountability placed on the practitioner to produce literate and productive citizens. Furthermore, it makes possible the statement that the return of the state's capital can be seen as being achieved through the control of the working-class women in ECEC. Not only does it keep these 'dangerous' women in order, but it also looks to the future and creates further orderly, compliant citizens.

For the working-class mother figure employed within the ECEC setting, their professionalism has very little value placed upon it, either economically or socially. This could arguably be seen as a reflection of the lack of value society places on the act of mothering in general, as exemplified in the hourly rate of £4.56 (Hampshire County Council, 2022: online). Their lack of value was particularly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. Christine Berry reported in *The*

Guardian that whilst teaching unions were able to force governmental U-turns during the pandemic, nursery workers ‘wielded much less collective clout’ (Berry, 2021: online). This lack of power is further confused she contended, whilst simultaneously being told they were indispensable to society; they were largely unprotected by safety laws and so were additionally dispensable. The opening of nurseries was deemed to be necessary so that ‘higher-value’ workers could return to work, this publicly devalued the nursery worker, and emotively she suggests it rendered them nothing more than ‘cannon fodder’ (Berry, 2021: online).

Boxley and Berry’s research illuminates the social divide, the separation between the worldviews of the diversity of families that use ECEC - such as Berry - and the contrastingly dominant working-class nursery workers who provide it (Osgood, 2012:13). The gardeners of the kindergarten deserve better social and governmental appreciation of their: ‘emotional professionalism’ (Osgood, 2012:152). A vision of the kindergarten of the future suggests both the acknowledgement of the lack of transparency in the relationships entangled around the ECEC child and a reconstruction of the social discourse around women’s professional identity as nursery workers and kinder gardeners.

Tending the garden

The traditional, tidy and time efficient kinder gardener, who controls nature, can be observed within the contemporary ECEC practitioner. This contrasts with the gentle and unhurried tending at Buckton’s Chalice Well.⁴ Less metaphorically, the centralised control of the sector and the accountability of the practitioner is in

⁴ See page 20.

juxtaposition with child autonomy today. The overarching principle of valuing the 'unique child' within the EYFS (Department for Education, 2021:6), underpinned by Froebelian theory,⁵ (yet not referenced), is achieved through the reductionist control and confinement of the unique individual who is held to the attainment of the Early Learning Goals (ELG) with every other 'unique child' (Department for Education, 2021:11-15). This appears to be in direct opposition with Froebelian educational theory. Froebel's work can be applied to this dichotomy. In 1826, he wrote 'Wild plants which grow where they are crowded and confined scarcely suggest any shape of their own ... children who are early forced ... into a pattern and purpose unsuited to their nature might have grown in beauty and in the fullness of their powers' (Lilley, 2010:52). The predicaments that face the gardener, and the kindergarten practitioner, appear perennial, and this is evident despite the changes in society since Froebel's time and the: 'possibilities of contemporary circumstance' (Prelinger, 1984 cited in Read, 2003:30). Unique children should not be controlled and confined into the shape of the ELGs. They need the space to grow into *their* full potential, not into a subjective adult's agenda.

Froebelian Education, Reduced

Adult agenda dictates that children within ECEC strive towards *their* ELGs and as they do so, usually have 'free flow' access to play outside. But, due to the 'schoolification' of the sector, (Brostrom, 2017) this time must be productive, despite Bruce's observation that Froebelian 'free play' will not 'fit into tight

⁵ See pages 15-16.

timetables' (Bruce, 2012:13). The child's achievement of the ELGs allows practitioners to prove their accountability. However, this means young children are growing up in disconnection from nature and from unhurried and loving interactions with adults in the reality of the entangled world of relationships in which they live.

A clear example of ELG achievement through the imparting of information in the hope of verbal reproduction, can be seen in the current issue of *Early Years Educator* (April 2022). Teacher and advisor Jenni Clarke recommends enhancing communication and language skills this Spring, though the use of pictures of baby animals or a poem 'freely available on the internet' to introduce the concept of the changing of the seasons to the young children and to increase their vocabulary (Clarke, 2022: S3). Whilst this might indeed increase their vocabulary, it does not replicate the sensorial experience of Spring, that would refresh and invigorate them if experienced in the forest. The forest is not a haphazard and subjectively constructed activity. It is 'replete with fruit and foliage, blooms, birds, insects, mammals and fungi, fascinating scents and sounds, [and] can be a work of art comparable to any of humankind's highest cultural attainments' (Hart, 2010:128). The kinderforst can be seen as a Mother Centre, for the natural and cultural refreshment of young children, and of course for the freedom from external control for the trusted mother figure, where the passing on of valuable, real and worthwhile knowledge happens.

Throughout this work, the kinderforst is referred to as being 'future orientated'. Sadly, today as one looks to the future in England's ECEC, one observes that the most recent white paper travels in the opposite direction of the kinderforst. On March 28, 2022, the paper implied the government was to promote a 'fully trust

led system' (Department for Education, 2022:10). Sadly, it is not until the footnote on page 43 that it is noted: 'The term 'trust' refers to an academy trust throughout' (Ibid., 2022:43). The EYFS is to have a 'new focus to early foundations for literacy, numeracy and language skills' (Ibid., 2022:26). Not only more of the same separate, disconnected, accountability for the sector, but also it will be 'broad, ambitious [and] knowledge-rich' (Ibid., 2022: 24). It is unclear whether the early years educators, advised by their profession's journal, through Jenni Clarke, to use pictures from the internet of Spring animals that the children are possibly seeing for the first time, out of context and reality, will be deemed by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) as either broad or ambitious. Should the white paper become an ECEC reality, the practitioner can look forward to an extension of the government's 'rigorous, evidence driven approach' (Ibid., 2022: 22) resulting in a depressing outlook for the future for ECEC in England. The fear over the ability of future generations to understand, protect and 'stay with' the wholeness of the biodiverse planet is now amplified (Haraway, 2016). The government appear to be distanced from the trust and radical acceptance of entangled diversity necessary for future human security, distanced from all that is found naturally within the kinderforst.

Today, as journalist and author Richard Louv contends, this disconnection from between the child and nature is proving problematic: 'at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature' (Louv, 2013: online). Escapism, freedom, connection with the whole and a true sense of duty to care for the environment in the ECEC garden today, is marginalised in mainstream settings, in favour of literacy and numeracy

attainment (Department for Education, 2021). A continuation of this practice adds to the uncertainty for the planet's future, as we rear generations, who - worsened by the pandemic – lack escapism, freedom and consequently good mental, physical and spiritual health (Louv, 2013 and Campbell, 2022). This was certainly not Froebel's intended outcome for kindergarten children.

Other aspects of ECEC, whilst recognisably Froebelian, do not bring to fruition his intended outcomes. Recorded observations in today's setting are not as Froebel intended them; he saw them as a tool through which to understand the child and for the observer to acknowledge both themselves and the child in the wholeness of the universe (Lilley, 2010:79). In England today, observations evidence the child meeting ELGs, and as such the child and the practitioner consequently become further controlled and confined by the EYFS. The child's own unique beauty is not an overarching principle; any escapism or freedom felt by the child in the garden is not documented or indeed valued. It is unlikely to be noticed if the child's personality is growing in beauty and into 'the fullness of their power'⁶ whilst in the garden, as the ELGs are the only target to be met. As Brostrom concludes, pre-determined learning objectives, such as the ELGS, whilst part of the accountability of the practitioner and the setting, are simply a 'waste of children's time' (Brostrom, 2017:13). It is therefore suggested that an ECEC setting presenting itself as 'Froebelian', cannot theoretically offer the EYFS and its associated ELGs as a method of its practice.

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A further reductionist attitude to Froebelian education is that the practitioner's *active* role and participation is confused; confusion could arguably lie in the concept that Froebelian education should be: 'far more permissive than directive'

⁶ See page 26

(Froebel, 1826 cited in Lilley, 2010:53). It is detectable in modern practice that there is a romantic undercurrent that views all 'play' as a constituent to child development (Brostrom, 2017:5). Adult organisation of learning and play is seen as inferior to 'children's creative self-activity' (Brown Smith, 1921 cited in Brehony, 2009:599). However, there is, as Van Calcar contended,⁷ a need to actively tend. Froebel's kindergarten teachers were not there to be passive onlookers (Brostrom, 2017:5). It is the gardener/practitioner's role to provide the optimum environment for each child, to carefully and gently prune the child's experiences to shape development to allow for maximum growth via discreet organisation, planning and direction. Just as the patient permaculture gardener would attend to their forest garden. Yet, as discussed, it is the confining accountability and measurement that is now the definition of the sector in England (Department for Education, 2021). This ties the gardener's hands, and consequently renders the EYFS a quick 'cash crop' and her only option (Simard, 2021:4).

Educator Agency

Accountability and measurement of the young child, means that today's Froebelian educator experiences a tension and occupies a void somewhere between statutory policy, their own conditioning and subjective beliefs and the setting's practice. Smedley and Hoskins cite Brostrom who contends that in some settings unstructured play has been: 'overgeneralised and interpreted too literally so that the role of the adult in supporting and extending play is underestimated'

⁷ See page 17

(Broström, 2017 cited in Smedley and Hoskins, 2020:1204). This can lead to the practitioner allowing *all* play and not engaging and extending ideas and structuring, for fear of not 'being Froebelian'. Smedley and Hoskins suggest that it is the goal orientated nature of the EYFS that causes this lack of confidence (Smedley and Hoskins, 2020:1204). Smedley and Hoskins also cite Moyles *et al.*, to illustrate the widespread difficulty that practitioners have in 'articulating pedagogical values' (Moyles *et al.*, 2002 cited in Smedley and Hoskins, 2020:1204). Their research identifies a weakness in practitioner articulation on the theory of play, even when practice is based on Froebel's ideas (Ibid., 2020:1204). It is arguable that the setting will be reluctant to invest money in training and this in turn prevents a deeper level of knowledge in the practitioner, as previously discussed, her needs are on the back burner. Yet deeper knowledge could alleviate confusion over the practitioner's role and her a lack of confidence. However, with statutory requirements so prevalent, one could question whether the practitioner identifies themselves as an agentic citizen, or merely part of a money-making mechanism that confines and controls young children. Perhaps this makes her more attractive to employ; with little or poor knowledge, or any imagined agency, she is more pliable both for the setting and the government. Osgood's classed professional identification of the nursery worker certainly plays a part in this lack of confidence and consequently the recognition of ECEC practitioners as an oppressed group becomes more apparent (Cohen, 2008:10).

Space for Inspiration?

A practitioner busy completing targets and externally set, homogeneous goals, is less likely to be able to provide or convey the love needed by her key children to

achieve this. Norwegian philosopher and ecologist Arne Naess' illustration supports this; he avows that the child is deeply affected by their mother's emotions. (In this case 'mother' is replaced by the professional mother figure within the setting). He writes that children feel 'their mother's hidden hostility against life, which they sense rather than recognise, and eventually become imbued with it themselves' (Naess, 1986: 229). The frustrations of the mother figure, herself controlled and confined, will be sensed by her children and will become part of who they are. The fracturing planet demands a return to ECEC prior to the implementation of the EYFS, so that we no longer require 'resilience' to be built into our children's education (Department for Education, 2021:6). But rather 'we' show them the love required to nurture a sense of love within them.

Naess confirms 'there is nothing more conducive to giving a child the experience of what love, joy and happiness are than being loved by a mother who loves herself' (Naess, 1986:229). The interconnected and spiritual nature of the relationship between practitioner and child is acknowledged here. The mother figure, whilst publicly denigrated, holds a position of huge responsibility, and needs time and space herself in order to be inspirational, and to offer such love, joy and happiness to the children in her care. Yet, in England she is accountable for the 15 ELGs and their subheadings, she receives poor pay, she has a lack of security and undertakes highly demanding emotional work.⁸ The practitioner, as mother figure, fulfils a highly important role on a micro level for the child's holistic health, and through application more widely, the planet's future. She deserves, as previously discussed, a trusting attitude towards her and time and space to be loving and inspirational.

⁸ See pages 23 and 24

Control

The control of the EYFS practitioner and their consequent control of the child, is part of the construction of today's ECEC setting in England. Individualist attainments of children are promoted, expected and praised; whilst the natural diversity of children, their individual abilities, skills and competencies are left unaccounted for. Such a system is marginalising, as the principal of Summerhill School Zoe Neill Readhead articulates:

This expectation that everybody will achieve academically is a curse to many, many young people. It has become a kind of discrimination that should be unacceptable (Neill Readhead, 2021:30).

An example of this discriminatory expectation is clearly outlined in the EYFS statutory framework. It is stated that children at the 'expected' level of development in the summer term at the end of their early years education *will*: 'Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed' (Department for Education, 2021:13). This can be viewed as a homogenising expectation. Children who fall outside of this expectation, are therefore categorised as deficient, not 'expected' and therefore as their educational journey progresses, this negative label will accompany them. It could be argued that the entire ELG process is not only a 'waste of children's time' (Brostrom, 2017:13); but a waste of civil servant, practitioner and parent time. This in no way takes account of life and the lived experience of the ECEC child. No account is taken of, for example, the birth of a sibling in the Spring of their final year in ECEC, a global pandemic and so on *ad infinitum*. Sir Ken Robinson, in agreement, states: 'Life is not linear, it is organic. We create our lives symbiotically as we explore our talents...' (Robinson, 2008: online). The child's experience of life is not linear, and not always on an ever

upward progressing trajectory. Therefore, as projections are formed about the child's potentiality in life, based upon these ELG outcomes, (Department for Education, 2021:5); Neill Readhead's statement is poignant, this is discriminatory practice, and can be seen as morally unacceptable.

The enforced linear trajectory attended to in today's kindergarten following the statutory EYFS, forces the potentiality of each beautiful kinder garden specimen to be isolated, controlled and appropriately labelled. There is evidence of the work undertaken by the gardener's neat endeavours, but the specimens are not reaching their full, natural magnificence as part of a whole interrelated, connected system. Rendered separate, they compete, unable to support other specimens in the short space of time they have as a 'cash crop' (Simard, 2021:4).

Froebelian Education, Released

With no cash crop expectation, in the rewilded kindergarten, specimens are appreciated for their own unique beauty, however that manifests. In the rewilded garden, life is known and experienced as being cyclical, species are attuned to the natural world, and support each other in the longevity of the connective experience.

Child transformation and development happens organically for each individual and unrepeatable child. A multidirectional flow of connective understanding between the mother figure, the gardener of the setting and the 'specimen' children, allows development and understanding of the world to ebb and flow naturally, much like that within a family. This cyclical approach is reflected in the mycorrhizal connections between the trees of the forest, as Simard confirms:

When Mother Trees – the majestic hubs at the [centre] of the forest communication, protection, and sentience – die, they pass their wisdom to their kin, generation after generation, sharing the knowledge of what helps and what harms, who is friend or foe, and how to adapt and survive in an ever-changing landscape. It's what all parents do (Simard, 2021:5).

In the kinderforst, the mother figure, instead of focussing on the stressed outcomes, and the stressing over outcomes, helps the children to experience not just the passing on of wisdom and knowledge, but the love, joy and happiness associated with mother figures who have the space and time to be inspirational, due to their connection to the natural and cyclical whole. The child and mother figure can feel the interconnectedness of the whole. In the kinderforst the children are not a transient cash crop but are recognised as co-creators and participants within the whole system interdependence. The kinderforst allows us to imagine a future citizen who is strong physically, mentally and spiritually; and, who places both biodiversity and human diversity at the heart of their actions. It is vital we cultivate this perception of humans, young and old, as belonging to the whole (Almers *et al.*, 2017).

This chapter has established that in England's ECEC today, the practitioner is confined within, and controlled by, the industrial style, linear EYFS framework. If she were able to work and play within the complexity of a connected methodology, she could provide the optimal conditions for growth and a nurturing, loving and inspirational mother figure relationship. Crucially, she could educate at a slower pace, children and mother figures could spend their time together immersed in a curiosity inducing, real and natural environment. This

would in turn facilitate a more naturally integrated approach to learning, resulting in the appreciation of the organic blooming of its unique children, not participating in a war against their unique nature. ECEC must begin to reflect our entangled, organic and holistic life processes. ECEC must acknowledge the interrelatedness of life and learning, and the symbiosis between young children, their adults and their environment.

In short, ECEC must return to the forest.

Conclusion

The Rewilding: A Sustainable Vision for the Future of the Children and the Women Working Within England's ECEC.

The conclusions provoked are now presented and are purposefully illustrated as pathways, through the kindergarten and out towards the kinderforst.

The path away from destructive habits

A monoculture-creating agricultural method is as inappropriate for the planet as it is for ECEC's method of educating young children. In England, it is time to step off the path the state treads. It is a clear and straightforward pathway, and it leads directly to a quick, capital return for the 'cash crop' produced by the EYFS and its subject separateness. The EYFS and its ELG expectation is an adult agenda and is irrelevant to the ECEC child themselves (Brostrom, 2017). The only expectation the ECEC child *will* reach by the end of their reception year (Department of Education, 2021); is to continue their experience of life through their own unique situation. Therefore, the ELGs are excess baggage to the child, neither inspirational nor eco-consciousness inducing and as such can be seen as of no benefit to their accelerated journey on the path into the volatility of the future.

Lost on this hasty journey, in the need for accountability in the sector, is a true sense of Froebelian education. A reductive and generalised depiction is portrayed to practitioners in the factory model of ECEC. This is visibly apparent in the EYFS's amalgamation of many theoretical pedagogies, none of which are referenced. This

results in the continued control of the working-class woman working within the sector. She is unable to attribute her practice to theory, and thus renders herself vulnerable on every front: educative engagement with parents; financial sway with employer; and ultimately within society, her lack of positive professional identity allows the government to continue to control and dominate her as they pursue their desire to keep society orderly. This means that both Froebelian theory and any contemporary discussions around it, are at best, reserved for the academic lecture hall, thus exclusionary; and at worst, simply lost to the valuable occupation of professional childrearing in society. However, there are alternative and less trodden paths 'we' can courageously choose, the journey is less direct, but it is more adventurous, inspirational and representative of the interconnections of life. Reminiscent of Froebel's kindergarten paths, it is wide enough for both children and adults to walk hand in hand.

The weaving of the transformational pathways

The rewilding of the kindergarten returns to a true interpretation of Froebelian education, with radical acceptance of all complexity, akin to family life. Its entanglements are profoundly transparent and thus recognisable and useful to the child and future citizen. To turn towards the biodiverse forest is to turn away from the horticultural practices required for a neat and tended garden.

To rewild the kindergarten the practitioner and children co-create a sustainable place and pedagogy through the specificity of Hart's forest garden system, the kinderforst. To rewild, as previously discussed,⁹ is a return to a more holistic

⁹ For rewilding definition see page 5

understanding of nature and natural processes. Trust is placed in the biodiverse whole. With careful planning, it requires minimal human control, and is a future orientated, sustainable perception. Forest biodiversity protection and regeneration is vital to the planet's health as the climate changes. The protection of ECEC as a diverse community is also vital.

Within the rewilded kindergarten one can draw on Simard's 2021 study and apply the role of the Mother Tree to the practitioner in the kinderforst. Mother Trees, through a below-ground network of fungal connections, pass on not only carbon to their kin nearby, but also pass on their knowledge, their wisdom and advice to kin and non-kin, producing an interconnected and inclusionary community space within the forest (Simard, 2021). Simard's research renders it possible for 'us' to understand, perhaps for the first time, that trees can exhibit sentient qualities. It is this knowledge that intensifies the need and the desire to protect the world's forest. As the mother tree, the practitioner creates and supports an unseen connective network of relationships in the diverse ECEC community and beyond, into every aspect of the unique child's life experience. She is part of the supportive symbiosis of the forest, ensuring children have the space to grow into their full beauty, unencumbered with external expectations from the state through the application of the EYFS.

The kinderforst can also be seen as a space for Buckton's 'Mother Centre' to be brought into being outside of Chalice Well, a gentle and warm-hearted place where children can find refreshment, be supported in their unique individuality and recognise themselves as part of the whole system. Such an approach, through the lack of adult agenda, also promotes a sustainable ecological pedagogy. A less violent approach in the kinderforst, illuminated as necessary by Naess, establishes

and protects the interrelatedness of relationships. Trust, time and the uniqueness of the environment are as important to the ecological gardener today as they were to Froebel in 1898.

The kinderforst is a true interpretation of Froebel's understanding that:

if man is fully to attain his destiny, so far as earthly development will permit this, if he is to become truly an unbroken living unit, he must feel and know himself to be one, not only with God and humanity, but also with nature (Froebel, 2005:310).¹⁰

Despite the passing of time, humanity is still searching for the stability and unity that Froebel sought.

Through Froebel's desire to afford the child unity and his concept of the kindergarten; through Hart's patient ecological forest garden methods; the beauty of Buckton's Mother Centre for refreshment; Simard's mycorrhizal interconnectivity of the family forest and Osgood's research on the nature of practitioner identity and web of complex ECEC relationships, it is possible to invite the reader to reconsider what a future orientated early childhood education in England looks like. The kinderforst seeks to promote the healthy growth of supportive relationships, both with kin and non-kin, human and non-human, as an example to the children in the biodiverse ecosystem. Such a way of being within early childhood can be seen as essential to humanity's social and ecological evolutionary journey.

The weaving of the theorist's paths that lead towards the kinderforst, all suggest that the ECEC child is not sincerely served by the masculine energy of a linear

¹⁰ Gendered language contextual to its time and place in history

trajectory of achievement and control; quickly hurried along by unvalued, pressurised, governmentally directed, subjective kinder gardeners. But rather that depth of knowledge, the development of positive human traits, such as compassion, wonder, love and environmental awareness can be achieved through unhurried time engaged with the feminine energy of mothering within ECEC. This occurs non-violently in the natural beauty and flow of the symbiotic kinderforst and helps to connect both the child and the practitioner to the ultimate mother, Earth.

The kinderforst as a reconceptualisation of the kindergarten attempts to remedy the lack of connection to the land, and the poor mental, physical and spiritual health of tomorrow's adults, for they must be strong and well prepared. The kinderforst educated citizen will instinctively know that life can be transparently and collectively well lived, in harmony with nature. The experience of the physicality of time and space to have their own thoughts and act upon them in ECEC is as important to the child as it is to the practitioner, as creativity will be needed to find future proof solutions. A deep connection to, knowledge and indeed reverence of, the natural world, found within the kinderforst, will allow the child to fully comprehend that nature has all that they need. The confident future citizen will not be afraid to stay with their convictions and protect what they know to be part of themselves.

Accordingly, the interwoven, alternative and somewhat winding paths arrive at the kinderforst, where there are only two expectations to be met within the early years of education, that is the trust in and the time for humans to 'be' together within it. The kinderforst's mycorrhizal relations will teach, inspire, refresh and remain with its kin.

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