

Froebel Project 2022-2024



We devised a training programme over the two years to educate the team on Froebel's principles as well as members of staff undertaking forest school training. The Froebel training was essentially about pedagogy and supporting staff to understand the history of their practice and to understand how we still use many of Froebel's principles today.

This document captures our learning journey over two years. Photographs and observations demonstrate the ways in which we have incorporated a Froebelian approach to improve our understanding of what is important to children.

We use individual 'special books' to document children's learning experiences over time at Oliver Thomas Nursery School, with a particular focus on Froebel, his pedagogy and principles. These are used by children, parents and inspectorates to review learning.

The special books are multi-functional: they offer children a chance to look back and remember their learning; they offer parents an account of children's time at nursery school and interpretations of play and learning with decisions about what children might need next to move them forward; they offer inspectors an insight into the school day and our curriculum offer and how children learn and develop and progress; and perhaps the real focus of this project was for the staff. The special books enable staff to really think about the learning; they can question and ask: 'Why this, why now?' and really think about children's interests through close observation, deciding what they might offer the child next to move them forward using their interests as a starting point.

The team were really able to combine their own pedagogical knowledge of Froebel which they got from staff meetings and Froebelian tutors with children's play and exploration, seeing for themselves first hand, the principles in action. The weaving of Froebel into the special books was the main measureable outcome of the project, the product. The process was more intangible with Froebel's ideas being absorbed into educator's daily, weekly practice and thinking.

I have included a snapshot to illustrate the above and I shall go through them one at a time:

1. Songs and Rhymes became a big focal point at our nursery school and the team learned about how much emphasis Froebel placed on this through his Mother Songs. For us it is especially important because singing and music are so inclusive. The slide demonstrates the use of songs and rhymes with a non-verbal child and how it became accessible for her through the use of sign and pictorial exchange.
2. Froebel understood the importance of songs and rhymes creating a sense of community and the value of a shared musical experience. This slide demonstrates this and is especially important for children with SEND who are non-verbal to be able to initiate a large group experience through their choice of song.
3. & 4. & 5. Our curriculum is based on the '20 Things to do before you are 5' which were developed and created by the whole Oliver Thomas community are all nature based and reflect Froebel's ideas around children spending time outside in the natural world. We can see from the slide that the child is experimenting with her shadow through a familiar song and is beginning to understand the relationship between her movements and the shadow in front of her. Slide 4 captures another of the 20 Things: walking barefoot in the sand. This time, the practitioner includes a small explanation about Froebel's ideas and how this learning links to his pedagogy. The project is really taking off as educators begin to make these links in children's special books. Slide 5 captures the wonder of snow another of our 20 Things to do before you are 5. Experiencing snow can sometimes be pretty rare so we really took advantage of it that year and many children who had never experienced the snow really got an idea of it through direct experiences – sledging down our hill was a real favourite!
6. & 7. The team all knew about children and blocks but not that the idea around them originated with Froebel. Slide 6 demonstrates the use of the small blocks. They are accessible to all abilities so those with SEND who are non-verbal can learn as much as those who are verbal. The focus and concentration we can see on the face of the child as she balances and

carefully places each brick on top of another. she is developing her mathematical thinking – she chooses flat surfaces for each brick knowing that only these will balance on top of each one. Slide 7 captures a more able child representing her own home experiences through the larger community bricks.

8. Again this is the value of block play in action with the child using the large bricks and building structures. She then goes on to construct using different materials by making her aeroplanes out of paper.
9. This child is very motivated and has spent a lot of time exploring block play. It makes sense to follow her interests into another area that Froebel was especially interested in: Woodwork. We bought a woodwork bench and began to find out how children learn using it. The special book pages capture the vast amount of learning happening and how right this next step was for this particular child.
10. She was creative and wanted to build structures and create forms – the next step was clay – another of Froebel’s occupations. Both the woodwork insert and the clay include simple explanations of the Froebelian pedagogy. The team were really understanding this now and all have a shared understanding of best practice and how our early years ethos weaves so closely to Froebel and his educational theories.
11. & 12. We have children who qualify for early years pupil premium. This is a deprivation index and those children have a small amount of funding attached to them. We plan the spend and what we are going to do to support those children. We decided to use Froebel’s occupations as a starting point and have small group sessions for those children who qualified. Slide 11 & 12 capture what happened and how the educators recorded it for the special books and what the children learned. It meant we were able to develop our garden too, so that the plants were relevant to the children and linked in with one of our 20 Things: Plant a seed. So our garden became rich and varied full of different herbs, vegetables and plants. Our songs and rhymes curriculum continued with staff understanding Froebel’s thinking around the Mother Songs and how important music and singing is for very young children.
13. We incorporate songs into every day classroom routines with maths as a focus. Froebel as we know, really valued songs and rhymes as part of a child’s early development and the team have developed a set of traditional nursery rhymes to deliver across the nursery school. We have developed a ‘song choice board’ to complement the songs so that children with language and communication difficulties can request a song using a pictorial exchange system, learning each song and it’s picture match supports this and by the end of the year, all children are able to use this independently. This particular song also has props attached: 5 Currant Buns which also support children’s learning of the song and the mathematical concepts associated with it.
14. The team learned how to link our 20 things curriculum with Froebel and are able to make the links clear for parents and children and all stakeholders looking at progress and learning in children’s special books. They become a window into the classrooms, into how and what children learn and here we can see the simple forms of nature bringing children together in a shared experience, a form of being which Froebel recognised as being so valuable.

This report offers a brief look at how the Froebel grant impacted our whole team at Oliver Thomas nursery school, and how improving team understanding had a positive impact on children’s learning. We now have an embedded shared understanding of our own pedagogy underpinned by Froebel’s practice and principles. In our July 2024 OFSTED inspection we were commended for having a strong and excellent professional development program with staff able to articulate Froebel’s understanding of small children and relate it to their own practice today. The research projects undertaken around Froebel and his occupations have continued, furthering our understanding and practice, embedding his ideas and making them our own. We received the ‘Outstanding’ grade this July and I am sure that part of our success is and will continue to be our dedication to Froebel and his ideas and principles.

I would like to thank the Froebel Trust for investing in our project and hopefully you can see the impact and how positive the involvement of yourselves has been for our team and therefore our children at Oliver Thomas Nursery School.

Lorna Prynne, Head Teacher

1.

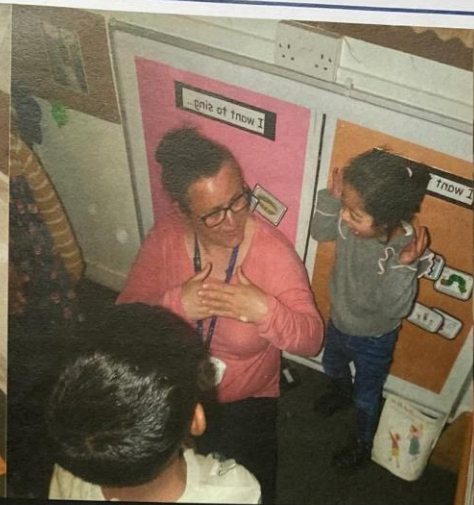


4th January 2023

Fiza, today you came and found me (Lorraine) outside in the garden. You communicate you want us to sit down as you pick up a crate seat and carry it over to the bench near where you saw me. I sit down and you place the seat down and we sit facing each other. You communicate you want to sing by doing the actions of head, shoulders, knees and toes. I sing the song and you join in with the actions. When I said to you "which song next?" You move back and forth for row, row your boat. I responded by saying "you want to sing row, row your boat." I use the signs for the sentence I used. You listen to me and observe me sign and you nod for yes. We hold hands to make our boat as I sing the song. You join in with the actions especially at the end for scream. I wait to see if you would communicate more to do row, row your boat again and you did by signing more. I model the sign for boat and you copy and sign it back to me. We do the song again before moving on to your other favourite songs. Fiza, you are doing brilliantly with using signs it is amazing to see you use sign along to communicate with me.

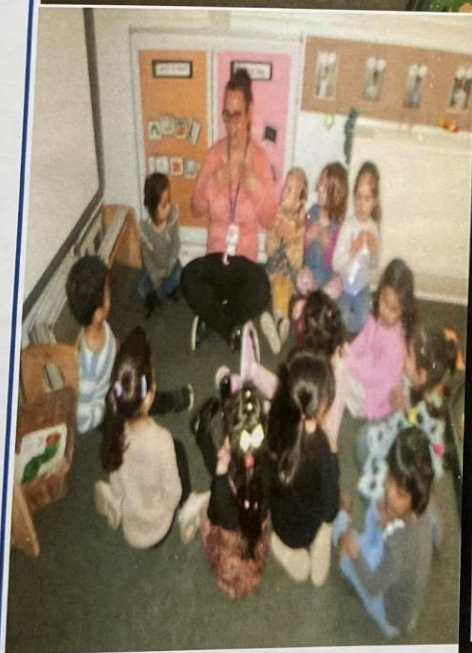
See the next page to see how your signing continues today.

2.



May 2023

Fiza, your friends in Panda room join you every morning to do one of your favourite activities what's in the bag. After we finished we did the sleeping bunnies song. You all pretend to sleep and excitedly jump when you pretend to wake up. You communicate you want to do it again by signing more. I (Lorraine) sign more back to you and use the word to. Your friends observe us doing the sign and they all copied and signed more. You smiled when you notice they joined you in signing. We repeated the song several times and each time you all signed more together to do it again. I then introduced the name song and I modelled the sign for name, and your signing name which you helped to choose with your family. Your signing name is to bring both hands up towards the chest and press both hands on to the chest. As we sing the song you sign your name with confidence. Your friends learn how to do the sign for name and your signing name sign. Fiza, it was great to see you share this social interaction with your friends and how they supported you by learning and using your communication style sign a long.



3.



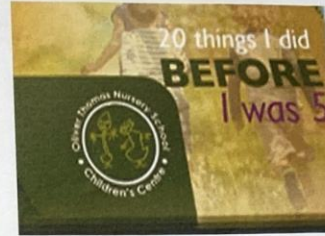
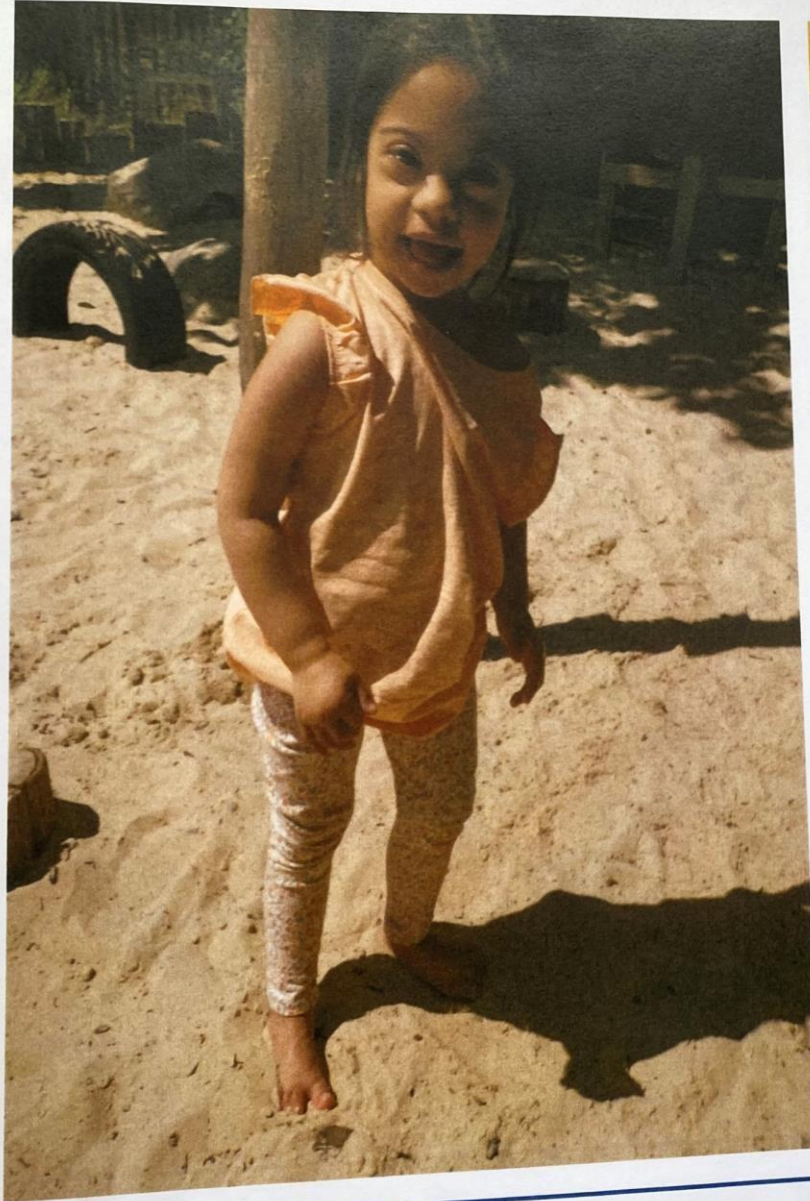
May 2023

Fiza, what a wonderful time you had exploring shadows taking part in one of our 20 magical things experiences. You took an interest in your shadow as you notice your silhouette on the ground as you block out the light. You independently start to do the actions to your favourite song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes and you observe what happens as your shadow moves as you move. You were fascinated by seeing your shadow doing your favourite song with you as you usually do songs with people.



Chase your Shadow

4.



Walk Barefoot in the Sand

June 2023

Fiza, today you took part in a new way of exploring the sand at nursery by walking barefoot. You felt the warm sand beneath your feet and toes as you walk around the natural surface enjoying this sensory experience. This experience was also supporting your physical skills as walking barefoot strengthens the muscles in your feet and ankles, improving balance and posture.

Friedrich Froebel, a pioneering nineteenth century educator emphasised the use of natural materials and hands-on sensory experiences to promote learning. Sand, being a natural material, offers various sensory stimulations such as texture, temperature, and weight. Children can touch, feel, and manipulate sand, which helps in the development of fine motor skills and the exploration of their senses. Experiencing walking through sand is just another sensory way of understanding and enjoying its properties.

5.



Catch a Snowflake on your Tongue

20 MAGICAL THINGS
My first experiences

14.12.22

We had a magical day exploring nature's treasure Snow. Children showed curiosity in where the snow came from, how it felt and what they could do with it. Lots of scientific discoveries around how to make the sledge go faster down the mound. We found safe pathways up to the mound. We experienced feeling and hearing the crunch of the ice underfoot. We shimmered as we had the tingling sensation of the snow on our tongues. Adults supported children in making sense of new words such as: snowflake, crunch, icy, melting, freezing, solid, squishy, slip, slide and frost. Adults supported children to think about one snowflake and how millions of snowflakes make snow. We worked cooperatively to make a snow person, learning about the properties of the snow. We took turns to pull each other on the sledges, learning about force and pull. Children realised the impact of the snow as we wore particular wet suits so we could enjoy it. They learned how to then get themselves warmed up inside.

Snow is an ideal learning material because it is completely open-ended with limitless possibilities.



Anab
to m
pers
ingr
laug
enjo
daily
con
idea

V
M
i
r

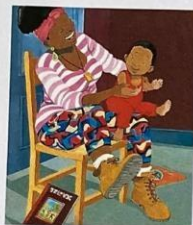
6.



May 2023

Fiza, you explore using blocks to create your own simple structure of a tower. You use your left hand to hold a block and use it to build and balance the blocks together. Fiza by taking part in block play it is beneficial for you as you develop your hand and eye coordination. You also begin to think like a mathematician as you discover different shapes and sizes of blocks as you stack them, learning the most basic concepts of geometry. You develop problem solving skills, spatial awareness and awareness of shape as you build your fantastic tower.

7.



Anabia you love coming in to tell every one you exciting news that mummy has had your baby brother.
 "He is in hospital, not mummy she is home - he is in a box!" (incubator)
 This wonderful experience has filtered down into your everyday play. Here you use the blocks to make a hospital. "It needs this" putting up the 'H' for the word hospital. You add a cross to for the first aid sign. Your make drawings and paintings to take home for him too. Want a great big sister you are! And how amazing that you are able to share this experience with your friends and staff at Oliver Thomas and use your construction skills to re-experience and understand what is happening in your family at the moment.

What next?
 Let's make sure we do some scribing and drawing for your baby brother. perhaps you could take the core book pack *So Much* home and talk about the baby in the story.

He is in hospital, not mummy, she is at home

Anabia you call me to see your "Aeroplane" that you have constructed out of the wooden blocks. Your thinking processes are clear: you execute an idea and then problem solve - 'which block shall I use and where shall I place it?' Then you think about the space you are working in and change and redesign the blocks that are unbalanced. Mairyam added that the day before you had worked with Noa making paper aeroplanes - you are interested in this and are interested in making a variety of representations of planes both on a large and smaller scale.



8.

I put this there

Lisa come look.

Later on the same day working at the drawing table you continue with your interests around aeroplanes. This time you use scissors with care and cut out a long strip and a triangular shape. You ask for help with the masking tape, connecting the paper together to represent another aeroplane.

I added this one

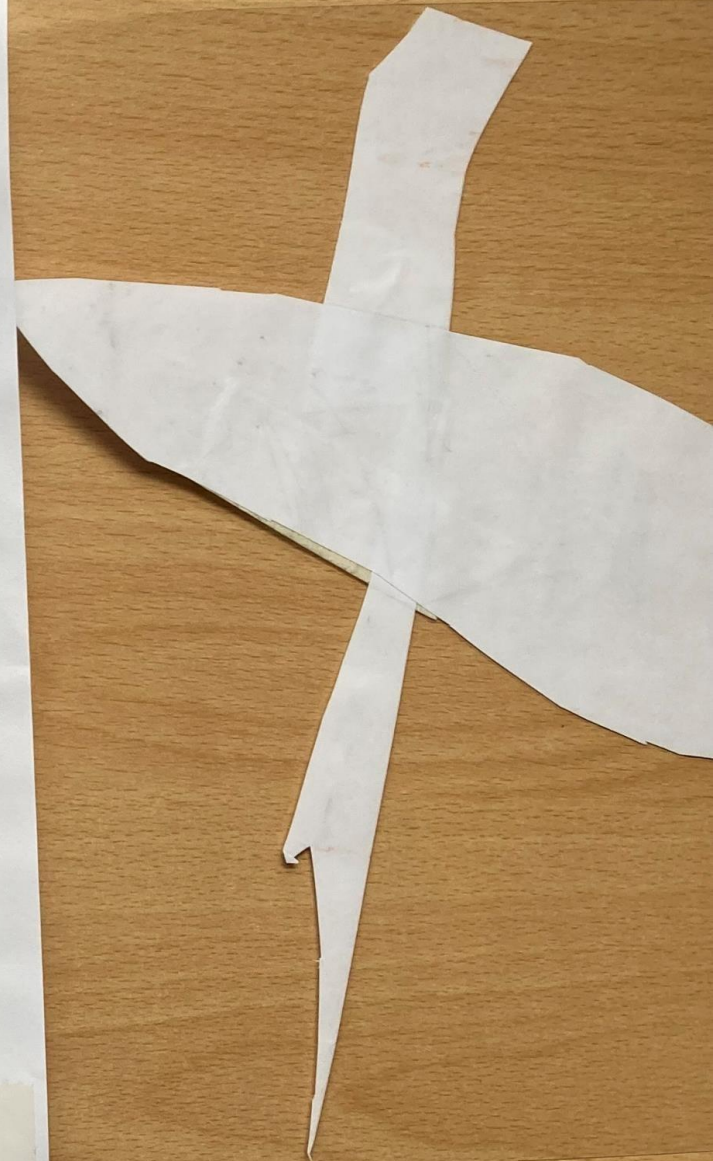
I drive the plane

I take this off

Anabia, you explored your interest in aeroplanes, expressing your ideas in different ways. First building an aeroplane and then folding paper, creating a paper plane and cutting parts of paper to create the wings and main body. You show great investigative skills, spending a whole day constructing and designing in different mediums.

What's next?

Let's continue to use the wooden blocks developing your mathematical language. Maybe you could work in collaboration with your friends, drawing, talking about your ideas together. We could look at some non-fiction books on aeroplanes.



A Froebelian Approach: The wonder of woodwork



The experiential nature of woodwork involves the 'whole' child developing core dispositions and especially nurtures wellbeing, self-confidence, and a sense of agency - that 'can-do' spirit that develops as ideas are put into action. The smell and feel of wood, using real tools, working with a natural material, the sounds of hammering and sawing, hands, body and minds working together to express imagination and solve problems, the use of strength and coordination: all go together to captivate young children's interest. High levels of sustained engagement and enjoyment are commonplace. It provides a truly unique experience.

We talk about safety rules and Anabia, you are able to listen carefully and follow them. You understand the dangers around the tools and how to use them safely: watching as you work wearing safety goggles always to protect your eyes. You use your hands carefully to hold and manipulate all of the tools and materials. From undoing the nut and bolt with your fingers, to holding and twisting the clamp, to carefully sawing and holding the wood at the other end. You are even careful when using the magnet to collect up the nails understanding a tidy well organised woodwork area adds to the safety of the space.

Phew! Good listening Anabia.



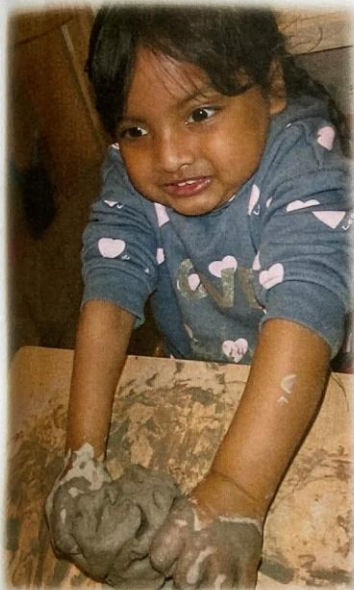
Anabia you are learning about how to use and manipulate the different tools. I introduce them to you one by one. Here you chose to you the nails the hammer with lots of practice and small amount of support you learned about your own strength and force, understanding the varying the amount of force used to hammer in the nails. You are refining your hand eye co-ordination skills when hammering small nails into wood or when attaching materials together - your concentration is excellent! What a great sense of achievement and joy you feel working in this way. Great work Anabia!

As wood has rough edges, you use the sandpaper to smooth them down. Now you are ready to build with the piece of wood you have chosen and cut. Wood work provides opportunities for you to experience maths: size, length of wood you need, amount, and the shape you want for your design.



Exploring Clay - A Frobelian approach.

Froebel said: This exploratory stage is important to give the children freedom to move in their own direction so they can become familiar with the clay, really engage with it and find out what it can do.



pinch

smooth

spray

Anabia, you access the clay with growing independence, building on your understanding of clay, investigating its properties. You work happily alongside other children exploring together. You confidently use your hands and fingers to poke, scrape and manipulate the clay into different forms.

Playing with clay really helps with your development of your hand and finger muscles in preparation for early writing. We continue to add new language as you play with the clay: poke, holes, smooth, pinch, coil and so on.

You happily link your exploration with the core book we have been reading as you begin to make a beanstalk in the clay for Jack to climb!

What next?

Let's continue to offer you the clay experience. You really enjoy making and constructing. Perhaps we could learn how to make a simple coil pot and a thumb pot too. We could draw some ideas first and think about the design and add some other materials.

11.



It's for my pizza!

05.10.22



Nature Creation

Our group was guided by Froebel's pedagogy.

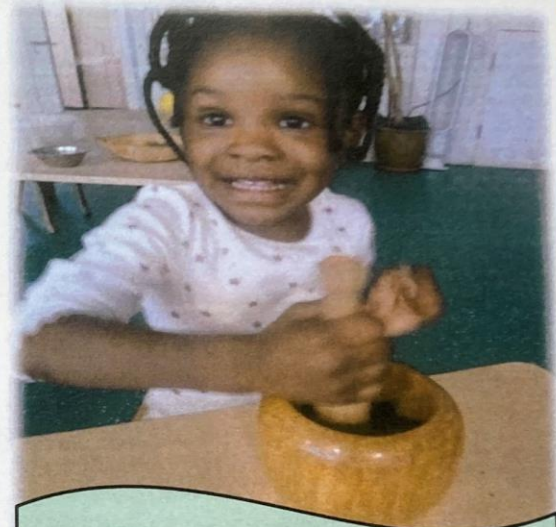
Through gardening, exploration and play outdoors, children develop an understanding of the natural world and begin to appreciate its beauty. Providing them with rich, first hand experiences, which is essential for growing minds.

Now familiar with the groups, you were ready to immerse yourself in a new experience. We used our amazing outdoor space and the variety of herbs that grow in it, to create this fantastic artwork.

You harvested the herbs, smelt them, touched them and looked at the differences in their appearance.

Using the pestle and mortar was a great way to blend your herbs together, ready for displaying on your paper.

03.10.2022—14.10.2022



"This was me, mix herbs"

15.12.22



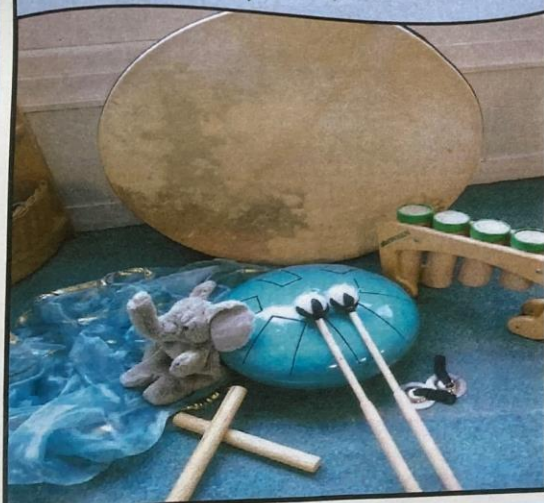
eypp

Songs & Rhymes

eypp



Cymbals!



Our group was guided by Froebel's pedagogy.

We enhanced and strengthened our relationships with each other by creating music and singing together. Through our songs you developed your communication and learnt new language too.

You became comfortable within the group and had the opportunity to express yourself through music and movement.

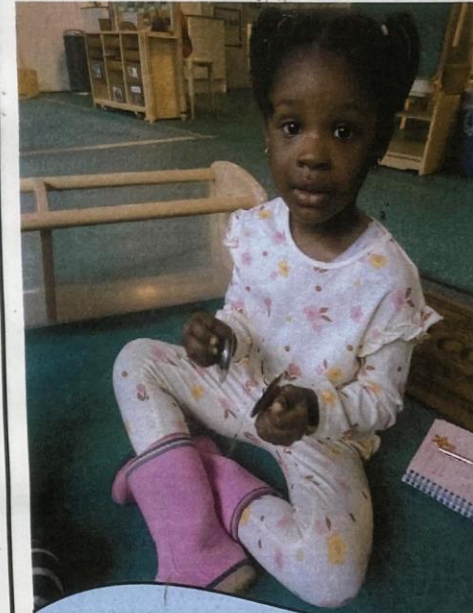
You spent time observing your peers and getting to know their names, through the 'hello' song that we learnt.

The repetition and consistency helped you to know what to expect, and this allowed you to become more comfortable within the group. From there, your confidence to engage began to grow with each session!

Look at how happy you look, playing peek-a-boo Phoebe!

After finding your feet, you began to join in with the singing and learnt new words along the way too.

20.09.2022—30.09.2022



Teddy bear, turn around, shoe, light.
28.09.22

13.

5 Currant Buns

5 Little Speckled Frogs

5 Little Ducks

Developing a deep understanding of 5 through songs

Nursery rhymes are a great way of embedding number sense. Here the children take turns to count the currant buns as they sing the song '5 Currant Buns in the Baker's Shop'. They model big and round and then are able to count down from 5 to 0. These simple rhymes give children the opportunity to enhance their knowledge as Froebel would say through experiences which are concrete and real to them. The children hear the song repeatedly and each time they count using 1:1 how many are left. This practise helps to embed the counting. Whilst they are doing this they are building up relationships with other children.

I buy a bun I
give you
penny

I making
more cakes

One, two,
three left

Let's continue to use songs and rhymes to practice counting. We could read 10 in the Bed too.

20 Magical Things March Through Crunchy Leaves

One of the most special things about the 20 Magical Things is that they are entirely inclusive. Children are able to participate in a shared experience irrespective of background or their stage of development. Playing in the leaves provides a starting point for scientific enquiry as adults and children can explore questions such as: I wonder why the leaves fall down? I wonder why they change colour? Will they grow back? Can I throw them higher? What happens if I throw them with more force?

Embracing unity within diversity.

"Finding the common threads and shared experiences, which can weave a diverse community together." Froebel Trust



Sienna observed Kyrese at work and chose to make a whole leaf family! She gathered a variety of leaves of differing sizes and looked for a place to start working. Initially she tried to put her leaves on a sloping log but they kept falling off. She tried to put them back and asked 'Why is it so slippery?' She made several leaf characters and named them as members of her family. Then, she decided to bury them in a big pile of leaves! It was a good opportunity to talk about empathy and negotiating with other children as Kyrese didn't want his work to be hidden.