



Cardiff  
Metropolitan  
University

Prifysgol  
Metropolitan  
Caerdydd

# Finding Purpose through Froebelian Principles

## Contextualising the project:

Education in Wales continues to move through a time of transformative change (Welsh Government, 2017) moving away from the more traditional curricular approach where knowledge is organised into discrete subjects (Power *et al.*, 2020) towards a purpose-led curriculum (Donaldson, 2015; Welsh Government, 2022). Central to this national driver are the Four Purposes, a shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). The Four Purposes are situated as the most prominent element of *Curriculum for Wales* (Sinnemaa *et al.*, 2020), and represent Wales' vision for children to be: ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; ethical, informed citizens; and healthy, confident individuals (Welsh Government, 2022).

*'In developing their vision for their curriculum, schools and practitioners should consider what the four purposes mean for their learners and how their curriculum will support their learners to realise them. Their vision – and the four purposes more broadly – should then guide the process of curriculum and assessment design. This will include developing their approach to curriculum design decisions across the whole school.'*

*As schools develop their vision to support learners to realise the four purposes, learner voice should be central to this. The input of learners should be an important consideration throughout the design process*

(Welsh Government, 2022)

Prior to this project, the research team had identified, through shared interest and professional dialogue, theoretical synergies forming between Froebelian Principles (Bruce, 2021) and the Four Purposes within the Curriculum for Wales (Hwb.gov.wales). They envisaged how they might work alongside each other within the process of curriculum design and enactment, reflecting on how Froebelian principles resonate with the Four Purposes. For example, the first of the Four Purposes refers to capable learners which was identified as having an association with Froebel's perspective of seeing children as capable, curious and active, learning best through self-activity and reflection (Tovey, 2017). The explicit reference to creativity within the second of the four purposes aligns very strongly with Froebel's principles in relation freedom and creativity. Freedom, looking at it through a Froebelian lens, is the means through which children experience and learn to make choices, to make decisions, to work out and work through problems, to explore things that capture their interest and all this ties in with a contemporary conceptualisation of creativity, often referred to as *little c* creativity. But Froebel valued creativity within the context of the arts, seeing them as a means of connecting children's inner life of, for example, their imagination with their outer life in relation their experiences as well as how these might be expressed through the power of symbols whether that be through drawing, painting, modelling clay, music or such like. The third of the Four Purposes refers to 'ethical, informed citizens', resonating with Froebel's ideas around freedom with responsibility where children might have, for example, freedom to make choices but these choices are constrained to some degree by the choices of others or the resources or spaces to which they have access (Tovey, 2017). The fourth purpose might be associated with Froebel's perspective of the child as an individual who is also a member of society, but it also reflects the importance he placed on the whole child, the holistic nature of development and the significance of being emotionally secure within the relationships they have with themselves, their families and wider community.

Nevertheless, despite these apparent similarities, no recognition has, thus far, been attributed to how the theoretical understandings and practical applications of Froebel's principles might provide early years teachers and practitioners in Wales pedagogical support as they transition into Curriculum for Wales. Therefore, this project sought to initiate a conversation, investigating the extent to which these synergies are evident and how these perceived synergies might support the enactment of the Curriculum for Wales with our youngest children in school.

## The Four Purposes:

The four purposes should be the starting point and aspiration for schools' curriculum design. Ultimately, the aim of a school's curriculum is to support its learners to become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

All our children and young people will be supported to develop as:

### **ambitious, capable learners who:**

- set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
- are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts
- are questioning and enjoy solving problems
- can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English
- can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
- can use number effectively in different contexts
- understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts
- use digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information
- undertake research and evaluate critically what they find

and **are ready to learn throughout their lives**

### **enterprising, creative contributors who:**

- connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products
- think creatively to reframe and solve problems
- identify and grasp opportunities
- take measured risks
- lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly
- express ideas and emotions through different media
- give of their energy and skills so that other people will benefit

and **are ready to play a full part in life and work**

### **ethical, informed citizens who:**

- find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views
- engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values

- understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
- understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
- are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past
- respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society
- show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet

**and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world**

**healthy, confident individuals who:**

- have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs
- are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy
- apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives
- know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well
- take part in physical activity
- take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk
- have the confidence to participate in performance
- form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect
- face and overcome challenge
- have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can

**and are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.**

## **Froebelian Principles :**

### **Froebelian Principles:**

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) was the inventor of kindergartens and a pioneer of early childhood education and care. Froebel's work and writing changed the way we think about and value early childhood. Froebel's ideas were considered revolutionary in the 1850s. The principles of his work continue to challenge and be relevant to modern mainstream early years educational practice.

### **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 should never be compartmentalised for everything links.

### **Autonomous learners**

Each child is unique and what children can do rather than what they cannot, is the starting point for a child's learning. Children learn best by doing things for themselves and from becoming more aware of their own learning. Froebelian educators respect children for who they are and value them for their efforts. Helping children to reflect is a key feature of a Froebelian education.

### **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, carers, family and wider community are valued. Relationships are of central importance in a child's life.

### **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, literal 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 taking them to new levels 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 interrelationship of all living things. This helps them to think about the bigger questions of the environment, sustainability and climate change.

### **Knowledgeable and 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 facilitate and guide, rather than instruct. They provide rich real life experiences and observe children carefully, supporting and extending their interests through 'freedom with guidance'.

**\* Find out more about a Froebelian approach to early childhood education at [froebel.org.uk](http://froebel.org.uk)**

## **The project:**

The project began with the research team facilitating a professional dialogue with the staff from a local primary school which included the head teacher, a member of the Governing Body, the nursery class teacher, and Higher-Level Teaching Assistant. The aim of this discussion was to develop their knowledge and understanding of Froebel and his ideas through a process of critical enquiry in relation to the Curriculum for Wales.

Following the period of professional dialogue, the morning group of the school's nursery class visited *Ty Froebel* one morning per week over a period of seven weeks. During their visits, the children had access to Froebel's Gifts and a range of his Occupations, namely block play, clay, woodwork, and gardening. They were encouraged to move around and explore the space, materials, and resources therein freely, and adults engaged in the Gifts and Occupations alongside the children, observing and supporting children's interests as facilitators, guiding them if needed or requested rather than through direction.

Conducting the research within a space dedicated to Froebel's principles and practices facilitated an investigation into what happens in relation to processes, relationships and learning when spatial and pedagogical drivers were solely created to engender Froebelian principles and practices. This allowed the research team, alongside practitioners, to develop an understanding of these principles and the extent of their relationship with the Four Purpose of Curriculum for Wales.

## Ty Froebel:

*Ty Froebel* is a resource space at Cardiff Metropolitan University which is dedicated to supporting the enactment of Froebel's principles and practices. Integrating indoor and outdoor spaces, it offers opportunities to explore and experience Froebel's Gifts and a range of his Occupations, including block play, clay, woodwork, and gardening.

The development of *Ty Froebel* began in 2021 with a vision for it to become a *Centre of Excellence*, advocating Froebel's ideas and supporting a growing interest in Wales in his principles and practices, placing a particular emphasis on their application in relation to *Curriculum for Wales*. Central to the work at *Ty Froebel* is a commitment to supporting Froebelian principles and practices in relation to four key areas:

- **Teaching and Learning:** providing opportunities through provision for Cardiff Met students to experience, reflect and discuss the opportunities afforded through Froebelian practice.
- **Professional Learning:** supporting teachers and practitioners navigating towards embedding Froebelian principles within their practice and provision through their own research and enquiries.
- **Research and Innovation:** undertaking research to explore, critique and develop Froebel's ideas and principles within the context of contemporary issues, rhetorics and debates.
- **Community Engagement:** creating opportunities to share the provision at *Ty Froebel* with children, families, schools, and settings and developing ways to reach out to wider communities, thus developing access to Froebelian practice and provision.

The intention of the work at and in association with *Ty Froebel* is to support and develop knowledge, understanding, and application of Froebelian principles. Nevertheless, maintaining a Froebelian ethos is paramount as we use his principles to guide and inform the set-up, organisation, decision-making, and ongoing development of this resource-space.



## Project Findings

This section presents findings in relation to each of the Four Purposes from our small-scale project, intended to initiate a reflective dialogue between all stakeholders within the early years workforce. These reflect our interpretation of how Froebelian Principles might be used to support the enactment of *Curriculum for Wales* with our youngest learners.

### Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives

Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
• Set themselves high standards and seek and enjoy challenge
• Are building up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts
• Are questioning and enjoy solving problems
• Can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English
• Can explain the ideas and concepts they are learning about
• Can use number effectively in different contexts
• Understand how to interpret data and apply mathematical concepts
• Use digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information
• Undertake research and evaluate critically what they find

Evidence of these attributes was often rooted in children's engagement in and across the spaces offered at Ty Froebel. Children's engagement was "really high" (class teacher) and was seen to support children to be '*ready to learn*':

When they're engaged, the behaviours for learning are just, they manage themselves, because the children are enjoying what they're doing (Class teacher).

Children's engagement was evidenced frequently across the gifts and occupations and "there was rarely a time you [would] see a child running around and have to direct them to something - they were always just so intrigued and engaged" (Class teacher). However, it was seen as particularly important – as it was noticeably different for, Harry, who struggles to demonstrate this engagement in school.

Harry doesn't like being directed, put it that way. So, I'm doing a lot of thrive with him and all that around his own issues. But yeah, to see him so engaged doing things. And he's, he's one of the few who is sometimes on his own doing something, but he's still very much engaged. And really **concentrating** on what he's doing. Whereas we struggle to get that in school (HLTA).

Foregrounding **the central importance of play** and valuing children as **autonomous learners** who learn through doing things for themselves, created an environment within which Harry was able '*seek and enjoy challenge*', show focus and concentration - demonstrating he is '*ready to learn.*' These attributes, resulting from children's positioning as **autonomous learners**, were evident across all Gifts and Occupations as well as in the wider spaces created for play - illustrated in the reflection below as children played/engaged with water, sand, balls and tubes:

...it was interesting to see what they'd bring over and what they'd use. And the same with the water, I know, obviously, already, they had the water tray set up with all the other bits. But I remember a few times, like all the balls ended up in the water, and they were exploring how they floated on the water. And then they were putting them down the chute. But with water, they were pouring the water down the chutes as well. So they were like mixing things in and testing different resources together completely, just by their own curiosity really (Class teacher).

Playing with these materials – being curious, testing them and seeing how they react in different scenarios are examples of how children '*seek and enjoy challenge*', '*question and solving problems*', and '*build up a body of knowledge*' through their play. Children's exploration, mixing and experimentation of the materials demonstrate children's capacity to '*undertake research and evaluate critically what they find*' through these experiences:

I think there was evidence of [research] all over the place. You know, taking the balls and rolling them down, you know, they were manipulating those stands, so that idea of inquiry, undertaking that kind of questioning and posing things, that was all there (Class teacher).

Children's engagement with adults, not just spaces and materials, was also seen as a catalyst for developing knowledge. Through relationships with **knowledgeable, nurturing educators** children were offered opportunity to '*build up a body of knowledge and have the skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts*'. Within the spaces offering opportunities for woodwork and gardening **knowledgeable, nurturing educators** were able to facilitate children's use of tools, including, saws, hammers, trowels and forks. Careful observation and guidance supported children to build '*a body of knowledge and have the*

*skills to connect and apply that knowledge in different contexts'* (Welsh Government, 2022). Within these spaces, children were also playing with and alongside their peers, and these relationships also afforded opportunity for children to '*develop knowledge*' and '*apply skills*':

[Children] get support from peers ... not relying on adults, and like, working together to solve or overcome whatever it was they were trying to do or achieve (Class teacher).

An example of this peer-to-peer support was evident in the woodwork shed when children, working with the vice for the first time to secure a wooden block for sanding, "were supporting each other, you know, showing each other, putting it in the vice, taking it out of the vice, putting it back in the vice" (Researcher 1). Through this support, children were evidencing their ability to '*communicate effectively*' by '*explaining the ideas and concepts they are learning about*' (Welsh Government, 2022).

## Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work

<b>Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work</b>
Connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products
Think creatively to reframe and solve problems
Identify and grasp opportunities
Take measured risks
Lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly.
Express ideas and emotions through different media
Give of their energy and skills so that other people benefit

Evidence linked to this purpose was initiated when children made decisions in relation to the spaces and materials with which they would engage, showing a '[willingness] to go and explore different areas' (class teacher) without seeking input or direction from adults:

...It wasn't like, they were looking to us to teach them anything. They were just interested (HLTA).

The open-endedness of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations in conjunction with the autonomy they were granted to move around freely and follow their own interests created an environment and ethos which enabled children to demonstrate their capacity and willingness to 'identify and grasp opportunities':

...going back to it being quite open-ended and, and free, they were more inclined to go and do what they wanted to do, because they were intrigued and engaged (class teacher).

This was particularly evident in the garden within which children had access to a sandpit, waterplay, a range of open-ended resources, and a climbing frame alongside opportunities to do some gardening which included planting, weeding, watering, digging, and harvesting fruit and herbs. Within the garden, children moved between what was offered within the space, following their interests and, in doing so, they made connections between the resources and

materials in one area and the affordances they offered if used in a different space within the garden:

The sand was interesting because the first things they would do was wet it, they would go straight to the water, carry it over the buckets. And, like you said about the teamwork. They'd do that together with the big buckets and carry it over. And then they'd, like, take it in turns and they'd go with the cups, and they'd all come back. They preferred the wet sand, probably because they can do more with it, because then they'd use the plant pots sometimes and make sand castles and things like that. But yeah, they totally resourced that themselves really didn't they? (class teacher).

Finding different means of transporting water from the water play area to the sandpit and helping each other in that process were examples of children '[thinking] creatively to reframe and solve problems' and '[giving] their energy and skills so that others benefit' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b). Using the water to change the consistency of the sand to extend the possibilities it afforded represented another example of children demonstrating a capacity to 'think creatively to reframe and solve problems' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b). Moreover, as they supported and cooperated with one another they would 'lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b).

Nevertheless, evidence of children applying their knowledge, using materials to express their ideas, thinking creatively to solve problems and leading and taking on different roles within groups were not more or less evident within any of the Gifts and Occupations. The open-endedness of the materials enabled children to access and explore in their own way, demonstrating a connectedness between what they were doing and their knowledge of and experiences in the world. For example, on one of the project days, one child (an elective mute) demonstrated her capacity to 'lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b) as she used skewers to create what were akin to paper kebabs. Commanding the space through her actions, others in her class imitated her, with some copying only and others moving her actions in different directions:

...but Leila led the whole room. So Leila started that and then in the end one person would come and then another and another and then she led, you know, without, without verbalising... So Daisy imitated...just watching and then imitated. And then here she talks about making a sail for her boat. So she imitated for a while and then she could see what it was starting to look like...and then she changed her mind and said it wasn't a boat anymore...And then they were, that room was full and busy with making, with using the skewers... (Researcher 2).

This episode was powerful in illustrating the diverse ways in which children communicate and can demonstrate leadership, afforded in this instance by the autonomy granted within the space and the open-endedness of, in this instance, the paper.

Similarly, in the clay area, children used the tools to make marks in the clay or to represent candles,

There was a lot of cake making, wasn't there, in one shape or form every week, but this was the trend wasn't it, to use the tools as candles... (Researcher 2)

Nevertheless, whilst using the tools as candles was popular amongst several children, one child demonstrated her resourcefulness and capacity to think creatively to solve problems as she managed to retain her own access to the tools by hiding them under the table:

She was managing the usage of the tools. So, she kept them under the table to restrict access, really, to be honest. So she could use them...She did it every week didn't she? Once she'd cottoned onto that, that was a tactic that she continued to use (Researcher 2).

Therefore, both teachers and the research team were able to recognise the potential of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations to support children in demonstrating the attributes associated with becoming *Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work*. However, the analysis of data demonstrated that at the heart of this insight lay an alignment between Froebelian principles and the attributes presented within Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022) and Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Settings (Welsh Government, 2022), with the former providing a catalyst for the manifestation of the latter.

For example, for children to 'connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products', they needed the autonomy to explore and create with the

materials through which they could bring a unity and connectedness between their knowledge and experiences of the world and the processes involved in exploring materials and making their creations. In doing so, they relied upon their creativity and the power of symbols to: build the 'amazing models' (class teacher) in the block play; see the potential of using the pots from the gardening to make castles in the sand pit; identify the possibilities of combining paper and skewers to make paper kebabs and a sail for a boat; and make the connection between the clay and tools to make cakes (sometimes for specific occasions like a birthday). Having the freedom to move around the space independently, making decisions and following their own interests contributed to the high levels of engagement but were pivotal to children '[identifying] and [grasping] opportunities' facilitated through Froebel's Gifts and Occupations.

Throughout the project, it was evident that relationships matter, creating an ethos of connectedness and democracy. The autonomy children experienced at *Ty Froebel* created an environment in which children and adults became peers:

I think if, say, one of us sat down by the clay, then they'd come over and see what we were doing. It wasn't like they were looking to us to teach them anything. They were just interested. And then they might have had a go at doing what we were doing. But it was more as a sort of peer (HLTA).

It also influenced levels of engagement, encouraging children to follow their personal interests which resulted in new relationships forming within the class:

...they then ended up working together, or at least alongside people they wouldn't normally have worked alongside. Then later on down the line, they were like, oh, yeah, I did that with [Darcy] last time, so I'll do it again (HLTA).

Therefore, relationships formed based on shared interests, with the autonomy encouraging children to 'identify and grasp opportunities' based on 'what they wanted to be doing' (class teacher). This then led to children to 'lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly' and 'give of their energy and skills so that other people benefit':

...the teamwork, just how they naturally kind of started working together and supporting each other, seeking out help from peers, instead of coming to adults.

Like, that sort of teamwork isn't something we always see a lot of' (class teacher).

...and it was just there were two little boys in [the woodwork shed] that were supporting each other, you know, showing each other, putting it in the vice, taking it out of the vice, put it back in the vice (Researcher 1).

However, paramount to children's autonomy and supporting children's capacity to become *enterprising, creative contributors ready to play a full part in life and work*, were two Froebelian's principles: the **Value of childhood**; and the **Central importance of play**. Collectively, these two principles contributed towards creating an environment and ethos which generated high levels of interest and engagement on account of the open-endedness of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations. Children's experiences in the garden demonstrated the scope offered by **Engaging with nature** as facets of being *enterprising and creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work* manifested in their experiences of gardening and outdoor play.

However, underpinning the evidence of children's capacity to demonstrate the attributes associated with becoming *enterprising and creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work* were **knowledgeable and nurturing educators**, central to creating an environment and ethos which enables children to 'identify and grasp opportunities' through which they can then demonstrate other associated attributes, valuing the diverse ways in which they can manifest.



## Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world

<b>Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world</b>
Find, <u>evaluate</u> and use evidence in forming views
Engage with contemporary issues based upon their knowledge and values
Understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights
Understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and acting
Are knowledgeable about their culture, community, <u>society</u> and the world, now and in the past
Respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society
Show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet

The evidence linked to this purpose indicated that the notion of becoming an ethical informed citizen of Wales and wider world begins with the world on a small scale involving the child, the people with whom they interact and their community (i.e., family, their class in school, the locality). The types of experiences, the role of the adult and the extent to which children can participate were identified as integral to the manifestation of the attributes.

For example, at *Ty Froebel*, once the children had been shown how to use the water pump in the garden, they ‘all taught each other’, demonstrating a capacity to ‘respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society’, evident in the way they passed on their knowledge and skills to others in their class once they had acquired them. Moreover, children’s ongoing use of the water pump provided opportunities for further attributes to manifest as children used it in conjunction with the sand pit:

The sand was interesting because the first thing they would do was wet it, they would go straight to the water carry over the buckets. And like you said about

the teamwork. They'd do that together with the big buckets and carry it over (class teacher).

Choosing to combine water with the sand was indicative of children having explored and discovered the effect of combining water with sand, a process which will have involved them '[Finding], [evaluating] and [using] evidence in forming views' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b). Moreover, the teamwork evident as they recognised the challenge associated with the heavy weight of the water pump provided evidence of children '[understanding] and [considering] the impact of their actions when making choices and acting' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b) as they helped each other in their endeavours.

Children's experiences of gardening as they watered the plants and herbs, planted seeds, and observed, reflected on, and responded to the life cycles they came across (e.g., looking at hidden bird's nest, the sighting of a dead bird, the development of strawberries) provided further opportunities for attributes associated with being *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world* to manifest. For example, children's interest in and experiences in and around caring for the strawberries provided opportunities for children to observe the transitions from flower to unripe to ripened strawberry:

And there was lots of talk around that actually where we would look at the strawberries, because they were planted in different parts of you know, weren't they, in the long, the long raised beds, and then there were a few in the pots in the middle weren't there? We would have quite a few, you know sort of touring the strawberries to see which ones were ready to eat and then when they were, it was like a treasure wasn't it (Researcher 2).

The combination of watering, observing, talking through the changes, and waiting until the strawberries were ripe before harvesting created conditions through which children could 'find, evaluate and use evidence in forming views.' For example, they came to recognise white flowers as an indication of where strawberries will appear in time, green as evidence of an unripe strawberry, and red representing a ready to eat strawberry. Through making these observations, they saw the impact of their care (i.e., watering) and patience as they waited until the fruit had ripened before harvesting, thus demonstrating, once again, their capacity to 'understand and consider

the impact of their actions when making choices and acting' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b).

Nevertheless, of particular significance was the evidence of children's actions and experiences being *linked* to big concepts (e.g., life cycles, cause and effect) and global issues (e.g., sustainability) without being *presented* in direct association with them. Moreover, children's play and what transpired from their experiences of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations provided meaningful, authentic experiences through which big concepts (e.g., cause and effect, life cycles) were encountered in a way that was accessible and meaningful to the children. For example, associations with 'show their commitment to the sustainability of the planet' could be made as children engaged in planting and caring for herbs, fruit and flowers in the garden but the evidence linked to the manifestation of this attribute was rooted in children's experiences of gardening at *Ty Froebel* rather than within the wider global context.

Similarly, as children moved around the spaces at *Ty Froebel*, engaging with the range of Gifts and Occupations, they became familiar with the customs of the space (e.g., removing shoes for the block area to prevent the carpet from becoming muddy, retaining tools for clay in the clay area). With knowledge of these customs evident in children's responsiveness to and alignment with these customs, associations could be made with two further attributes: firstly, 'Are knowledgeable about their culture, community, society and the world, now and in the past'; and secondly, 'Respect the needs and rights of others, as a member of a diverse society' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b). Nevertheless, the scale and extent to which these attributes were evident reflected the context and children's experiences.

Over the course of the project, children navigated vast concepts, such as peace and conflict through their experiences of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations as they managed their own and others' access to resources and materials, encountered and resolved disagreement through negotiation and teamwork and supported and cooperated with each other as they developed shared interests and goals:

And a bit of negotiation, wasn't it? You know, if, if so it was if, there were more people that wanted to use it, you know, there will be a bit of bit of negotiation,

a bit of disagreement, but they did. I don't really recall adults having to intervene, really, to resolve that. They did, mainly, but there was also a lot of cooperation as well (Researcher 2).

Cumulatively, they provided evidence of children respecting the needs and rights of others, taking the impact of their actions into consideration, and exercising their right to participate whilst showing respect for and responsibility to others. Nevertheless, the evidence did not manifest in terms of 'society and the world' or 'the planet' (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b) but were rooted in the experiences of *Ty Froebel* and reflected their stage in terms of life, learning and development.

Therefore, the evidence gathered from children's encounters and experiences of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations served as a reminder of the importance of recognising children's progression towards the Four Purposes as being gradual, incremental, varied, and in line with their lives and development, valuing childhood in and of itself and recognising children's development as a process of *becoming* rather than *being*.

Central to the extent to which children's experiences could support the manifestation of the attributes associated with being (or rather becoming) *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world* lay the role of the adult, creating an environment that was engaging, serving as a catalyst to encourage children's participation:

and I think when they got there, they'd quite often go out to the garden to see, if like, the box of balls was out there. Yeah. Or, you know, what was what was there? So that they could then choose so they, they wanted to know, what what we have we got out today? What, what can we do today? And then they could pick from, from that (HLTA).

Alternating between stepping forward and stepping back, adults were pivotal to supporting children, equipping them (through guidance) to participate freely. For example, on the first day of the project, several children required support in putting the gardening gloves, a process which involved instruction, modelling, demonstration. Nevertheless, having provided the support one week, some children were then able to put the gloves on independently, demonstrating the role of the adult as supporting children towards greater autonomy:

I remember one week, when we, it must have been quite early on and they were putting the gardening gloves and I, you know, spent a lot of time just putting the gardening gloves on you know...checking that the fingers were in and you know, it was quite a big thing. Just, you know, to get, the gloves on. And then I remember next week and...a couple of them brought the gloves. I was like, Oh, here we go again. But actually, they, a couple of them put them on really quickly. So whatever we'd done the previous week it had sort of, it was worth spending the time (Researcher 2).

Similarly, the customs of the physical space (e.g., retaining the clay tools in the clay area, keeping the parts for each Gift together) created an ethos of respect introduced via explanation and guidance from adults but maintained by children through their own actions:

I think at the beginning, it was even just the little tiny things in amongst the areas like getting water for themselves, like having to not man it, but oversee it, until they kind of knew they have to wait their turn and how to get it (class teacher).

It was it was more sort of just the general rules. Rules is a tricky word, but just the general sort of running...And things like with the gifts that they kept them kind of together, rather than hide them around (HLTA).

Establishing the 'running' (HLTA) of the space through guidance provided children with knowledge of the culture of the space and the know-how required to respect the needs and rights of others. As such, the role of the adult was that of a facilitator, providing guidance and support when needed with an emphasis on enabling children to access and engage with Froebel's Gifts and Occupations freely.

Therefore, the potential of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations to support children in demonstrating the attributes associated with becoming *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world* was evident from the professional dialogue between practitioners' and the research team. The process of analysis demonstrated an alignment between Froebel's principles and the attributes associated with being *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world*, with the former supporting the enactment of the latter.

**Engaging with nature, Unity and connectedness**, and the **Central importance of play** within the context of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations were identified as

instrumental to creating opportunities through which children could demonstrate their capacity to become *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world*. For example, with play as the driving force behind children's actions, they navigated the space and engaged with the materials freely whilst exercising respect and responsibility towards others, evident in the way they operated within the parameters set by the environment. Children's experiences in the garden brought **unity and connectedness** between their play and the wider world through the principle of **Engaging with nature**, evident as children moved freely between the gardening and engaging with other areas within the garden (e.g., water play, sandpit, climbing frame):

And they were so keen, even just filling up the pots with the soil and like tipping things and helping with the watering and the digging, they, I, just, they loved that (class teacher).

Like, they would find something in the garden and take it to the sandpit like they went to kind of find their own resources. And it was interesting to see what they'd bring over and what they'd use... (class teacher).

However, through their play and engagement with nature, the **value of childhood** was significant in illustrating that children's capacity to demonstrate the attributes associated with being *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world* to an *extent* and within the context of *their* experiences:

...I think for me, they mainly went to their peers for things and like you said about that, if they couldn't carry, normally in school they'd come to a teacher and ask us but it was very much like getting their friends involved and having that team work (class teacher).

This situated their experiences at *Ty Froebel* within the wider context of their life, bringing further **unity and connectedness** between present and the future experiences. This insight reinforced the **value of childhood** in terms of it laying being a period during which the foundations for nurturing children towards *becoming* ethical, informed citizens, equipping them through meaningful experiences underpinned and driven by children's play through which they would become cognisant of the impact of their actions on others and the planet:

Because even the things like, you know, the spaces where you take your shoes off on the, you know, for the carpet, and don't take the clay to, you know, you know, even that is an element of being ethical, because you are, you are, you know, an individual in that community, sort of having to live responsibly, but it's done in a way that is appropriate and where the child is, and the same way the engaging with nature is engaging with the notion of living sustainably. So you know, composting the, you know, the, the flowers...when they're dead, or you know, you are living sustainably, so, therefore, you come to understand the impact of living like that/ (Researcher 2).

Throughout children's experiences of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations, it was evident that **Relationships matter**:

- The relationship with themselves as they made decisions on where they would go and what they would do.
- The relationship with peers in their class, teachers, and the research team as they operated alongside and in collaboration with others.
- The relationship with the world through their experiences of gardening.

These relationships burgeoned from children participating as **autonomous learners**, afforded by the open-endedness of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations and the ethos of freedom with guidance which underpinned children's experiences:

...it was so interesting just observing and watching what they were getting from it independently and yeah, I think for me, they mainly went to their peers for things and like you said about that, if they couldn't carry, normally in school they'd come to a teacher and ask us but it was very much like getting their friends involved and having that team work (class teacher).

They were just involved, yeah, they just joined in. It was a bit more, um, I guess, I don't know, democratic...You know so if, they, for example...somebody started mixing the herbs in the water, then you would have a queue of children, you know, being interested and wanting to do that, if a couple of children were picking the strawberries, then you know, other people would want [to]...(Researcher 2).

Therefore, evidence from the project indicated that Froebel's Gifts and Occupations facilitated through the enactment of Froebelian principles could create an environment within which the attributes associated with being *Ethical, informed citizens, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world* could be nurtured. Nevertheless, paramount to this being feasible was the principle of **Knowledgeable and nurturing adults**, emerging as pivotal to creating an effective environment which supported children's self-activity, moving between freedom and guidance sensitively, responsively, and in alignment with children's needs. Moreover, notwithstanding the synergies identified in this project, the significance of **knowledgeable and nurturing adults** in terms of being able to identify and articulate evidence of these attributes, being cognisant and valuing the stage at which children are in their lives and development was identified as affecting the extent to which this alignment might be observed. The professional dialogue between practitioners and the research team followed by the analysis of data through the lens of Froebelian principles reinforced the importance of professional enquiry in and of practice and demonstrated the capacity of Froebelian principles to provide a framework for observing, reflecting on and articulating children's progression towards the Four Purposes.



## Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have secure values and are establishing their spiritual and ethical beliefs</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take part in physical activity</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take measured decisions about lifestyle and manage risk</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have the confidence to participate in performance</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Face and overcome challenge</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can</li></ul>

Evidence reflecting these attributes often originate in the relationships children formed and established at *Ty Froebel*. It is evident that to navigate their experiences as ‘*healthy*’, ‘*confident*’, ‘*resilient*’, ‘*independent*’, and ‘*valued*’ (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b), their **relationships matter**.

The relationships children developed with peers and adults were notably initiated and mediated through the relationships they formed with and through space and materials. The respect given to them as **autonomous learners** allowed what they were interested in and what they could do to be the starting point for their engagement with the space and others within it.

I feel like [their] confidence to participate as well, I feel like, none of them were afraid because of the environment, and because of the open-endedness of it. There was nothing they could get right or wrong. Nobody was kind of afraid to go and try something new (Class teacher).

Foregrounding **The central importance of play** within these spaces afforded children freedom, ownership and ‘*independence*’ over their interactions. Children were able to bring their personal experiences, their ideas and their imagination to the spaces and materials.

Within these spaces children also demonstrated their ability to form 'positive relationships' with their peers, often by stepping outside of existing friendship groups:

...they didn't feel the need to have to follow their friends, so they were more willing to speak to and work with the children that were in that space with them, because that's what they wanted to be doing" (Class teacher).

...they were much more engaged with children that they wouldn't necessarily engage with in school that we haven't seen them interact together, really, and then at Ty Froebel they were, they were speaking to different children, and they were like working together with different children (Class teacher).

Increased engagement driven by interest in their experiences enabled children to relinquish the security of their existing friendships and work alongside their peers. These interest-based relationships engendered a sense of '*respect*' and '*trust*' whereby children would seek out help and offer support to each other. This collegiate way of working demonstrated children's '*ethical*' and '*empathetic*' approach to their relationships:

...they naturally kind of started working together and supporting each other seeking out help from peers, instead of coming to adults like that teamwork isn't something we always see a lot of (Class teacher).

These collegiate relationships also enabled children to '*face and overcome challenge.*' 'e repeated example saw children trying to use and manoeuvre the water pump (a substantial water carrier that took thought and collaboration, as when full, it became too heavy for one child to use independently).

That water pump, that they could carry round and move and so they took it over and they did stuff with that in the sand and then they brought back and then they put it down the chutes ... it was quite a physical thing to do, but they all wanted to try and do this physical thing and make it pump (HLTA).

*'Taking part in [this] physical activity'* (Welsh Government, 2022a; Welsh Government, 2022b) by moving and using the water pump was seen to support "a lot of collaboration" (Class teacher). These newly forming collegiate relationships with peers instigated by shared interest, were similarly replicated across the relationships children formed with adults.

Positioning adults as **knowledgeable and nurturing educators** enabled these relationships to be less about instruction and more about facilitation and guidance.

I think if, say, one of us sat down by the clay, then then they'd come over and see what we were doing. But it wasn't. It wasn't like, they were looking to us to teach them anything. They were just interested. And then they might have had a go at doing what we were doing. But it was more as a sort of peer (HLTA).

But every, every time that either of you (researchers) were there, they all kind of gravitated straight towards you, didn't they? Yeah. And they were so keen, even just filling up the pots with the soil and like tipping things and helping with the watering and the digging, they, I, just, they loved that (Class teacher).

Children demonstrated their ability and willingness to 'potter' alongside the adults, to develop conversations about the manipulating the clay, tending to the garden or building with the blocks . Adults, within this role have opportunity to support and develop children's interests through 'freedom with guidance'. It was within these responsive relationships that evidence of children's ability to seek '*support to keep safe and well*' and '*manage risk*' was also demonstrated:

I mean, it was lots of things like taking measured risks, you know, on the climbing frame, I can think of one of the children or children probably not exclusively, just one that's popped in my head, where, umm, she was trying to climb further up the climbing frame, but couldn't so needed, needed help. Umm. But then, developed confidence and then, in told me that she didn't need any help anymore. So, she had a few goes with help and then told me when she, you know, she took a measured risk in that in the sense of, I want to climb higher, but I need help. So that was a measured risk. And then actually, she waited until she felt confident, and had done it a few times with help to do without, without help, rather than taking an unmeasured risk and doing it without help to start with (Researcher 1).

## **Conclusions:**

At the end of this small-scale project, the research team concluded that an alignment between Froebelian Principles and the Four Purposes was evident across the children's experiences at Ty Froebel. Furthermore, the Gifts and Occupations were identified as having the potential to form the basis of early years practice and provision within Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). However, it is important to note that at the heart of this

alignment is an understanding of Froebelian Principles and their integral role in supporting purpose-driven pedagogy.

Moving forward, the research team will position these initial insights as a starting point for further enquiries and on-going professional dialogue at and in association with Ty Froebel.

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Photographs to be included throughout the pamphlet:













































