

The Tuffkid Woodwork Project

***Intent:** Strengthening partnerships with parents of children with additional needs*

Funded by the Froebel Trust

Our Context

Tuffkid Nursery is an integrated early years setting and part of Kisharon-Langdon, a British charity supporting Jewish people with learning disabilities and autism. The nursery currently serves 31 children aged 2–4 years of age, around one third of whom have additional needs. Tuffkid provides an inclusive environment, supported by a multidisciplinary team including a physiotherapist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist and a dance movement therapist, who work weekly alongside children and staff within the main nursery environment.

We are a Froebelian nursery, drawing on Friedrich Froebel’s principles to support children’s holistic development through meaningful, hands-on experiences. Froebel described occupations as experiences that move children “from the simple to the complex, from the known to the unknown,” strengthening creativity, independence, and deep engagement (Froebel, 1895). Woodwork, as one of Froebel’s key occupations, has long been embedded in our curriculum and is valued for its capacity to support focus, fine motor development, problem-solving, confidence, and creativity.

Froebel’s principles of unity and connectedness is at the centre of everything we do. We recognise that children learn best through whole body experiences which stimulate the mind, body and soul. Woodwork does just this, by united thinking and doing. When using real tools and real materials, children are supported as autonomous learners who act with purpose, pursuing their own ideas with persistence and creativity.

Our Challenge

When taking a closer look at our woodwork provision and our parental involvement, we noticed some concerns. Some parents, particularly those of children with additional needs, expressed uncertainty about the safety and suitability of woodwork provision for young children. Some were concerned about the use of real tools, some were unsure about their child’s ability to be included and others simply didn’t see the objective of it altogether. This parental uncertainty seemed to influence the children’s confidence in engaging, particularly for children who already experienced barriers to participation.

Froebel emphasised the importance of partnerships with families, stating that “the family is the first and most important school of the child; the parents are the first teachers, and the home the true foundation of all education” (Froebel, 1887).

It became clear that support and confidence was essential, from ALL our parents, including the ones with children with additional needs. Without shared understanding between home and nursery, access to this occupation was not yet fully inclusive. Although appropriate woodwork adaptations and support were in place for children of all abilities, understanding between home and nursery was missing link.

Our Solution

This project was therefore designed to educate, engage, and reassure parents about our Froebelian woodwork provision, to strengthen unity between home and nursery. Through workshops, hands-on sessions and video observations, we aimed to demonstrate how woodwork can be taught safely, highlight its developmental benefits, and encourage parents to actively support their children’s participation. In doing so, the project sought to remove barriers and widen access for all children, reinforcing inclusivity.

The Project

Components:

1. Online Parent Woodwork Zoom - Pete Moorhouse: woodwork educator and Froebel tutor
2. Parent Experiential Workshop – Live, hands-on workshop with Pete Moorhouse in Tuffkid Nursery
3. Video Observations – Video observations of children involved in Tuffkid woodwork sent home to be shared with parents

All 31 families at the nursery were invited to join. While parents were enthusiastic about partaking in the project, most preferred not to be filmed – particularly those whose children could be identified. We respected parents’ wishes, avoiding video footage, and received participant consent for photographs usage instead. Parents shared that still images felt less intrusive and offered greater control over what was shared. Written consent was also obtained to use anonymised quotes in our study, following our Tuffkid ethics policy.

1. Online Parent Woodwork Zoom - with Pete Moorhouse

Duration: 1 hour

Topic: Theory and Practice of Woodwork for Young Children – This included some staff observations of children in the nursery, particularly those with additional needs

Participation: 24 parents

Data Method:

- ‘Before and After’ Parent Surveys -focussing on parental understanding
- Qualitative feedback, written reflections and Zoom chat contributions

Outcome

To evaluate the impact of this project on parental perceptions, parents were given a before and after survey. The surveys included some identical reflective questions to track change in perspective. This approach enabled comparison of individual responses and highlighted changes in understanding, confidence, and attitudes towards children’s participation in woodwork.

‘Before Surveys’ reflected uncertainty around safety, developmental value, and suitability, particularly for children with additional needs. ‘After Surveys’, demonstrated a clear shift towards greater appreciation, deeper understanding of the benefits of Froebel’s woodwork occupation and increased willingness to actively support their child’s participation.

The Zoom emphasised Froebel’s principle of starting where the child is at and meeting each child at their level. Child observations were included in the zoom, which enabled parents to see how woodwork could be adapted to each child’s abilities. Some children began with hammering cause and effect toys, while others participated in banging golf tees into clay – building coordination and laying foundation skills for progression. These videos revealed that some parents were unaware their children were already engaging in woodwork or using real tools in the nursery. For these families, seeing their children deeply involved in woodwork was transformative. It made it visible how activities were adaptable and how ALL children were supported to engage safely and successfully.

Table: Parental Perceptions Before and After the Zoom Session

<u>Before Zoom</u>	<u>After Zoom</u>
“I wonder how such young children can do woodwork safely?”	“The safety concerns I had were addressed so clearly, I now feel confident woodwork can be made safe for all children.”

“With my daughter’s current skills, I don’t think woodwork is an option, it seems too risky.”	“Now I think it would be amazing for my daughter to take part in woodwork, I’m really excited for her.”
“I think of it as just hammering and nails. It seems enjoyable, but I don’t really grasp the depth or the developmental benefits.”	“I now understand more of the benefits, it’s not just fun, it’s incredibly rich in learning.”
“I was intrigued when my son came home saying he’d done woodwork. I am not sure what kind of tools he is using at that age, but I am glad he is learning a new skill.”	“I can now see how beneficial woodwork is for development. I was impressed by how many parts of the curriculum it ties into. I’ll definitely be encouraging him more.”
“We think woodwork would suit our child, who enjoys real, everyday activities. Our concern is how to make the use of tools safe for a child with delayed motor skills.”	“The video showed clearly how woodwork can be safe and adaptable for any child. I’d love for my daughter to be involved now.”
“I am not sure how children who struggle to focus would manage something like woodwork.”	“I was fascinated to learn that children who have trouble focusing can stay engaged for long periods during woodwork.”
“It sounds fun, but I don’t know how much learning really happens.”	“I was surprised to discover the enormous benefits, creativity, risk-taking, and real satisfaction in making something. I now see it as a powerful learning experience, not just a fun activity.”

These data responses show a consistent pattern: parents who initially expressed hesitation, reported increased confidence and understanding after engaging with the Zoom session. This shift directly influenced parents’ willingness to encourage and support their children’s participation, helping to remove a key barrier to inclusion.

2. Parent Experiential Workshop – with Pete Moorhouse

Duration: 1.5 hrs

Topic: Woodwork in Practice

Participants: 15 parents

Data Method: Parents’ written reflective feedback

Outcome

The live parent workshop offered parents a first-hand experience of woodwork, allowing them to engage physically and creatively with the materials their children use in the nursery. This embodied experience, reinforced Froebel’s belief in learning through doing and strengthened parental empathy towards their children’s learning experiences. Parents described the session as calming, empowering, and creatively fulfilling, often expressing renewed confidence in both themselves and their children.

Table: Parental Reflective Feedback:

“I never thought I could create something, I surprised myself!”
“It was calming, relaxing, and inspiring.”
“My kids are now asking me to do woodwork at home.”
“It felt good to use my hands again.”
“I’m now super excited for my child to continue their woodwork sessions.”

These responses demonstrate how parental participation strengthened unity between home and nursery, supporting sustained engagement beyond the setting.

3. Video Observations

Duration: 3 minute videos

Topic: Children involved in woodwork

Participants: 31

Data Method: Reflective Parent Comments

Outcome

Short videos were sent home showing each child participating in woodwork at nursery. These videos allowed ALL parents to see their own child as a capable, engaged, learner within a safe and supportive environment. Froebel believed in the idea of ‘the whole child’, that all aspects of child’s life are interrelated – their thoughts, feelings and actions. This principle and his belief in the power of symbols, were fully expressed through these videos, as children used real materials to represent ideas, thoughts and emotions. This was particularly meaningful for children with limited verbal communication. As Froebel voices, ‘It is all a unity; everything is based on unity, strives towards and comes back to unity’ (Froebel in Lilley 1967:45) - unity of the ‘whole child’

as complex individual with coordinated components, and unity of each child as part of a family and wider community.

Table: Reflective Parent Comments

“It was amazing to see my child using the tools safely and confidently.”

“Seeing [child D] actually engaged with woodwork made me appreciate how much skill and creativity they have developed.”

“I had no idea my child could focus for so long.”

“It was lovely to see my child enjoying woodwork so independently.”

“The video showed me how adaptable woodwork can be.”

“After seeing how much [child B] benefited from woodwork, I wished my older children had had the same opportunities.”

These reflections demonstrate how seeing their child’s competence helped parents reconceptualise both risk and capability.

Overall Outcome

Following the project, staff observed increased engagement among children who had previously been hesitant, particularly non-verbal children and those with additional needs. Practitioners noted that children whose parents expressed increased confidence, were more willing to approach and sustain involvement in woodwork.

Children also showed increased progress in these areas:

- Fine motor development
- Focus and attention
- Confidence and independence
- Risk assessment
- Creativity and problem-solving

Conclusion

This project had a clear and measurable impact on inclusion at Tuffkid Nursery, as shown in the above data tables. Increased parental understanding and support,

reduced hesitation around woodwork and supported wider and more sustained participation by ALL children - including those with additional needs.

Through sharing information and collaborating with parents, the 'Tuffkid Woodwork Project' removed a key barrier that had previously limited some children's access. Where uncertainty had initially influenced parental encouragement, shared understanding between parents and practitioners enabled children to engage more readily, securely and for longer periods of time.

As a result, woodwork has become a more inclusive experience across the setting. Children who had previously been cautious, particularly non-verbal children and those with additional needs, demonstrated increased interest and prolonged involvement. The project embodied Froebel's principles of unity and connectedness, autonomy, creativity, and partnership with families, widening access to a rich Froebelian occupation and strengthening inclusive practice across the nursery.

Next Steps

- Continued woodwork workshops for parents
- Implement workshops for other Froebel occupations
- Offer our workshops to practitioners from other settings
- Upcycling - Involve parents in the sustainability aspect of woodwork, by sending in recyclables to be reused in woodwork
- Develop home woodwork opportunities for interested families

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks goes out to all the parents who participated with such openness and curiosity, to Pete Moorhouse for his inspiring leadership, to the Tuffkid staff team for their constant dedication, to the children for their intrinsic curiosity and involvement, and to Laura Japheth for leading the project. We also deeply thank the Froebel Trust for their encouragement, support and belief in this work.

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