

Implementing Slow Pedagogy in Early Learning and Childcare through Froebelian Principled Practice



Clark draws attention to what she calls **accelerated childhoods** (2021)

Rosa highlights that there are 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..." (Rosa, 2016:407)

Additionally, Rosa (2016) argues that the modern capitalist society favour a systematic escalations and accelerations, driven through economic growth (Rosa, 2016:407). Clark (2021) agrees and claims that the pressures to hurry children are focused on finance, not necessarily pedagogy or social concepts – **"Children are viewed as human capital or future human capital within a neoliberal world view"** (Clark, 2021 n.pn)

"Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times" - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12



Findings

The implementation of slow pedagogy in the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings resulting in the communities cultivating a shared vision through informed theory and literature and then fusing this with the practice. However, this took time to reflect and establish as the interpretation of knowledge required reflective dialogue within each team. The Froebelian Principles poster (Froebel Trust) supported a shared understanding and was used to reflect on practice which assisted unpicking concepts such as 'Freedom with Guidance' (Tovey 2017). Taking time to reflect on these supported practitioners viewing children's perceptions at a deeper level and attuning to what these mean to each individual child. On occasions video footage was used to truly reflect through the lens of the child as sometimes there were times practitioners thought children had autonomy, however, examples of videos helped reflect further. This evolved into recording lived stories of individual children to document relevant meaningful narratives.

Consistent feedback revealed from practitioners that the support and knowledge gained through webinars, chapter reading (Clark, 2020, 2021) and bespoke project workshops supported a deepening of understanding of Froebelian Principles (Green, 2021) and built further knowledge of slow pedagogy (Clark, 2021) and how this fuses with practice was reflected upon.

Impacts in practice became evident, the increased opportunities for children's perceptions and participation in practice created greater autonomy for children and increased staffs understanding of children's individual capacity.

Opportunities for children and practitioners to explore their community through nature, increased and unravelled slow process and slow knowledge.

The project focus was nature and marvellous mealtimes, for this project, however, the concepts were naturally spreading through other areas of practice.

The research questions provoked discussions and enabled the opportunities as whole staff teams to respond, which were then reflected upon through observations of practice.

The project enabled practitioners to view children in their own right and provoked mindset shifts of nursery routines, to enable their view to value what these routines mean to children. It challenged practice and unconscious bias, as it helped to discover that some practitioners shared they saw mealtimes as a task and did not fully embrace the value of these learning together opportunities: **"Now we see that the children are more than capable it makes perfect sense"** (practitioner).

The outdoors was once driven by clock time and filled with many adult planned experiences that some practitioners felt was part of their role, however freeing time to 'be' present with the children with no predefined script was when the practitioners lived what Tovey (2017) describes **"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).

This project enabled policies to be reviewed and children's policies to be written.

Froebelian principles

Unity and connectedness
Everything in the universe is connected. The more one is aware of this unity, the deeper the understanding of oneself, others, nature and the wider world. Children are whole beings whose thoughts, feelings and actions are interrelated. Young children learn in a holistic way and learning about never be compartmentalised for everything else.

Creativity and the power of symbols
Creativity is about children representing their own ideas in their own way, supported by a nurturing environment and people. As children begin to use and make symbols, they express their inner thoughts and ideas and make meaning. Over time, shared reflections of everyday life, community and culture become more abstract and nuanced.

The central importance of play
Play is part of being human and helps children to relate their inner worlds of feelings, ideas and lived experiences to the real world. Play is a way of thinking, feeling, imagining and creating and is a resource for the future. Children have ownership of their play. Froebelian education values the contribution of adults offering 'freedom with guidance' to enrich play as a learning context.

Engaging with nature
Experience and understanding of nature and our place in it is an essential aspect of Froebelian practice. Through real life experiences, children learn about the interconnectedness of all living things. This helps them to think about the bigger questions of the environment, sustainability and climate change.

Knowledgeable, nurturing educators
Early childhood educators who engage in their own learning and believe in principled and reflective practice are a key aspect of a Froebelian approach. Froebelian educators challenge and guide, rather than direct. They provide rich real life experiences and create children educationally supporting and extending their interests through 'freedom with guidance'.

The value of childhood in its own right
Childhood is not merely a preparation for the next stage in learning, learning begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Relationships matter
The relationships of every child with themselves, their parents, peers, family and wider community are valued. Relationships are of central importance in a child's life.

froebel.org.uk

Conclusion

This collaborative project has enabled a learning together community of professionals to focus on Froebelian Principled Practice and deepen their knowledge of slow pedagogy. It facilitated theory and research to underpin practice and provoked deep analysis of how practice is linking to our Froebelian Principles and what this means to the children. It permitted time to reflect and truly observe to inform thinking. New knowledge gained was fused through reflection of practice and changes were made collectively informed mainly through deep observation which led to discussions and improved practice. It aided practitioners to create a deeper lived understanding of slow pedagogy and Froebelian principles with the main project, focusing on nature in one setting and the other two settings with Marvellous Mealtimes. However, the **Unity and interconnectedness** became apparent and the sharing through workshops and reflections supported settings to naturally review other areas of practice. Due to the positive impacts these projects will continue to be embedded and sustained. Many robust systems have changed in settings, including policy changes which involved children creating policies. Each early years community have identified other areas of practice they would like to spread and focus on slow pedagogy which is underpinned through living the Froebelian Principles to enable reflective holistic experiences which truly value and respect the process and capacities of children and enable autonomy and respect for all.

References

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Introduction

The main aim of this study was to examine slow pedagogy through Froebelian Principled Practice. Research from Clark (2020:21), namely **"Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child"** (2021) inspired and stimulated the project along with a dissertation titled **"Exploring Slow Pedagogy through a Froebelian Lens"** (Green, 2021). Clark (2021) and Green (2021) invite others (practitioners/parents/policy makers) to slow down and look deeper into what slow pedagogy means for children.

Methodology

A significant ontological position used for this research was the viewpoint that **"children are competent agents who actively contribute to shaping the social world through everyday activities"** (Gallagher, 2009:67).

The theoretical perspective of critical inquiry is applied, where the participants reflect on early learning and childcare (ELC) practice to inform the social reality and the participatory element of being.

The epistemological position within this study was constructionism. The methodology used for this research study was qualitative.

The following research questions were asked within each early years community, practitioners provided a consensus through reflective Froebelian Principled practice and gained knowledge through workshops and literature to increase knowledge of slow pedagogy:

1. What is your understanding of the concept 'slow pedagogy'?
2. From your understanding, what does '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?
4. Through observing and reflecting in practice your Froebelian principled practice, in what way does this connect to slow pedagogy.

The use of observation, narrative and participatory methods were used to gather data. Providing real lived stories gathered from real people to truly understand the experiences and tell the story.

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

Links to Slow Pedagogy

- Calming atmosphere
- Space
- Time
- Unhurried
- Going beyond clock time
- Starting with the child
- Place – sense of belonging
- Beyond Listening
- Deep observation

"...Both these 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, J. (1992) *A Child's Work: Freedom and Play in Froebel's educational theory and practice*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 66.

The "child expresses their internal motivations towards leading their own learning through their actions. This in turn helps them build theories about the world around them" (Education Scotland, 2020:68).

"An unhurried environment allows me time to concentrate on whatever catches my attention without being rushed" (Education Scotland, 2020:31).

Patience

... 'patience can be a resilient, persistent, active, brave quality. There is room for this type of powerful patience in a timefull approach.'

Clark, A. (forthcoming) *Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education*. Abingdon: Routledge.