Establishing a Froebelian Setting across Nursery to Primary 2

Maisondieu Primary School and ELC





Our Context:

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Location and Setting:

- Maisondieu Primary School and Nursery is a large rural school on the East Coast of Scotland.
- Housed in a traditional school building - closed in classrooms - no open plan spaces (potential barrier to mixed age experiences)

Community and Relationships:

- Strong focus on connection with **family and community**.
- We work hard to maintain **positive working relationships** with children, families, and the wider community.

Environmental Utilisation:

- Geographically located between the **Angus Glens** and the **East Coast shoreline**.
- We are lucky to have an **abundance of natural resources** nearby.
- Efforts made to **utilise the local environment** and provide children with diverse community visit opportunities.

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Pedagogical Approach and Recent Developments:

Early Years Philosophy:

- Passionate about **'Getting it Right for our youngest learners'**.
- Focus on **slowing down pedagogy** in the Early Years.
- Commitment to a **holistic view** of the child.
- We work with a **mixed demographic** and strive to understand every child as an **individual**.

Key Setting Transformations:

- Recent efforts have been made to **transform the setting** to meet all learners' needs.
- **Walled Garden Development:** Created a **Forest School site** and outdoor space for all children to experience and observe nature.
- **P1 Space Renovation:** Includes a **full kitchen** to provide daily snack and cooking facilities, replicating nursery experiences.
- **Staff Development (CLPL):** Significant investment to ensure all practitioners have in-depth knowledge and understanding of child development **(11 practitioners NSY-P2 Froebelian Trained)**

Rationale for developing mixed age provision:

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Core Beliefs, Aims, and Froebelian Alignment:

Learner-Centred Provision: We are committed to providing environments where children can be **active, curious, and creative** learners throughout the school day.

Environmental Development: We are transforming Nursery, P1, and P2 spaces to foster environments that encourage active **play, dialogue, and reflection** among children.

Froebelian Principles: Our strategy is aligned with **Froebel's philosophy** that younger and older children benefit significantly from **learning together**.

Gray (2011) discusses in detail the advantages of mixed-age play, he highlights the positive impact of younger children having additional offers of care and emotional support and older children having opportunities to nurture and lead, this would sit in harmony with Froebel's view on unity, connectedness and community (Froebel Trust, 2012).

Rationale for developing mixed age provision:

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Current Implementation and Observed Impact:

Mixed-Age Play Introduction:

We had begun to open the door between Nursery and P1 to facilitate weekly mixed-age play sessions but knew we could develop these experiences further.

Literacy and Communication Benefits:

- Children demonstrated in our previous mixed age sessions, that reading and writing instruction can be successfully included within a mixed-age setting.
- While literacy opportunities emerged naturally through mixed-age play, our primary focus was on creating rich experiences that fostered relationships, creativity, communication and a sense of belonging in line with Froebelian principles.

Benefits Evidenced by School Staff:

- Reciprocal Learning: Younger children contributed imagination and creativity into play transactions.
- Modelling and Support: Older children modelled more advanced behaviours and offered necessary emotional and informational support to younger children.

Staff Collaboration:

Increased staff collaboration and shared professional development (e.g., Nursery staff supporting P1 documentation; P1 staff supporting Nursery mark-making).

Baseline:

Voice of the parents:

"I think opening up the door between nursery and P1 gives D more opportunities to connect with close friends and family which I think is so special. I know he felt really safe and comfortable in nursery, and we were all (the family) apprehensive about him moving through to P1 with different adults and children. Having the opportunity to spend time with children and adults he connected with and formed positive relationships within previous years, has given us some comfort".

"I am very thankful my child is getting the chance to be in the primary 1 environments. She will join P1 in August and I think this will help her to be less anxious".

"The first week, he said he felt a little worried because he didn't know if the nursery boys and girls would remember him, so he stayed in p1 for most of the time".

Voice of the children:

"I want to go back because my cousin is there. My cousin knows I'm in P1 and would definitely want to play".

"The nursery children might be nervous to come to P1 because we are tall".

"We can help them learn their letters because we know a lot."

"We can show them where to put things".

"I'm worried they won't recognise me".

Voice of our staff:

"Benefits will be children taking responsibility and leading play, being role models for other children".

"Children will lead, follow and share ideas and play".

"It might boost social skills and self esteem. It will be familiar to a family structure, which can support confidence".

"Might see natural leaders spring into action. Opportunities for siblings and existing friends to spend time together".

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Project aims:

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Pedagogy and Practice Development

- Embed Froebel's Principles: Focus on embedding Froebel's core principles across the Nursery to P2 provision.
- Develop Mixed-Age Contexts: Deliver and sustain high-quality mixed-age play experiences and opportunities across Nursery, P1, and P2.

Staff Capacity and Expertise

- Enhance Staff Knowledge: Provide high-quality CLPL (Career-Long Professional Learning) and networking to deepen staff knowledge and understanding of Froebelian pedagogy.
- Develop Curricular Expertise: Increase staff expertise in specific curricular areas (e.g., clay work, textiles) to enrich mixed-age opportunities.

Curriculum and Provision Enhancement

- Align Opportunities: Develop mixed-age opportunities that explicitly align with Froebel's principles and cater to children's diverse needs and interests.
- Introduce "Live Provocations": Create mixed-age experiences using "live provocations" by inviting outside experts to share their crafts, providing children with otherwise unobtainable experiences.

Community Engagement and Sharing

- Share Project Progress: Regularly share the project's progress, benefits, and outcomes with the wider community using diverse media (video, , pictures, newsletters, observations, exhibitions).

The Project:

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- Twice weekly mixed age play sessions – involving **Nursery, P1 and P2.**
- One session involved a **visiting local artist**
- Each artist worked over **5-6 weeks** and spent the afternoon sharing their craft and working with children across **nursery, P1 and P2**
- Whilst some children were engaged with the artist, the rest of the children were **free to play** across the nursery and P1 environments (indoor and outdoor)
- The act of opening the door between spaces became a powerful symbol of **transition and continuity.** Children revisited **familiar environments and relationships**, supporting emotional security while also exploring new identities as learners.
- Through working with artists, children explored **Froebel's occupations** and experienced a variety of materials through which they could **express their ideas, feelings and understanding of the world.**



Hetty Haxworth
Printing artist



Susie Stehli
Textile Artist



Kirsten Ritchie- Walker
Fine art painter



Irene Hughes
Ceramic Artist

Mixed- age Play in Practice:

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Open-ended play opportunities
During each mixed-age session, children were free to access both Nursery and P1 environments, indoors and outdoors. This enabled children to revisit familiar spaces, reconnect with friends and siblings, and form new relationships across age groups.

What we observed

- Older and younger children naturally collaborated in their play.
- Children moved between leading and following roles.
- Younger children contributed imaginative ideas and new possibilities within play.
- Older children often offered support, guidance and reassurance.
- Existing friendships and family connections were strengthened.
- Children developed confidence in exploring unfamiliar spaces and experiences.

These experiences reflect Froebel's principles of **the central importance of play and unity and connectedness**. The open-door approach supported children's sense of belonging and allowed them the **freedom** to make choices while remaining **supported** by familiar adults.

















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Screen Printing with Hetty Haxworth

Printmaking allowed children to explore sameness and difference, transformation and cause and effect, developing an understanding that their actions could influence outcomes.







Textile artist: Susan Stehli



Sessions included:

- using EXpandIT to add shells and loose parts to fabric

- using transfer paint to press paintings onto fabric

- making natural dyes with kitchen waste and dying fabric

- sewing different textured fabrics together

- using glitter paints and metalic threads and wools






Our Creations

















Artist Workshops

Kirsten Ritchie-Walker – Painter








Artist Workshops

Irene Hughes – Clay

Working with clay supported children's **symbolic representation** as they transformed their ideas into physical forms and made meaning through materials.

Reflections on Working with Artists

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What worked well

- Children were inspired by skilled members of our community.
- They learned new techniques and experimented with a range of materials.
- Artists shared their passion and encouraged children to see themselves as creators and makers.

What we learned

- It was important to balance teaching new skills with allowing children time to explore and develop their own ideas.
- We worked closely with artists to ensure experiences remained playful, open-ended and responsive to children.
- The process of creating was more valuable than the final product.



Looking Ahead

- We will continue to work alongside community experts while ensuring experiences reflect our Froebelian values of play, creativity, individuality and freedom with guidance.
- While working with visiting artists was highly enriching, it required careful consideration to ensure experiences remained aligned with our Froebelian approach. At times, there was a tendency to focus on producing a final product, which contrasts with our emphasis on process and exploration. This highlighted the importance of supporting visitors to understand our pedagogy.

Sharing and Celebrating the Project:

- videos and pictures shared on Seesaw with families

- SWAY digital presentations shared with parents to document project

- art exhibition held in the community library to celebrate the work from mixed age sessions







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CALEDONIAN RAILWAY
BRECHIN CASTLE


MARCUS



Feedback from children:

"I like being with my friends in other classes. It makes me happy."

"My sister is in nursery and I get to do art with her."

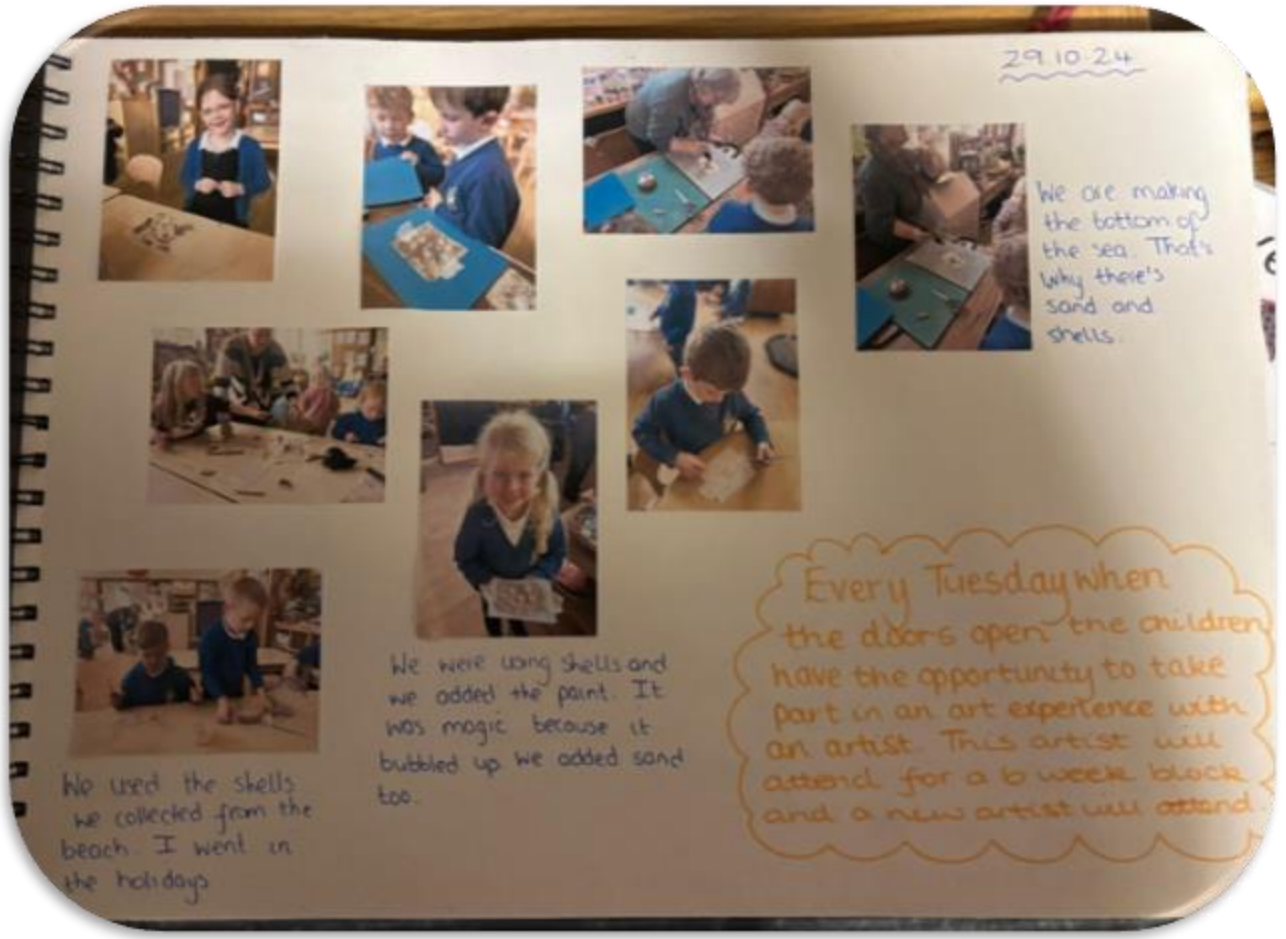
"I like it because we can all get together and I see my old friends from nursery and my friends from P1."

"I like cooking together and tasting it afterwards."

"I've liked coming back again to see my P1 friends."

"We can look after P1 so they don't get hurt when we are playing outside in the garden."





Children's comments highlight the importance of **belonging, continuity of relationships and emotional security**. These experiences reflect Froebel's belief that learning grows from **strong relationships and a sense of connectedness.**

Stories of individual children:

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In the block play area in nursery, two nursery children (aged 3 and 4), challenged the P1 children by suggesting they could build a tower taller than the castle they were creating. As they shared ideas about making strong foundations, the older children listened and adapted their designs. Together, they explored balance, height, and stability, learning from one another through cooperation and playful experimentation.

This shared experience reflected the Froebelian view that children learn through **relationships, curiosity, and meaningful play**, with every child contributing valuable ideas **regardless of age.**



During a mixed age play session, two children worked together to set a table in the home corner. As they carefully counted objects in sequence, the older child, gently supported the younger by modelling one-to-one correspondence and encouraging her to touch each item as she counted.

Together they explored different ways of grouping the objects, noticing how the same quantity could be arranged into smaller sets. The younger child proudly recounted the groups, while her older peer watched on.

This shared experience reflected the Froebelian belief that children learn through **meaningful interaction, cooperation, and hands-on exploration**. Through their peer collaboration, both children strengthened their mathematical understanding, communication skills, and confidence, while engaging with concepts of number, pattern, and part-whole relationships in a **joyful and purposeful way.**











Staff CLPL

- Clay workshops
- Working and learning from artists
- Froebel Course













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Mixed age what else...

- Cooking and baking
- Community visits
- Singing
- Woodwork
- Play
- STEM
- Finger Rhymes in the community

Across these experiences, practitioners balanced **freedom with guidance**, allowing children to make choices, follow their interests and collaborate with others while receiving appropriate support where needed.

Next steps:
Future developments include widening community involvement to include local agricultural workers, offering children additional insight into the working life of their community.

Sustained Impact – what happened next:

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Children's Learning

- Children independently revisited clay, textiles and printing techniques during play.
- Skills introduced by artists became part of everyday experiences.
- Children used materials in new and creative ways to express their own ideas.

Pedagogical Impact

- Mixed-age opportunities became a regular feature of our provision.
- Staff continued to plan with a mixed-age lens.
- Shared understanding of play across Nursery, P1 and P2 was strengthened.

Froebelian Reflection

- Children demonstrated agency by using previously learned skills in self-chosen ways.
- Learning became embedded through repetition, exploration and play rather than through adult direction.







Impact:

Pedagogy and Practice Development
- Embed Froebel's Principles – focus on sharing these with families this year
- Develop Mixed-Age Contexts – sustained through staff training and funding to purchase resources

Staff Capacity and Expertise
- Enhance Staff Knowledge – additional 2 staff trained, networking opportunities
- Develop Curricular Expertise: working with and learning from experts, connections made: "Friends of Maisondieu"

Curriculum and Provision Enhancement
- Align Opportunities- Reflection using the Froebel Self-Evaluation Toolkit helped us consider how effectively our provision supports the principles of play, connectedness, creativity, autonomy and holistic development.

- Introduce "Live Provocations"- running with similar model this year and staff are all eager to think with a "mixed age" hat on

Community Engagement and Sharing
- Share Project Progress – successfully shared, continuing to focus on sharing principles and practices with families and community

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Unity and connectedness

Knowledgeable nurturing educators



Creativity and the power of symbols

Autonomous learners



Relationships matter

Central importance of play

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Thank you to the Froebel Trust for funding this project and supporting our journey.

Maisondieu Primary School