

Introduction

This **MSc in Education, Early Childhood Practice and Froebel** dissertation research study focuses on **exploring slow pedagogy in Early Childhood through a Froebelian (1782-1852) lens in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)**. Examining slow pedagogy through the Froebelian lens in ELC settings **may result in a culture of collaboration, agency and listening, which embraces all children having time to live and learn within holistic, unhurried nurturing places. Slow pedagogy can be defined** in the following ways, where Cowan (in Clark, 2021:npn) argues that it is **“...something you do with children, rather than to children and something that has time for wonder and uncertainty”**; while Bateman (2021:npn) adds: **“It is less about linear time...more about full engagement in the flow of deep time”** (Clark, 2021:npn). Research from Clark (2020:21), namely **“Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child”**, inspired and stimulated this dissertation. Clark’s (2021) work **invites others** (practitioners/parents/policy makers) **to slow down and look deeper into what slow pedagogy means for children. It draws from a plethora of Froebelian literature** (Froebel, 1826,1847, 1856, 1885, 1887, 1908; Tovey, 2017, 2020; Bruce et al., 2019; Bruce,1991, 2012, 2020, 2021).

The following opening quote is used to provoke deep reflection:

“We grant space and time to young plants and animals because we know that, in accordance with the laws that live in them, they will develop properly and grow well. Young animals and plants are given rest, and arbitrary interference with their growth is avoided, because it is known that the opposite practice would disturb their pure unfolding and sound development; but the young human being is looked upon as a piece of wax, a lump of clay which man can mould into what he pleases” (Froebel, 1887:8).

Context

The literature review achieved an **exploration of slow pedagogy in relation to ELC practice through a Froebelian lens**, whilst encompassing relevant and theoretical literature. The focus was aligned to four key themes which emphasises the importance of **‘starting with the child’** and how **‘time’, ‘space’** and **‘place’** are significant to build capacity and focus on knowledge around research of slow pedagogy and how this links to Froebel’s philosophy and modern-day principled practice. It also raised concerns through the theme of **measurement and neoliberal constructs**. Beginning with the Froebelian principle of **‘starting with the child’** – as Bruce (2021) explains, **“what children can do (rather than what they cannot do) is the starting point in a child’s education”** (Bruce, 2021:142). Additionally, Bruce asserts, **“begin where the learner is, not where you want them to be, or they ought to be”** (Bruce 2021:143). Furthermore, Bruce reiterates that **“the focus is on what children can do, and it is not about deficit”** (Bruce, 2021:144). Limited literature was found supporting practice research of slow pedagogy through a Scottish context within Early Years settings. However, Realising the Ambition, Being Me (RtA) (Education Scotland, 2020) – advocates **“starting with the child”** (Education Scotland, 2020:65). The national guidance discusses the “basic principles” to support **“Responsive and intentional planning through child-centred pedagogy in practice”** (Education Scotland, 2020: 63). It also states that “much of what we now take for granted in Early Learning and Childcare has its origins in Froebel’s ideas” (Education Scotland, 2020:102).

The literature also revealed negative factors such as a **culture of measurement**, where Roberts-Holmes (2020) states that neoliberalism **“attempts to reduce Early Years education into a ‘school readiness’ factory that prepares young children for success in primary school tests”** (Roberts-Holmes, 2020:170). In addition, Rosa (2016) highlights growing concerns regarding young children’s learning: **“We will have to be a little faster, more efficient, more innovative, if we want to maintain our place in the world.... In fact, success, strength and efficiency in the present are directly proportional to the strength of the compulsion to escalate the future”** (Rosa, 2016:407). Clark (2021) agrees and claims that the pressures to hurry children are focused on finance, and not necessarily pedagogy or social concepts: **“Children are viewed as human capital or future human capital within a neoliberal world view”** (Clark, 2021:npn). Additionally, the desire for a slower pace is not new – evidence from Holt (2002) shows that children learn better at a slower pace and for this reason he called for **“slow schooling”** (Holt, 2002:9). Additionally, Honoré argues that there is a problem with **“academic hothousing”** (Honoré, 2008:63), as **parents accelerate childhood for returns of quick knowledge through rote learning**. This could link to the writings of Bruce (1991) where she notes, **“... we are influenced by the general philosophies of life that are dominant in our society”** (Bruce, 1991:119).

Exploring Slow Pedagogy through a Froebelian Lens



The work of Froebelian Helen Tovey (2017) is considered useful, as Tovey adds, **“the use of adults’ time is crucially linked to children’s growing independence and autonomy”** and that **“Froebelian educators create long periods of open-ended uninterrupted time...”**. Therefore, **“time is not ‘filled’ but is freed from all unnecessary interruptions”** (Tovey, 2017:42).

Methodology and Ethics

The **epistemology** and **ontology** are discussed prior to the research design, followed by documentation of **the data collection methods and procedures**, and the **data analysis**. This continues with **converse positionality and trustworthiness** before moving on to ethical considerations, limitations, and the conclusion. MacNaughton and Hughes (2008:56) advise that **“as your research progresses through new cycles, you should return regularly to the literature”**, which is an ongoing tool that supports this research.

The **aim of this study was to explore slow pedagogy through a Froebelian lens** and the following research questions were examined by higher education student and early childhood practitioners as participants.

1. **What is your understanding of the concept of ‘slow pedagogy’?**
2. **From your understanding, what would ‘slow pedagogy’ practice look like in ELC?**
3. **In what ways do children in your setting have the freedom to decide how, where and when to spend their time?**

The **methodology used for this research study is qualitative**, using **narrative** and **participatory methods to gather data**. Howe (1985) asserts that qualitative methods provide clear forms of values which show methodological intervention results. In addition, **“qualitative data is not expressed numerically”** (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009:228), therefore, the plan is for the **data to provide real stories with information gathered from real people**.

The use of **research codes of practice from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) and the United Kingdom Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) (2009) were adhered to and enshrined at each stage**. In addition, all **Covid-19 guidance (Scottish Government and University of Edinburgh)** was adhered to.

Findings

This research study enabled and cultivated a platform of resources for the participants who were Higher Education Students/Practitioners. It collated the **voices of participants** through **reflections of practice** and the **findings show how practice correlates with this research and theory**.

A selection of findings from participants showed their **perceptions of what slow pedagogy means** to them. Ivy explained **“slow pedagogy to me means pausing and taking time to build relationships with children, families and connecting with our local and wider community. We take time to observe the beauty of children’s individual learning.”**

This connects with the Froebelian principle of **“relationships matter”** which are **“... of central importance in a child’s life”** whilst expressing the importance of the **“autonomous learner”** (Froebel Trust, npn).

Participant Rose responded **“I would describe slow pedagogy as the practice of recognising children’s need for space and time, to mould and immerse themselves in their own learning story. It is the ability to support children’s exploration of the world around them at a pace which is right for them. For practitioners this means slowing down, allowing ourselves to be in the moment with the child and work with them in a non-didactic manner.”**

This aligns with Payne and Wattochow’s (2008) **“time, and our experiences of it, which warrants attention of ‘place’”** (2008:25).

Lilly added a further significant aspect, **“we need to think what slow pedagogy means for practitioners, children and families. It’s not just an approach, it’s like a way of living.”** Which makes connections with Tovey (2017), where she discusses that the **“Froebelian approach is not a method...it is underpinned by key principles”** (Tovey, 2017:2).

The discussions **end in opposition to neoliberalism and the hurried culture of measurement**. The outcome of this research study chapter is in agreement with Clark (2020) – that **there is a need for “transformative change”** and a strong belief that ELC practice can draw upon the key messages within the findings of this research, including this pertinent key message from Bruce (2021), who invites the **“reconnection of Froebel’s principles and practices”** (Bruce, 2021:145).



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McNair “there is an expectation that **children will do certain things at certain times**” and argues that in early childhood **“children need this time and space to pursue their own interests”** (2021:npn).

Liebschner (1992), drawing from Froebelian ideology, notes that:“... **notions of freedom from something, freedom from rote learning and freedom from inappropriate teaching, led Froebel to a more positive notion of freedom, namely freedom for children to participate, to choose, to act, to observe, to play and above all to be allowed time to absorb new knowledge at their own speed of learning”** (Liebschner, 1992:66).

Conclusion

The research study identified areas in practice where there are **clear links and connections with slow pedagogy and Froebelian principles**. It was found that there is **limited research within the Scottish context of exploring slow pedagogy in practice through a Froebelian lens**. It answered the research aim, questions and the findings. It revealed that each participant’s definition of slow pedagogy had strands of different elements which were relevant and valid, and a reminder that slow pedagogy, like Froebelian philosophy, is not a structured method.

The **focus group participants brought a wealth of discussions and became fully immersed in the study**. Discussions and findings unearthed many fusions with research and theory to ELC practice. Clear links were revealed which showed elements of slow pedagogy from practice, such as **Marvellous Mealtimes (a local authority approach to mealtimes) and the freedom to explore space and place**, although some restrictions due to Covid-19 were having a negative impact. Participants identified that **natural environments lent themselves to slow practice, in opposition to feeling hurried and completing tasks which some indoor spaces were found to show**.

The **findings also discovered a need for more shared vision and clarity where principles inform and underpin practice**, findings show a need for opportunities to have **team discussions and come to a consensus of what quality practice is and what words and concepts mean for each early learning community**.

This research study, whilst small in scale, will **contribute towards several potential implications on policy, practice and research**.

The **participants’ enthusiasm to learn more and share slow pedagogy through a Froebelian lens within their ELC settings instigated a future project** which is planned to enable further development through a Scottish local authority ELC practice context. The project is called **‘Implementing Slow Pedagogy in Early Learning and Childcare through Froebelian Principled Practice’** which is a collaboration in partnership with Alison Clark and funded through the Froebel Trust.

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