



Spateston Early Learning and Childcare Centre
Froebel Trust: Final Project Report

GROWING CONNECTIONS: PUTTING OUR GARDEN AT THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITY

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Written By
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ABOUT US

Spateston Early Learning and Childcare Centre is situated at the heart of the community of Spateston within the Johnstone area of Renfrewshire. The service is registered for 112 children at any one time all aged 3 to starting school. It operates from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 50 weeks per year.



Unity and connectedness are at the heart of what we do



Staffing comprises of Head of Centre; Depute Head of Centre; two Senior Early Learning and Childcare Officers; Early Year's Graduate; Early Learning and Childcare Officers and Support Workers.

The service is well established within the local community. In January 2021 we moved to a new build facility designed with Froebelian principles in mind. The indoor and outdoor spaces encourage children to move freely as their play develops. Unity and connectedness are at the heart of all we do, and this includes children, practitioners, families, and the community. We believe that children learn best when they feel happy, secure, and confident in their surroundings, our centre empowers children to individually flourish and be proud of what they achieve.





ABOUT OUR PROJECT

Froebel believed that “family and community are at the heart of education, the child is not separate from other people, in the home or in the community and wider world” (Bruce, 2012). Within Spateston Early Learning and Childcare Centre our philosophy has been developed with all connected to the service and reflects our Froebelian beliefs of unity and connectedness. The Froebelian approach we take to education keeps family and the community at the centre of learning and development, this ensures that children explore the wider world through their connections.

OUR VISION

We have recently completed a practitioner inquiry project focusing on ‘The Interconnectedness of Play: The Impact of Engaging Families in Children’s Learning’. This project allowed us to focus on the families role in enhancing children’s progress in learning through play. We wanted to continue this research by looking in more depth at the role our community could have being another link in the interconnectedness chain.

The outdoor environment is pivotal to children’s learning. Engagement with the natural world, through growing their own vegetables and fruits, is building their understanding of the cycle of nature. The children have their own greenhouse and allotment space within the nursery garden area. We used the expertise of people within the local community to support and develop our knowledge and understanding of the process.

We worked alongside the children to do this.





OUR ASPIRATIONS

The connection between the indoor and outdoor learning environment within Spateston is seamless, children move freely between both. The responsibility they have for growing and looking after our allotment enables them to use the produce to cook and bake regularly. This natural experience enhances children's knowledge of the world around them and gives them an insight into real life experiences such as, environments, society, and economy.



We wanted to make the produce they harvest available to the local community, selling their jams and soup, bread and scones, fresh eggs, and potatoes. Any profits the children made would support the further development of their growing space and sustainability projects within the nursery and local community.





THE AIM OF OUR PROJECT

Outdoor play is very much part of our learning environment and enabling children the opportunity to choose the outdoors as they follow their interests to explore. Outdoors encourages curiosity and provides them with new challenges. The indoors and outdoors are viewed as integral parts of one whole environment, and both have equal value within Spateston. Our Froebelian approach encourages the children to make connections between areas of the environment, between resources and fundamentally between ideas.

Appreciation of sustainability will be visible as the children look at the world around them.

We hoped that this project would enhance the learning connections children make and build a stronger understanding of the natural world around them and their role within it. Engaging with the wider community and using green spaces nearby would become a normal part of their learning environment. Children would have time to explore and discover the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.

Quality learning outdoors would continue to be a significant part of the children's learning and building connections with people and places within the local community would bring different opportunities to their play.

We believe that children learn best when they have the freedom and opportunity to follow their natural curiosity so giving them the opportunity to make connections and a sense of the world around them would support their cognitive development and progress in learning.

Appreciation of sustainability will be visible as the children look at the world around them to notice, observe and reflect on the changes the seasons brings to the garden.





OUR PROJECT IN ACTION: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Valuing the skills of practitioners and the professional development that some have undertaken was an appropriate starting point for us. Three practitioners studied Froebel in Childhood Practice at the University of Edinburgh. The projects that they undertook as part of their training were connected to the outdoors and linked the growing of fruit and vegetables to the further development of our allotment and the cooking carried out within the nursery environment.

Continuous improvement is an integral part of quality provision within our setting, this is a shared responsibility amongst all connected to it, children, families, and practitioners. Practitioner research has been effectively used as an information tool to achieve change as part of the project.

Children engaged with the whole life-cycle of growing plants from seed to harvest to compost. Cookery with children provided an exciting learning experience for everyone involved. Spending time outdoors within the green house the children were able to further their knowledge and also display their understanding of how to care for living things as they continued to grow their vegetables until they were ready to harvest. This taught the children about the seasons and caring for living things within the environment.

**“As children watch plants grow they begin to understand something about their own lives”
(Read, 2012)**

Learning about plants and the planting and growing process through more specialised training on a horticultural course has increased the expertise of practitioners as they developed a seasonal plan for our crops in the allotment area.

Transformational change happens when as a collective we are always learning. Practitioners have had the freedom to follow their interests and take ownership of developing aspects of practice through gaining a broader knowledge and understanding of research and theory during their studies.





The Magic of Cooking

Initiation

March 7, 2003: Early childhood education students, Dr. A. Parker, L. Channing with Young Children

Young, M. Chubbler, Plating and Serving

June 10, 2003: Blending the pizza and the Early Years Practice

Rationale

Frederick's 21st century view of a child's kindergarten, has significantly changed. It has moved away from the importance of outdoor play and the engagement with nature in its essence. Frederick argued that through gardening children learn the value of the plants and their own lives such as the need for food, water and shelter. Through playing outdoors this is the best way for children to experience nature. Children should engage with the whole life-cycle of growing plants from seed to harvest to compost.

The goal is to establish risk, but enough up to the neck and shoulders (Duffy 2003)

4-6 children, one or more possible degrees of average risk and one child responsible for each area (Frederick 2003: 40)

Through playing no challenges and the children will be more confident

Implementation

This project began with group discussion as this allowed the children to socially interact with each other and discuss different ideas of what they could make using their home-grown ingredients. The children spent time at the surrounding greenhouse exploring the different fruit and vegetables that they had themselves planted from there. They decided that they would like to create pizzas. At the time of planning the pizza some of the vegetables were not quite ready to eat. This allowed the children to continue to learn how to care for living things. Once all of the ingredients had been harvested it was time to prepare the pizza. The children were given the ingredients and they were able to independently make their own pizza base. To prepare the pizzas, the children had to collect different tools to assist them such as vegetables, grains and knives. They were then able to chop the vegetables and the children used real knives with supervision from an adult. This allowed the children to assess risk in order to keep themselves safe.

Once the toppings were prepared the dough was then brought back to the table and the children rolled the dough out to their choice of shape for the pizza. The toppings were added to the pizza, each child making their own individual choices. Once the pizzas had been constructed these were then placed into the oven to cook for around 15 minutes. Once the pizzas were cooked, they were removed from the oven by an adult and then placed onto trays to be cooled down before serving to the children. The children were already displaying what they would like to buy next.

Evaluation

The impact this project made to the children was evident from the feedback from the children themselves and also the staff at the setting. During the planning process of this project, it was agreed to consider the children's voice, they were fully involved in the process and it was a child led experience. From spending time outdoors within the green house the children were able to further their knowledge and also display their understanding of how to be living objects, as they continued to grow their vegetables until they were ready to harvest.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this development project was set out with the idea to develop cooking within my setting, in particular using our own fresh produce to allow the children to learn further. It was one through this project that Frederick's principles were implemented along every step of the way. The children within the nursery environment benefited from an on learning environment and displayed an increased level of engagement from taking part in this project.

Research and theory support our practice and the knowledge gained by practitioners is supporting the uniqueness of our setting within our community. High quality early years practice is building the experiences our children have and with the support of the wider community we are building a sustainable asset for the future.

Spartanburg Early Learning and Children's Center: Seasonal Backdrop: Plan August 2023 to July 2024							
January		February		March		April	
Planting 	Winter Trees 	Planting 	Winter Trees 	Planting 	Tomatoes Sunflowers (greenhouse) Wheat (Planters)	Planting 	Strawberries Tomatoes (greenhouse) Sweetcorn (Planters) 
Gardening	Post Control Weeding of crops	Gardening	Weeding of crops Spring flowers: Misscom	Gardening	Spring flowers: Misscom	Gardening	Spring flowers: Misscom
Environmental Awareness	Bird watching, feeding, making bird feeders and insect bug Garden (bird watch 2.6 th)	Environmental Awareness	World Fairtrade Night (27 th) 	Environmental Awareness	World water Day (22 nd) The Great British Spring Clean 	Environmental Awareness	Life Cycle: Caterpillar Eggs Earth Day (22 nd) 
May		June		July		August	
Planting 	Bluebonnet Squash Pumpkin Bootstrut Shoe Gaid (greenhouse) Carrot: Corgettes Onion: Potato: Lark Turnip: Brambles Sunflowers: Nectarissims (Planters)	Planting 	Tomatoes: Horticultural Sweetcorns (greenhouse) 	Planting 	Plant out vegetables: started in the greenhouse	Planting 	Radishes Kale: Cabbage (Planters) 
Gardening	Post control Weeding of crops	Gardening	Post control Weeding of crops	Gardening	Post control Weeding of crops Harvest: Horticultural	Gardening	Harvest: Horticultural Tomatoes: Strawberries: wheat
Environmental Awareness	World Bee Day (20 th) Every Flower Counts	Environmental Awareness	World Environment Day (5 th)	Environmental Awareness	Plastic free July 	Environmental Awareness	National Almonds week (7 th)
September		October		November		December	
Planting Gardening	Spring flowers: Post control Weeding of crops: Harvest: Brambles: Sunflowers: Nectarissims	Planting Gardening 	Spring flowers: Harvest: Carrot: Onion: Potato: Lark: Corgettes: Turnip: Sweetcorn	Planting Gardening	Spring flowers: Harvest: Bluebonnet squash: Pumpkin Bootstrut	Planting Gardening 	Winter plants: Post control Weeding of crops: 
Environmental Awareness	Hedgehog houses built and put out	Environmental Awareness	Hedgehog houses built and put out Pigeon week (29 th)	Environmental Awareness	Bat leaves built and out	Environmental Awareness	

The seasonal plan we created together with the knowledge of our families and the local community



OUR PROJECT IN ACTION: THE ALLOTMENT EXPANSION

Our allotment and greenhouse have produced lots of fruit and vegetables that we have planted. The children have cared for and nurtured their plants to produce some very tasty produce. The space we had was fast becoming full and our ambition to develop this aspect of learning for the children was becoming restricted. We made a decision to increase the space we had and create another allotment space within the nursery grounds that would truly be a community asset.



The New Allotment Space



A New Larger Poly Tunnel
Under Construction

“Blessed are those who see things in humble places where others see nothing”
(Pissarro, 2014)





Building Planting Beds



A Recycled Water Butt



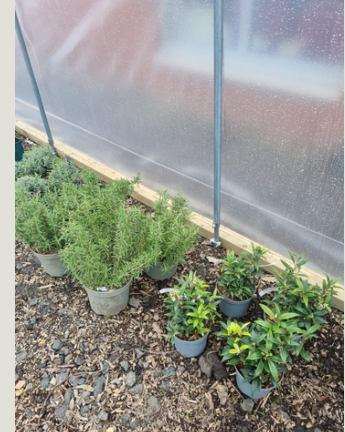
New Soil in the Beds



Getting Ready to Plant



A Community Donation



New Plants Arrived



Preparing to Plant



Tending the Crop



Deciding if it's Harvest Ready



Taste Testing the Tomatoes



OUR PROJECT IN ACTION: THE COMMUNITY SMALL HOLDING

We have a community small holding a short walk from the nursery. The owners of the small holding share in our philosophy and often welcome the children on frequent visits. As part of the project, we adopted hens that live at the small holding and the children visit regularly. They are learning how to care for animals and collect the eggs. The children understand about sustainability through the natural environment they are immersed in.



We aim to: make strong connections across our environment that links children's learning and development to home, family, culture, and the local community. We ensure that we provide a unified approach to the opportunities and experiences we offer. Working together in harmony we ensure that together as one we strive for a uniqueness in our approach to achieve the best outcomes for all.

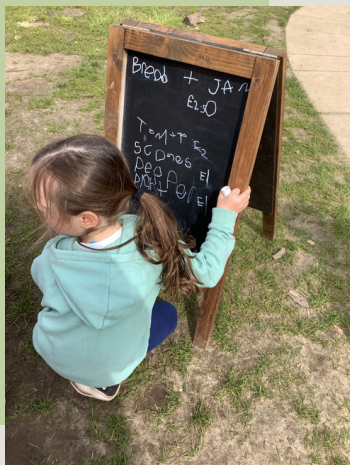
(Spateston ELC: Our Philosophy)

Quality learning outdoors is continuing to be a significant part of the children's learning. Building connections with people and places within the local community brings different opportunities to the children's play. They are taking their interest and sharing it at home with their family. Some of our children have been introducing us to their pet ducks and we have been lucky enough to have duck eggs become part of our daily baking experience. We are truly experiencing how learning together is enhancing our community as a whole.



Engaging with the wider community and using green spaces and nearby has become a normal part of the children's learning environment.





OUR PROJECT IN ACTION: THE MARKET STALL



Our project aimed to get to a position where we could create an area at the front of the nursery where the children could advertise their market stall and display what they have made to sell to families and the wider community. We achieved this and the children, families and local community were very impressed. The skills and knowledge the children had about their products was evident as they had the confidence to share it as they sold!

It is all a unity; everything is based on unity, strives towards, and comes back to unity.

(Froebel in Lilley, 1967)

The children bake and cook daily with the produce they have grown. We offer the produce children have grown available to the local community. The children sell their jams and soup, bread and scones, tomato plants and fresh vegetables. They learn about money, setting a price to sell their products. Any profits they make supports the further development of the growing space and sustainability projects within the nursery.



Cultivating and preparing our own food is igniting a passion for wholesome eating. Collaborating with the community is broadening children's understanding of the significance of the environment in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.





THE PROJECT IMPACT

Outdoor play has always been very much part of our learning environment and allowing children the opportunity to choose the outdoors as they follow their interests to explore, develops their curiosity and provides them with new challenges. The indoors and outdoors are viewed as integral parts of one whole environment, and both have equal value within Spateston.



Passionate educators have supported the family to nurture the natural curiosity our children have exhibited and through working together we have given our children the skills to be all they can be and the desire to be even more.

Our children have developed a natural curiosity about the world around them. Through a variety of real life contexts they have a broader understanding of the different occupations people do within the world of work. This project has developed a depth of learning that is now embedded into our Froebelian practice and into their individual understanding of the natural world and their place in it. We value the uniqueness of each child connected to our centre within an environment where they develop their skills to make choices, know the decisions they make during their play are valued and can understand what success feels like as we celebrate their achievements together.





SUSTAINING OUR PROJECT

The continuation of the project has been built into our improvement plan for the upcoming year. Learning about sustainability through our philosophy is apparent as the children's play develops in great depth outdoors. Children have the skills to be all they can be, and we have observed this as part of our project evaluation. We want to build on this, developing the children's confidence as autonomous learners.

The professionalism of practitioners will continue to be enhanced by having the evidence to support our belief that children learn best when they have the freedom and opportunity to follow their natural curiosity. We are planning to use the evaluation of our project to share our findings to the wider early years community.

We will continue to develop our allotment where children can further enhance their understanding of the natural world, growing their own fruit, vegetables and herbs. The space will be open to the local community and be an asset that we have created to share, learn and develop skills together. We want children to continue to access this space as citizens of the community long after their time within the early years has moved on.



Expanding the children's passion for wholesome eating using the produce they have grown is something we have observed through their skills in the kitchen social zone. Enabling the children to do this outdoors will create a connection between sowing the seeds, growing the produce, harvesting their crop and cooking a healthy recipe all outdoors. We will develop the children's skills and understanding of the homegrown food they have produced. Outdoor cooking will be part of the learning opportunities we have available as they use the outdoor hob, grill and oven that we hope to purchase for this purpose. This will ignite a passion for wholesome eating that the children can share with their family.

