



Froebel Project 22-23 Camborne and Truro Nursery Schools



Camborne Nursery School

Camborne Nursery School (CNS) is situated in a deprived area, in the most deprived LSOA's (lower super output areas). There are approximately 85 children on roll with a high number of children with SEND (approximately 49% on SEND record of need).





Truro Nursery School

Truro Nursery School (TNS) is situated in the County's city. The school comprises just under half from least deprived LSOA's. There are approximately 95 children on roll with approximately 20% with SEND on the record of need. The school also has a higher percentage of children with EAL than most of the County.





Rationale



During the Covid -19 pandemic both schools worked hard to build honest trusting relationships with parents and carers despite the restrictions and very limited face to face contact. We wanted to undertake a project aiming to address the inequalities we had identified as a result of the pandemic.

We planned to provide sessions which would offer opportunities to: enrich parent's and children's interactions at home; support parental understanding of child development and the value of play and increase social experiences and opportunities available to families.

Aims of the project



We wanted to explore Frobelian principles with families to aid understanding of the value of play and childhood. By inviting families into the schools to play together alongside the educators we hoped to support relationships and children's language development whilst building staff confidence in communicating with families. We wanted to raise staff confidence in exploring influences on children's levels of well-being and involvement. One of our aims was strengthen the bond between home and school learning by encouraging a sense of unity which enriched children's experiences both at home and at school. As Froebel remarked

Today the most urgent need in education is that the school should be united with the life of home and family. (Froebel in Lilley, 1967:156)

Summary of the project

The project workshops took place over 2 academic years commencing in summer term of 2022 and ending in spring 2023. Both schools invited families to take part in 5 weekly sessions all of which took a different Frobelian theme. A total of 24 families took part.

In addition we invited all families to join us for a celebration day bringing together the community and a wider number of families to experience Frobelian principles in practice. A further 49 families attended.

The project was led by 7 key educators including the headteachers from each school who worked with Dr Jan Georgeson from Plymouth University who was supporting the project as the research mentor.

Research Mentor

We worked with Dr Jan Georgeson of Plymouth University. We have worked with both her and the university in the past so have an established working relationship. Dr Georgeson supported the project by:

- effective planning to collect relevant data and carry out the project with integrity
- challenging us to continually consider impact
- interviewing staff and collecting data
- helping us to analyse the data effectively

Factors we considered in planning the project



During the initial planning stages we needed to consider the confidence of staff and notably their own knowledge as well as their confidence to work alongside families. A key factor was raising the importance of Froebel's principle of 'freedom with guidance'. Following the disruption of the Covid - 19 Pandemic we needed to be aware of how we might re - engage with families and whether it would be beneficial to invite specific families or allow all to take part.

To ensure valuable interaction and the ability to build effective relationships we felt that a small number of families in each session would have more impact. We wanted the space we worked in to be reflective of Froebel's intentions such as being able to readily engage with nature.

Whilst planning, we realised how effective communication with our school communities would enable us to gain support for the project. Talking directly with families reflected Froebel's beliefs about the importance of respectful partnerships.

Dr Georgeson encouraged and supported us to consider effective ethical collection of data.

The project in practice



Throughout the project we continued to develop our knowledge through training with the Froebel Trust short courses. We planned a series of sessions with opportunities for exploration including a focus on nature and outdoors; engaging with food and growing; working with clay and blockplay. We wanted to ensure fidelity to Froebelian principles particularly connectedness with nature; the importance of play and recognition of children engaging in self activity.

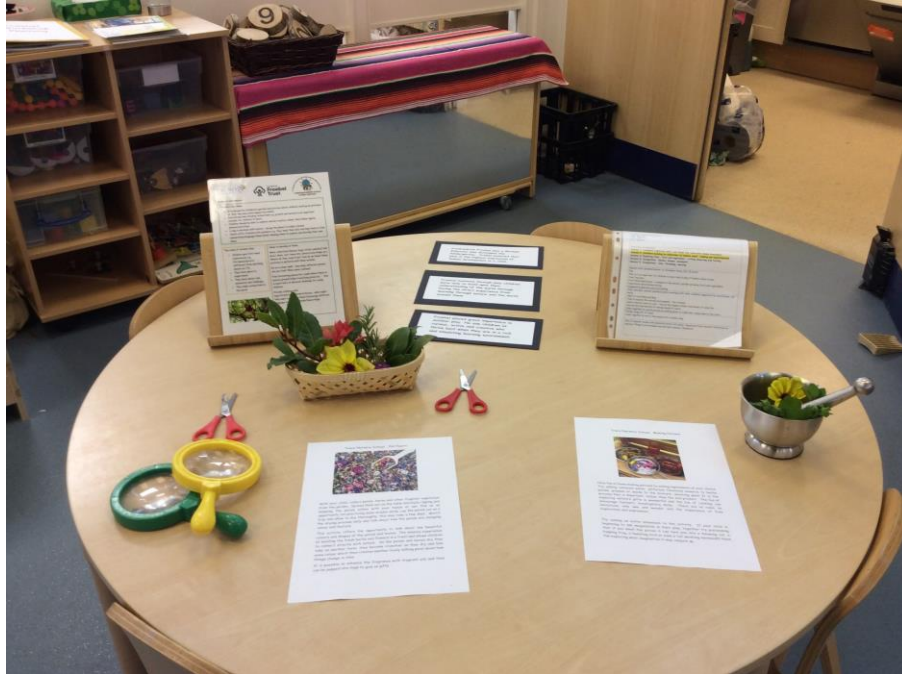
The project was open to all families. We also personally encouraged families who we felt would gain specifically from engaging with the project. Therefore the groups were diverse including mothers, fathers and grandparents. Some families came who didn't often get the opportunity to spend lots of time playing with their child and observing them in school.

The sessions encouraged children and parents/grandparents working together as well as being an environment for learning more about Froebelian principles.

We provided clear handouts which highlighted Froebelian practice for families to take away.

Observation and reflection was an ongoing process for both families and educators. The educators regularly gave a commentary on what they were observing about the play supporting families to understand their child's intentions.

Dr Georgeson supported us to gain the reflections of families through questionnaires. The questions we asked included 'how confident do you feel about supporting your child's development when playing outside/when playing indoors and when cooking and preparing food.'



1 - Introducing Froebelian principles to families; some key information and handouts.



2 - Observations of high levels of involvement.



3 - Collaborative play to encourage active and curious learners.



4 - Children engaged in the reflection process. The educators facilitated conversations about learning.



5 - Active exploration of the properties of clay ; a form of everyday life.



6 - Open ended activity that the whole family can engage with together.



7 - Willow weaving frames offer the exploration of Froebel's occupations.





8 - The satisfaction of collecting things from nature.



9 - Observing in nature stimulates conversation about creatures and habitats.



10 - Blocks provide open ended opportunities for trial and error and to explore mathematical forms.



11 - Rich first hand sensory experiences with food.



12 - An opportunity to understand the whole life cycle of growing plants, harvesting, eating and composting.



13 - Connecting with nature to explore the beauty of form



14 - Using woodwork to support problem solving, autonomous play and freedom with guidance.

Impact - the most important differences



Impact for Families

Feedback from families participating in the projects shows an increase in confidence in supporting their child's development when playing outside; indoors and when cooking and preparing food.

91% of families commented that the session encouraged them to engage with blockplay at home

82% of families commented that the session encouraged them to play with sand and water at home

76% of families commented that the session encourage them to explore food preparation at home

Comments from families demonstrated a strong sense of connectedness in relationships and an understanding of the value of play and childhood:

"We've had a lovely time playing with blocks and also made our own song bag as (child) have been singing your song so much. The first time we got the blocks out (child) made a train and xxx made the soft play from Lappa Valley. Another time I thought we'd try and make Buckingham Palace as we've talked a bit about the Coronation. They had a good go but it was hard with the shapes we have!. But the play took a nice turn as (child) started making an 'animal care centre' which then developed into a whole other game. Thank you."

"M asked me if we could go and use the paintbrush and bucket straight away after the session so we went to the park!"

"C and I loved taking part in all the sessions and we have enjoyed having a go at the activities at home too. Cutting her own fruit and vegetables has been a hit and she remembered so much about how to prepare food safely."

"The workshops were a brilliant way to learn new and exciting activities to do at home. My son certainly enjoyed trying these out at home. Thanks you for letting me be a part of this."

"Very much enjoyed watching (child). I have learnt so much about what he likes to do."



15 - Understanding the value of play at home.



16 - Exploring food at home following a session in school.

Impact for Educators

- Improved knowledge of Froebelian pedagogy
- Improved relationships with families

Reflections from Educators (in reflective journal and from interview with Dr Georgson)

'It was good to share conversations with (families) from a Froebelian perspective as to why such environments lend themselves to natural learning and how this benefits the child in the long run. The high levels of engagement in the children in the workshops has been evident and the continuation of play and activities at home from hand outs and suggestions linked to the activities at school has been good. The parents clearly had confidence working with their children but have enjoyed understanding why and how this type of play is benefitting their children.'

'Levels of awe and wonder have been high during these activities. The small groups have allowed me the time to concentrate on quality moments with the children. One example is (child) who found a snail on a tree and together we stared at it, looking at the shapes of the tree compared to the snail. We talked about the textures of each object, the size differences, the shapes we could see. The fascination of the discovery by him and me were comparable and we shared a moment of connection through strong eye contact and beaming smiles as though we had found the end of the rainbow!'

"The outdoor sessions were the most popular"

"I had a parent who looked at the Froebel Trust website before they turned up because obviously the invitation had it written on it"

"It's given me a lot of confidence to do that (workshop) again, definitely"

"I think its really kind of helped my confidence to talk to parents about why we do things and why we teach a certain way and why we spend so much time outside"

"I did have some families actually come back and show me what they had actually done at home"

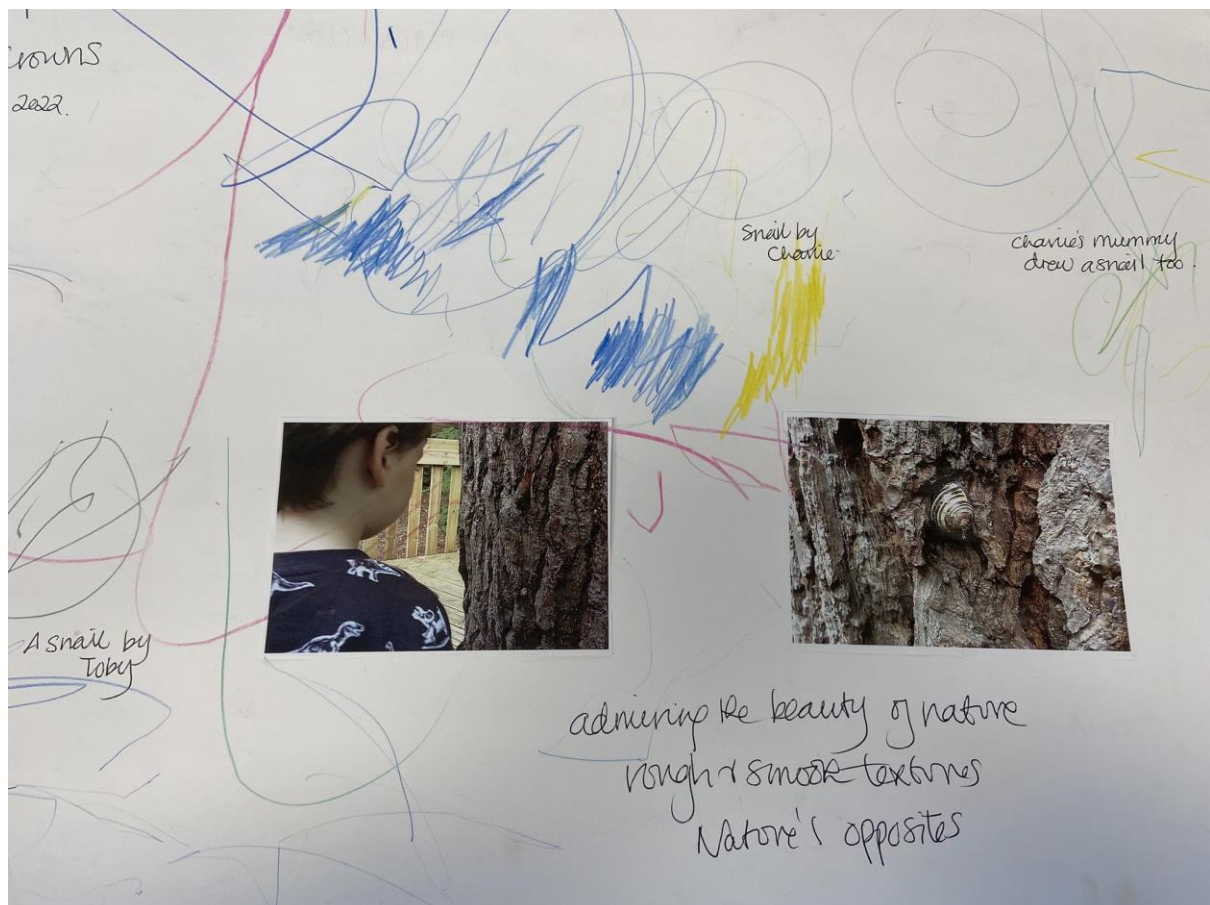
"There were some children that were quite keen to try certain foods and some that they hadn't ever tried...the parents were really surprised."

Reflections from headteachers (project leads) from interview with Dr Georgeson

'The project cemented the (Froebel) training that we have had so it forced us to embed what we have learnt'

'The staff developed their knowledge and (the project) supported both our leadership and our staff knowledge'

'Staff feel confident in engaging with nature...we see the value in connecting with nature rather than just being or playing outdoors'



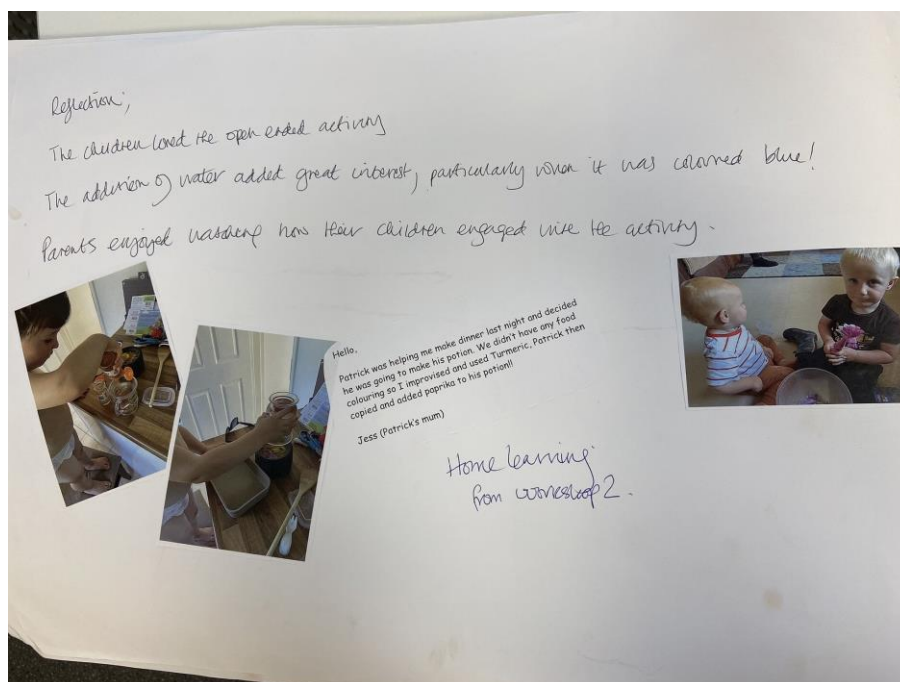
17 - An example of educators reflecting upon children's learning.

Impact For Children

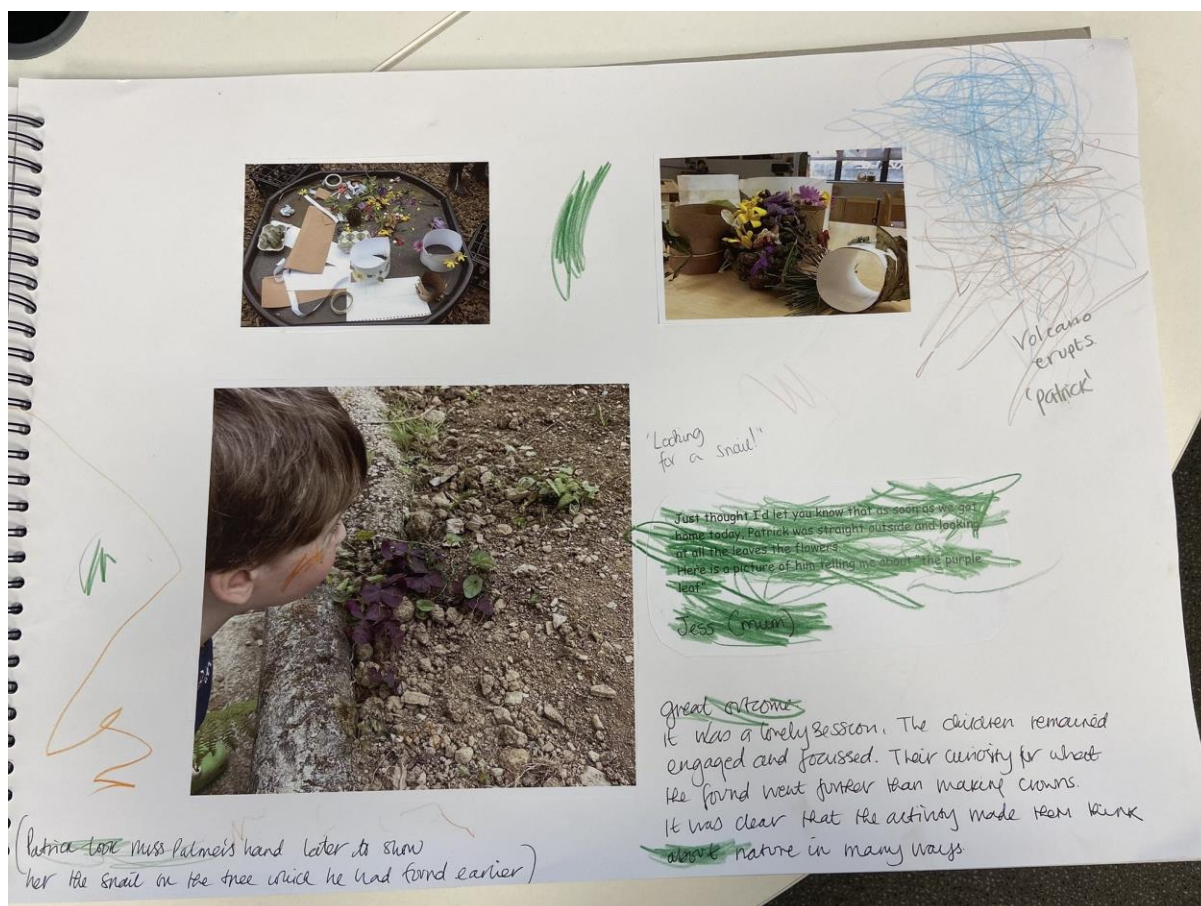
During each workshop the staff member observed children for their levels of wellbeing and involvement using the Leuven Scales [Well-being and involvement | Leicestershire County Council Professional Services Portal](#)

During the sessions the observations were all scored at 4 or 5 with one exception being at 3

Observations from educators and families highlighted the increased connection between school and home. Educators observed that the rich learning opportunities provided context for their language and vocabulary development.



18 - Journals were kept by educators to document reflections and learning alongside families.



19 - Language development and new vocabulary was recorded by educators and families.

What lessons did we learn/how did we adapt?

The most important outcome was the learning that took place with the children and families. Sometimes this is difficult to evidence.

Asking families to attend for 5 sessions seemed too much of a commitment for some families. We amended this in the final block to 3 sessions rather than 5 and this worked better.

Practitioners found it a really good way to work with small groups of children and families and this further enhanced the key person relationship.

The need to be conscious of meeting the needs of adult and child learners and how they learn.

Dissemination

Local Level

For the duration of the project both settings welcomed other professionals as visitors to the nurseries. Over 50 participants visited the two settings and we have been able to share our project details and outcomes as well as our commitment to Frobelian practice. The participants have included other settings; Ofsted; early education students and the Local Authority.

Wider dissemination

We were also delighted to contribute to the Froebel Trust conference in March 2023 when we presented our initial findings.

Emma Short and Helen Adams have also been involved in preparing some of the materials for the NPQEYL for Teach First as well as delivering sessions. This has included a short discussion of Frobelian principles.

What next and sustaining impact



Working closely with just a few families has been so beneficial. This will be hard to sustain in the same way but there are some things we can take forward as a result of the project.

We will continue to provide families with information and handouts to support them with ideas and opportunities to enrich play. Moving forward providing open sessions for families to come together particularly encouraging the wider family community. We noticed that the vast majority of families attending did so with mothers/grandmothers. The open sessions encouraged more fathers to attend. We would like to be able to support fathers more by offering sessions after school and at the weekends.

Further professional development and opportunities to reflect together will support the development of knowledgeable and nurturing educators.

We hope to be able to continue to disseminate our good practice both locally and nationally.

Both nursery schools will continue to share good practice through updating of websites; social media and contributing to the Stronger Practice Hubs.

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