



# Designing a *Play Cafe*

Ingredients to designing a play cafe inspired by  
Froebelian Principles



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



Δίκτυο  
για τα δικαιώματα  
του παιδιού

Πέρα από λόγια και συμβάσεις



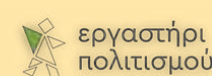
Funded by  
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εργαστήρι  
πολιτισμού

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## Reflective Resource: Ingredients to Designing Play Cafes Cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles

This reflective resource about the ingredients to designing play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles is aimed for practitioners, business owners, parents/carers, community groups or any other childhood provider that wants to offer high quality social and play spaces for families with young children in public or home spaces. Whether you are operating an existing play space for young children e.g. a soft play centre, a play cafe or a playgroup or want to create and set up a new space e.g. a community group in a hall, a new play cafe business or you want to create an enriching play space in your local community or home this reflective resource is for you. In order to provide a high quality social and play space for young children and their families there needs to be significant financial investment and commitment, knowledgeable, skillful and critically reflective adults and ongoing funds for continuous professional development and research. However, as our project demonstrated, it is also possible to co-create high quality social and play spaces with very low costs, through sustainable, recycled, open ended materials and resources that you can find in your everyday environments and by bringing a unique and diverse skillset and knowledge of people and community partners together who are guided by a common vision and with Froebelian principles as guiding tenets working with meraki, love, creativity, social justice, collectivity and care.

### How to use this reflective resource?

Please take your time to go through this resource. You may wish to do this individually or in companionship. You will find a visual with all the interconnected ingredients for designing play cafes and then we focus on each one in more detail. All ingredients interconnect. Each ingredient has a little summary about it, questions to encourage critical reflections and case studies with provocations for thoughts for action (e.g. what would you do in practice?). In some cases we suggest further resources that you could read further. We hope that this resource will guide us to practice and promote children's rights to play, space and living.



Inspired by

# Froebelian Principles

Our project was inspired by Froebelian Principles, please see here: <https://froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles>)

As part of our project Kristina Konstantoni (Scotland) and Eftyxia-Afroditi Panagopoulou (Greece), alongside a group of international practitioners, and based on the research findings with children and families, co-created specific play cafe principles inspired by Froebelian principles

## The importance of play

The importance of childhood and children's rights

Love, Care and Meraki

Attunement with nature and Sustainability



Joy and hope

## Autonomy and Harmonious Collective Co-Existence



Free play, Creativity and Freedom of expression

Knowledges, Embodied Experiences and Critical Reflexivity

## Participatory pedagogies

Pedagogies that are attuned to children's rhythms

Pedagogies of the commons



Social Justice, Anti-discrimination, Anti-racism and Anti-colonial

Inspired by

# Froebelian Principles

## The importance of play.

Play is a right that needs to be safeguarded. Play is innate and is very important for both children and adults as it connects, discovers, experiments, learns, relaxes, creates commons. Play can be serious business and fun. We recognise that play can also be a hurtful/toxic experience for children and this needs to be acknowledged and changed. Through play children understand and experience the world and others.

## The importance of childhood and children's rights

Childhood is important both in the present and for the future. It is not just a preparation for the next stage in life, however experiences in childhoods also have longer term impacts.

Children have rights to protection, participation and provision that need to be protected, safeguarded and materialised.

## Free play, Creativity and Freedom of expression

Free play, self-directed and child-community centred play is so important for children's and adults' learning, creativity and being. Creativity and freedom to express ideas, emotions, feelings and experiences through multimodal ways enables children and adults to express themselves in different ways. Through this children and adults express their 'inner outer and their outer inner'

## Autonomy and Harmonious Collective Co-Existence

Autonomy and interdependence in children's play and social experiences are important. Being able to participate and be part of larger communities through community organisations, civil society, families and friends is also important. Everything in the world is connected, entangled and interdependent. Both children and adults are relational and interdependent and seek to live together in harmonious, respectful and collective co-existence. The play cafe is a one stop space for both children and adults/carers to play, learn, enjoy, relax, get support. A space that also enables parents/carers to co-work whilst the child plays.

## Attunement with nature and Sustainability

Being attuned with nature and paying attention to the world and things around us, ensuring that our actions create a sustainable impact both for the now and for the future.

## Love, Care and Meraki

An ethics and praxis of love and radical care of both self, others and the wider world, is key for living well, for learning and emancipation. Pedagogy that is guided by professional love, care and meraki provides children with transformational, liberatory, curious and inspiring experiences.

## Knowledges, Embodied Experiences and Critical Reflexivity

All knowledges are valued and respected, academic, practice-based and embodied & lived knowledges. The play cafe space encourages continuous critical reflexivity and lifelong learning developments. Checking our biases and prejudices personally and collectively and taking action is essential. The play cafe values co-created knowledge towards more equitable and sustainable livelihoods.

## Social Justice, Anti-discrimination, Anti-racism and Anti-colonial

Play cafe spaces are spaces that practice social justice principles, anti-discrimination, anti-racism and anti-colonial practices. This means going beyond celebrating diversity and seeking 'inclusion', to radical transformation and equitable and liberatory processes, practices, structures and experiences. Social justice principles acknowledge interconnected and entangled common worlds, inequities and seek to challenge and remove these. Social justice approaches strive towards empathy, respect, solidarity and emancipation/liberation.

## Joy and hope

Joy and hope are important for living well, resisting hardships, and imagining better futures.

A pedagogy that is attuned to the different rhythms of childhoods. Encouraging the best play experiences through participative approaches, mutual collaboration and understanding of children's and families' lived experiences, interests, needs, their histories and cultures.

## Participatory pedagogies

Pedagogies that are attuned to children's rhythms

Pedagogies of the commons

A slow approach that places children and their communities at the heart of practice. Providing spaces, processes and resources that enable children and their communities to actively co-create, design and research equitable, sustainable and accessible spaces and experiences in their communities

Community, families, children, parents, carers, policymakers and stakeholders working together towards a collective and shared approach in providing the best play and social experiences to children and families, sharing ideas and resources in an equitable, participatory and democratic way.

# About the Project

This reflective resource is based on findings from The Play Cafe Project: What would Froebelian play cafes look like? An ethnographic, participatory, play and art based, co-created with young children and their families research project which started in October 2022-May 2025 (32 months) funded by the Froebel Trust. The Play Cafe Project was a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh (project lead) and the Network for Children's Rights (Greece). The Play Cafe Project had two aims: 1) understand the current opportunities that children have to play in community and business play spaces and their underlying philosophies and principles and 2) explore children's, families', practitioners' and business owners/staff views of play cafes and co-design what Froebelian play cafes may look like. The project worked with 42 families with young children (under 8) in Greece and Scotland from the early stages of research (e.g. theme of research), to co-designing child-community-centred Play Cafes, to the actual creation of a pop up play cafes and play festival experiences for young children and their communities. Young children traversed through different ages during this time. Our research process involved a group of 16 young children advisors. Seven young children advisors (1.5-8 years old) across Scotland and Greece, four of which were children of two of the researchers (in Scotland) and a group of 9 young children advisors from the Culture lab of the Network for Children's Rights in Greece. More than 400 people participated in this research and more than 2900 have attended our play cafe events and pop up play cafes throughout the years.



# Our Findings

We found that parents/carers with young children face a lot of anxiety and stress when playing in public life and public space. Young children and their families face many barriers (e.g. due to intersections linked to affordability/economic barriers; accessibility; location; barriers linked to social demographics and positionalities like: racial, religious and cultural barriers; gender, age, ability/neurodiversity etc; not feeling welcome; language barriers; dietary barriers; time/activity restrictions) and experience many intersecting inequalities when playing in public life (indoors and outdoors). Not all children have access to the same spaces and experiences; for example, recent refugee families or migrant families that do not speak English or migrant autistic/neurodivergent children feel isolated and do not always access public spaces due to fear of and/or experiences of discrimination and racism. Power relationships between children and adults or between children have an impact on play experiences, as do different play environments. High-quality play and social spaces are scarce and families that attended the Froebelian pop-up play cafes (in Scotland and Greece) considered them ideal social and play spaces. Despite the lack of high-quality play provisions, children were observed to be active agents in reclaiming play spaces creatively; however, there is a strong desire for the creation of high-quality play cafes in diverse communities/neighbourhoods. Play cafes are recognized as an important type of informal high-quality play and social provision in public life, a one stop space for both children and parents/carers to meet their needs and interests. Play cafes ideally need to have a flow between indoor and outdoor spaces. Feeling safe, having trust, feelings of belonging and a strong sense of community, respect of different communities, diversity in resources and staffing are very important, as well as practices of anti-racism and anti-discrimination.

As part of our findings we have put together this reflective resource about the ingredients to designing play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles with the aspiration to make 'amazing' and socially just play cafe spaces.

For more information about our findings and our work please check our website:\n  
<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/playcafe/>

Thank you to the **Froebel Trust** for funding this project.

# A little story about the background of The Play Cafe project

The play cafe idea which is inspired by Froebelian principles was created by Dr Kristina Konstantoni (University of Edinburgh) and her son Alex Bizas when he was around 2. Kristina and Alex, couldn't find a space where Alex could play freely and creatively and Kristina as a parent could enjoy and relax too. Kristina and Alex's experience of cafes and other places for play was very disappointing; they felt that they were not carefully designed to support play and did not all have adults that knew how to be with children so that they can play freely and creatively. Kristina and Alex went on a mission to find out what other children and families thought. They found that some families had even more difficulties than them. For example, autistic migrant children or poor refugee families or families of colour faced a lot of difficulties! Although they would find their own ways to work through these difficulties, as a team altogether we had to do something about this. The Play Cafe project Alex went to a nursery, Cowgate Under Fives that he really liked, because it was Froebelian. For Alex Froebelian meant that he loved the careful design of the space for play, the play materials and the adults that looked after him. Alex liked it that the adults cared about him, loved him, looked after him, knew a lot about children and listened to him. It was also fun! Alex and Kristina wondered why there couldn't be places like this outside of his nursery, when he goes to coffee shops for example with his mummy and this is how the Play Cafe which is inspired by Froebelian principles was born. Ariana, Kristina's daughter was born in 2021 and she has been integral in the play cafe Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis, sharing her knowledge, lived experiences and ideas enthusiastically and creatively, enjoying 'working with mummy for the Univeristy' until amazing play cafes are provided for all children.



# Ingredients of a Play Cafe

High-quality play and learning for young children

Design, Space and Resource Matters

Care, Love and Relationship Matters

Pedagogy and Meraki Matters

Ingredients to designing a Play Cafe

Community and Social Justice

Role of the Adult Matters

Knowledge sharing, Learning and Research

A One-Stop space for all provisions both for young children and adults/carers

Human and other-than-human Matters

Children's rights

De/anti colonial work

# High-quality play and learning for young children

High-quality  
play and  
learning for  
young children

Providing high-quality play opportunities and experiences for children is important for families and children. High quality play and learning spaces need to provide a range of provisions, experiences and materials that offer children a rich play environment both outdoors and indoors. It is important to have in the space high-quality resources and experiences (refer to Ingredient 6) for children to be inspired, curious, creative and enriched in play (e.g. independent learning, child-led experiences and freedom to play). Resources that are well-maintained, clean (hygiene) and are looked after. High quality play cafes need to have spaces where children can experiment with materials and resources freely (being mindful of others) and creatively, without being worried about 'making a mess' or 'making something dirty'. Having second hand clothes or aprons and shoes like wellies in the play cafe that can be borrowed during the visit/experience is important for families.

A space that enables high-quality play and learning opportunities for all children is important. Spaces which provide provocations that challenge children and require problem solving, spaces that are safe-as necessary allowing small risks appropriate to trigger children's curiosity and learning. Also, play cafe spaces that provide children with opportunities to make their own creations like craft making/their own artifacts and real cooking opportunities e.g. chocolate crispie making, making local, national and international cuisines/recipes. The role of the adult as a facilitator and guide is important, especially when a play experience is perceived risky by the adult (see Ingredient 1) so that there is a careful balance between free play and sensitive intervention without adults intervening 'too much' and then leading the play or limiting a play experience. In other words, Froebel's principle of 'freedom with guidance' is important. There needs to be a balance between safeguarding children's rights e.g. children's right to be protected and children's right to participation and play. Having a range of different play materials to facilitate children's different interests, needs and backgrounds is important; the type and quality of play resources and materials are more important than the number of play equipment. In addition, more open ended, natural and everyday materials that you can find in your everyday life are often more important and relevant to children's everyday experiences than any expensive equipment.

'Quality' is a contested term as it tends to be attached to a universal and dominant Eurocentric and Western definition which needs to be challenged, decolonised and expanded upon. For example, in an early years space children are engaging with resources like books about famous people, however the books represent mainly White Western and European people. To decolonise the early years space it would be important to reflect on this with the children, think together about 'who is here', 'who is missing' and why, and diversify the sources about different important people from around the world, so that different people from different contexts can be represented. For example see: Little People, Big Dreams <https://littlepeoplebigdreams.com>. *For further ideas please see Ingredient: De/Anti Colonial*



# Case Studies

## Thoughts for action:

The children are playing in a soft play area. Parents are to pay £8 per entry with limited amount of hours for children to play. There are restrictions enforced on the way children can play in these spaces ('do not climb up the slide', 'do not run', there are signs that segregate play depending on age e.g. 'only babies -2 year olds here 'only 5 year olds and above here'). The resources that are in the play space are mainly structured, and focused on physical play and do not support other aspects of children's creativity in play. There is no natural connection between indoors and outdoors. Children get bored easily after a session of play and also want fresh air.

## Thoughts for action:

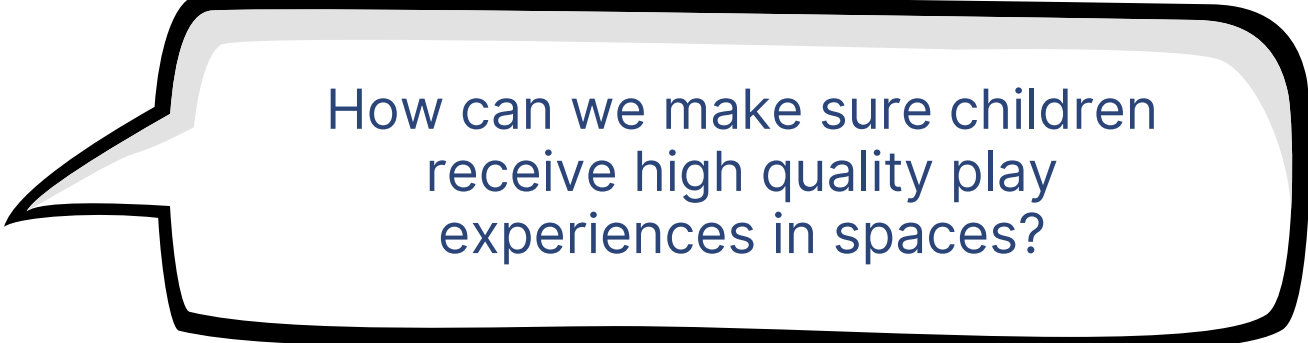
Moses showed interest in having access to the outdoors space looking out the windows. We had a conversation as he pulled my hand to show me the garden: "wow, this is so exciting. It's got so much space. It's very clean, I wished I could go out to the garden", I reply: "I might find the way one day, and if you like, we can go together".

## Thoughts for action:

There is an experience in the play cafe where children can make their own chocolate making crispie. There is a practitioner and a child engaged in this experience. There is a little booklet that describes the steps that one can follow to make a chocolate crispie (like a recipe book) and the child starts to read this with the practitioner. There is a point where they need to light the little candle so that they can melt the chocolate with real fire, the child then says: 'Can I light the fire on my own?' How would you facilitate this experience next?

***'...He enjoyed the construction table (woodcraft table), the woodwork and the bookcorner (...) I wish when my son was like toddler or really young, I wish I would have similar events, I wish I would have been to a space like that because it felt very safe for mums as well and very nurturing for children, I wish there were more things like that, and I wish I was aware of that... I think he would have benefited greatly(...).'***

***(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old, sharing their experience of We Play Festival play cafe)***



How can we make sure children receive high quality play experiences in spaces?

# Design, Space and Resource Matters

Design, Space  
and Resource  
Matters



A high-quality space that is aesthetically beautiful, clean (in terms of hygiene), designed by professional designers, young children and their communities to suit their needs and curiosities. What is defined as beautiful can mean different things to different people, however our findings showed that there was a common shared appreciation of natural elements and colours, which were considered aesthetically beautiful and calm. Natural resources and colours support young children in many different ways: learning, independent and interdependent play, deep and creative play, they are comforting, calming. A high quality space is culturally relevant and responsive. The design of the play space provides a flow of interconnected and holistic rich experiences for young children. It is important to provide enriching and engaging spaces and resources that spark children's curiosity and creativity and deep focused play (which has an impact on carers too e.g. if a child is deep in play then that provides the space for the carer to relax, work etc). The design of the space also creates a sense of comfort and feeling safe. It is a space that connects the indoors and the outdoors in an organic and fluid way which accommodates different types of energy (from intense, more physical, to slower, more introspective moments) and multiple uses. The design of the space offers both child-centred sized furniture [e.g. child-size furniture and other resources (e.g. cups, cutlery)] and adult-sized furniture for adults and children to relax, socialise, eat or drink (e.g. comfy sofas, armchairs, tables and chairs). The design of the space allows for a fluid, interlinked and blended experience between adults and children, where adults and children can observe and interact with each other and share social and play experiences.

## Feel and Design:

- Natural elements (e.g. plants) and colours (e.g. wood)
- Calm and peaceful (well-being for children and carers)
- Light (e.g. natural light, fairy lights, light colours and light temperature)
- Play resources that encourage creativity (art materials and open-ended and flexible play resources; everyday materials)
- Not overstimulating through colours and forms/shapes (not being too busy visually)
- Organic forms e.g. curves, soft forms through furniture and design
- Comfort and welcoming e.g. soft materials like cushions, armchairs, or children's sized sofas or little chairs and tables)
- Safe and comforting spaces to place your baby
- Multi-sensory design including smell, touch, light (e.g. if no allergies in a space then the essence of a natural organic humidifier like lavender)- but not overstimulating
- A space for privacy for breastfeeding mothers, for praying etc.

## Questions / Top Tips

- Do we have the children and families in mind when designing these play cafe spaces? e.g. the space available, the resources, the materials used and the environment it provides
- Do we intentionally choose the resources and materials for the space with care and thought based on child-community centred pedagogical thinking? (e.g. open ended, natural elements and colours used, organic forms and materials for the space).



**“The child (...) who has cared for another living thing (...) is more easily led to care for his own life.”**

**(Froebel in Lilley 1967, p.129)**

- Do we include people of colours' perspectives and indigenous knowledges into designing these spaces for all children and families? Or are we guided mainly by mainstream, dominant Eurocentric and Western ideas (e.g. what resources are used in the space, how do we design these spaces for all children and families of the community?)
- Does the space favour the needs of certain families and children more than the others? (e.g. does it provide easy access and availability for children with autism, disabilities?)

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Imagine Sally, a 4 year old child is taken to a soft play with her friends. She feels very insecure sliding down the tall slide in the main area, so other older children try to help her, and eventually she comes down with the help of an adult. She breaks into tears many times during her one hour slot in the space, and eventually leaves unhappy.

The same child visits a craft session at an art gallery, where there are lots of open ended resources and materials where she can create her own sculpture and then examine whether her creation floats on the water or sinks. Sally engages in very deep, creative play during her time. She was exploring all the resources, using them in different ways and testing her creation, while she was very proud with herself and gained confidence as well. She requested to stay longer at the venue which was a result of her happiness.

### Thoughts for action:

Beauty trends in design have been criticised for perpetuating white western ideals. For example, neutral colours and monochrome, and/or minimalism have become the preferred Western aesthetic; minimalism has become a 'trendy lifestyle choice' (Duvall 2021: 66 ). Moreover, 'aspects of 'pioneer' pedagogies, spatial organisation and use of particular materials have become highly commercialised, as evident in the growth of merchandising and coverage on the social media platforms Pinterest and Instagram. The McDonaldization (Ritzer 2011) of 'the pioneers' is now an ongoing concern in globalised capitalist market economies where what they come to symbolise – aesthetically, culturally, materially – is recognised as a unique selling point, of particular appeal to particular demographic groups' Osgood (2024:2).

### Thoughts for action:

Savvas is a young boy that attends the activities of a local NGO. He lives in the centre of Athens and his older sister, who is 16, takes him with her everywhere she goes. "I play everywhere!". Savvas enjoys playing in public transportation and in squares while his sister is hanging out with her friends. These spaces are more than often not designed for children, let alone for children's play. Public transportation isn't clean, neighbourhood squares in Athens are often not well kept either and there are a lot of issues regarding safety. When he visits the NGO, he has a space to play and bring many of his real-life experiences to his play. However, the resources at the NGO are also scarce and limited to what funding and donations allow. For example, he enjoys playing with buses and train tracks but it's difficult to find resource pieces sometimes to play or create them and he gets disappointed.

*“Το γεγονός ότι ήταν ένας χώρος που είχε πολύ ξυλο και είχε λίγα χρώματα δεν ήτανε έντονος χώρος, δεν το βρήκα έντονο χώρο ακόμα και εμένα την ίδια που είμαι νεύρο τυπική μπήκα μέσα κ μου έβγαλε κάτι ζεστό, άνετο και όχι overstimulating , non overstimulating ... ήταν πολύ ωραίος χώρος και επίσης ήταν η πρόσβαση εύκολη  
The fact that it was a space that had a lot of wood and had a few colours (pause) it wasn't an intense space, I didn't find it an intense space, even for me who is neurotypical, I came inside and it made me feel warm, comfortable and not overstimulating... it was a very beautiful space and it was also accessible”*

*(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old, sharing their experience of We Play Festival play cafe)*

*“I was amazed about the fact that everything was plain wood (Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe) , not only the fact that it was wood it has different you know feeling but also it was colourless and it was natural and i could see i don't know how to explain it but i could see it made things quieter, not quieter, eh they weren't distracted by the colours , they were more concentrated on that , i don't know how exactly it helped , i think it made a difference the fact that it was like natural colours (...) it (pop up play café) offers really great things (...) it is a great quality”*

*(Interview with Aggeliki parent, , Greek, 17 Nov 2022, via zoom)*

*‘A wealth of things to do!  
(Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe) Very impressive set-up and quality equipment’ (The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)*



*“it was all very positive, I thought the quality of the equipment was incredible, every single thing was in such nice condition”*

*“we tend to think that kids don’t need beauty, right? But I get so what and I feel that a lot of spaces for kids we never think about the aesthetics”*

*‘aesthetically beautiful and I and also surprised I’m like, oh, my God community you just don’t get these things for free...’*

*(Interview with Sophia, Parent, Italian, )*



*‘beautiful environment, lots of lovely natural materials. calm and constructive environment. so much so that X (child) slept throughout the music session!’*

*(We Play Festival, Postcard Feedback)*

*‘Wonderful nice to see diverse and beautiful toys - mostly plastic free that are for imagination’*

*(We Play Festival, Postcard Feedback)*

*‘happily surprised at the quality of the toys and the amount of wood as opposed to plastic. Staff were extremely friendly. Good variety of activities’*

*(We Play Festival, Postcard Feedback)*



*“it feels more natural and wholesome...I guess more sustainable for the world aswell and more sturdy, like things that could be passed on many times”*

*(Interview with White Scottish Mother , 9 Nov 2023)*

*“We loved the natural wooden objects - they created a calm environment and you could see that all children were very engaged.”*

*“I really believe in natural materials, natural play, and earth elements. I'm quite spiritual, so these elements have a calming effect. My children are drawn to forests, woods, and natural settings, which resonate with the essence of the play cafe, a place crafted from the very elements of nature.”*

*‘Obviously the equipment, em kind of strike really, really, you know of like what people would say like high quality, but as you know it was kind of natural and kind of hard wearing and you know it was kind of quite open-ended..’*

How does the design of your play space and the materials and resources promote a certain kind of ideal? The natural wooden design and not overstimulation of colours of our Froebelian play cafes was highlighted as significant by families, including families of autistic children.

However, how do we continue to design such spaces whilst making sure we are not perpetuating specific dominant Western aesthetics? how can we be equitable and decolonial in our play cafe design?



#### Further reading:

Duvall, SS. (2021). Playing with Minimalism: How Parents Are Sold on High-End Toys and Childhood Simplicity. In: Hains, R.C., Jennings, N.A. (eds) *The Marketing of Children's Toys*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62881-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62881-9_4)

Fry, T. and Willis A-M. (2017) Design and the Global South. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1): 1–2.  
Osgood, J., Archer, N. J., Albin-Clark, J., & Mohandas, S. (2024). Bewildering early childhood 'pioneers.' *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 32(4), 875–883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2024.2355096>

Spyrou, S. (2022). When design designs children: The importance of ontological design for childhood studies. *Childhood*, 29(4), 471-477. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682221125859>

# Care, Love and Relationship Matters

Care, Love  
and  
Relationship  
Matters

Relationships matter. Children should have the right to be cared for and loved. It is critical for a space to enhance and support the opportunity to build and create healthy, caring and loving relationships between individuals (e.g. inter-generational, adult-children, children-children and adult-adult relationships). 'To love is to be open and honest, caring, affectionate, we show responsibility, respect, commitment and trust (hooks 2000). Love in this context is about deep, attuned and caring relationships between children and adults, it is about what Jools Page coined as 'professional love' in early childhood and Grimmer (2023) as 'loving pedagogy', this love moves 'beyond romanticised or other contextually inappropriate forms of love' (Page 2017: )



A space where children and families feel connected, cared for and loved, spaces which they trust and they feel a sense of belonging. Connecting and building relationships between different people is significant as is creating safe spaces where children and families with similar cultures and languages can meet together especially for migrant and refugee families.

## Questions / Top Tips

- Is the space comfortable for e.g. grandparents to be with their grandchildren? (as well as other adults and children to be in?)
- Do we treat families and children with care, love and respect? Do children feel loved and cared for?

*'It was a very interesting experience because while they (Afghan families-refugee status) were all sort of sitting together at the tables, I could see that some of them were starting to go in the play space and play beside their children and with their children and it was sort of space where they could have this chance to socialise but their children were really excited and really blending beautifully with other children from other backgrounds...after some time they started socialising even though I know most of these women don't speak English fluently or very basic levels of English, they started socialising with the organisers...so Kristina went to welcome them and one of the grandmothers started stroking her hair, she sat down and started to stroke Kristina's hair and it was a beautiful connection that the grandmother was making with Kristina and it was such a beautiful scene to see, how comfortable they felt, how friendly they were and how welcomed they felt' (Interview with Reyhaneh, Iranian, Team Member, 4 November 2023)*



***“EVERYTHING - the people have been so kind and thoughtful. The toys were of such high quality - loved all the wooden toys. The lighting was beautiful, so bright”***

*(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)*

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Imagine a play space where the adult carers (e.g. practitioners) are not welcoming the children and families warmly (e.g. not smiling, not connecting with the families and children, are so distant etc). Imagine if the adults spoke to children abruptly and very seriously, telling them where to go and always making comments about what to do and not do.

Some children are trying to share their curiosities with the adults, but the adults seem too busy to pay attention, they just continue speaking to other adults or with their work.

*How would this look and feel different if it was driven by a 'loving pedagogy'?*

How can we make sure that the children and families in the play space feel welcomed, loved, cared for and they feel a sense of trust towards the play space and its people?



### Further reading:

hooks, bell. 2001. All about love: New visions. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.  
Page, J. (2018). Characterising the principles of Professional Love in early childhood care and education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 26(2), 125–141.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2018.1459508>

# Community and Social Justice

Community  
and Social  
Justice

A space which all children and families of different social backgrounds and life stories (e.g. nationalities, ethnicities, race, disability, gender, age, religion, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds) are welcome to use together, enhancing a sense of belonging. A space which values intergenerational play and co-existence. A space which respects diversity, feels safe and welcoming. It is also a space which promotes a sense of belonging and togetherness, which respects differences among each other and recognises inequities and inequalities that contribute to power imbalances. A space that works towards being anti-racist and anti-discriminatory and which works towards building solidarity amongst spaces and people. A space that works through conflict, recognising biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking.



## Questions / Top Tips

- Do we promote and protect children's right to play and to non-discrimination?
- How can we be both proactive and reactive in promoting anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practices?
- Is the space welcoming, safe, non-judgemental and culturally responsive?
- Will there be support for families and children to play freely in a shared space in the community? What happens when certain children and families are discriminated in a space?

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Mitsos is a young gypsy traveller boy who is walking in a square in Greece. He would like to join and play football with Kostas, a young white Greek child. Kostas is quite happy and starts playing with him. Kostas' grandmother notices, comes closer to Kostas and says 'lets go now, we need to go'. She doesn't want Kostas to play with him. She then says to Kostas to wash his hands (she is worried that Mitsos is dirty and hasn't been vaccinated)

### Thoughts for action:

'I don't go anywhere, where can I go? I am at home, always at home. I don't know anyone, I don't speak the language (English), without knowing anyone, where can I go?' (Interview with Mother Albanian, recent migrant, parent of three children, two of whom are under 7)

### Thoughts for action:

Tina is a 5-year-old girl from the Philippines that visits a local organization daily with her mom. This organization focuses on the holistic support of migrant and refugee women based in the centre of the city. The organization doesn't only focus on supporting women in their new life in Greece but offers services for their families and their children. "I come here with my mommy; she learns things too!", "I paint and play and sometimes my mommy rests, the couches are comfortable", "the food is very good in the kitchen"!


***"I don't want to be judged for this (pointing to the hijab), I don't want to be judged for who I am when I go into spaces..."***

***Not being asked to take hijab off "***

***(We Play Festival , Play Cafe & 'Whose space series: Children's Play in Public Life' Community and family Co-design workshop, What is your idea of an inclusive play and social space? 20 Sep 2023)***

***'child needs a peaceful environment where they can practice living in a community, play cafe provides this environment. Also, there are so many play equipments, which is not available for families in home'***

***(We Play Festival Postcard Feedback, new arrival, migrant mother)***



How can we make a space safe, comfortable, welcoming and anti-racist for all children and families to play together?

# A One-Stop space for all provisions both for young children and adults/carers

A One-Stop space for all provisions both for young children and adults/carers

A 'one stop space' for connection which enhances social cohesion and meets the different needs of all children, their important adults and their communities. An accessible shared space that is equitable and accessible and which provides a range of provisions both for young children and adults/carers, meeting both children and their parents/ carers needs. A one stop space where children and adults have access to high quality play and learning experiences, spaces to eat, connect, relax, socialise and get easy access and support to various services and informal support and information. (e.g. mental health, well-being, pre-natal, post-natal support)



## Questions / Top Tips

- Can members of the community (e.g. families and children) come to the space and get access to various key services that they need? (such as mental health, well-being support, social, food, and play provisions)
- Does the space consider the needs of both children and their important adults?

**“Play is to the child a mirror of life-long struggles that await him. Therefore in order to gain strength for these, children seek obstacles, difficulties and strife in their play.”**

**(Froebel 1887, p. 118)**

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

A mother is with her baby who is 1 years old. They have been in the house all day and decide to go out. Where shall they go? The soft play is expensive and also it doesn't really have an enriching play space for the baby to engage in deep and curious play, the food and coffee and the cafe area is not that nice either. Where can she go that would meet their different needs? She is also having a tough time with breastfeeding and with sleeping. She is so tired and low, it would be great to informally speak to someone about this and share her worries and concerns.

### Thoughts for action:

"it's because at home, I get very bored, I can't manage, so when they come home from school, I give them something to eat and then take them (out). At least when we go (out), my own situation gets better, I feel better, yes, and when we're home, they just want to play on the phone and watch TV, but when we go (out) then they won't ask for the phone all the time" (Mum to three children, Afghan)



How can we co-create spaces for families and children that meet their different needs?

## Accessibility

Consider the below:

- Continuity and permanency of a space is important to families with children, feeling a sense of belonging and trust to the space
- Consider distance and reach of the space; transportation. Is the space close by or do families need to get there via car, bus, bike, walk
- Spaces for buggies, baby changing facilities, toilets, breastfeeding spaces, a small kitchen with a fridge, a microwave, a space to pray and others
- Entrance steps that make it difficult to access with a buggy
- Time restrictions and time slots do not work well with families with young children; queuing is not pleasant for children and puts a lot of stress on the adults
- Pre-booking and pre-payment puts families with children off due to unpredictable circumstances with children
- Segregation of ages within the play spaces doesn't seem to work; spaces for different play energies should be available but not segregated and especially not segregated by age



**Think about the below case study:**

“the feeling that this is a temporary space, as soon as you entered, you felt that this is gonna be around for an hour and then it's packed” and he added, “ it's like when you go sit somewhere but you know you'll have to leave soon, right? Now I don't mean just one day, but a long-term view of the place, this is a space which will be packed in a couple of days and it might turn into anything, like clothes shop the next day. Yeah, it didn't give you that sense (of permanency) (Moses's -3 years old-Dad, Iranian)



*“Unique space - safe for kids to play with other children while parents can sit with a cuppa. Nice and relaxed and informal unlike other “baby groups” or the library or expensive cafes”*

*(The Heart of Newhaven Froebelian Futures play cafe, Postcard Feedback)*

*‘Very much so, the flexible and opportunity to meet mums and children locally. Emily doesn’t go to nursery so opportunities to meet up and explore are great’*

*(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcards Feedback)*

*“...children playing, they create those opportunities for parents to really connect.”*

*“...because all the other stuff need me to do something with her , gymnastics you know everything but that was like you know it is safe in here we've set it up that way , nothing will happen, let them play many kids are coming and going and having fun and you can sit for a second and have a cup of coffee, even though all of the parents were behind their children but still we had the opportunity to relax for a bit..”*

*(Interview Greek Mother, 17 Nov 2022 via zoom).*

*“Eva-Maria: Yeah, I think in the community it would be lovely if there was more of that because it does enable adults to, chat amongst themselves as well*

*Elizabeth: we were relaxed weren't we? We were relaxed*

*Eva-Maria: you know , yeah, knowing that the children are having a purposeful experience and you can enjoy watching them and you can interact with each other as well*

*(...)*

*Elizabeth: that was a lovely place to meet up*

*Eva-Maria: it was*

*Elizabeth: because the children were calm and we were able to ..*

*Eva-Maria: to have a proper chat*

*Elizabeth: yeah”*

*(Interview with Eva-Maria Grandmother of a mixed race child, White British and Elizabeth White British Grandmother of bilingual and trilingual children December 2023)*



# Knowledge sharing, Learning and Research

Knowledge  
sharing,  
Learning and  
Research

An accessible, comfortable and safe space for adults and children to interact and share experiences and knowledges, both formally and informally. A space for learning and unlearning experiences through various cultures and practices from different members of the community which connects local, national and global contexts. A space which is non-judgmental and anti-discriminatory and anti-racist for both adults and children of different cultures, nationalities, gender, sex, religions, race, ethnicities, social classes, abilities, disabilities and others, and practices to be together. The space is flexible and adaptable to enable adults and children to be & learn together, to share & do (e.g. create things) together with care towards each other in order to make better worlds & lives.

**“the child is in living relationship with the present, past and future of human development.”**

**(Froebel in Lilley 1967, p.57)**



## Questions / Top Tips

- Do we provide opportunities for adults and children to interact and communicate with each other comfortably in informal spaces in our academic, policy and professional spaces?
- Are families and children and members of the community welcomed in academic and public spaces? Are there restrictions for certain members (e.g. 'no running' and 'no playing' for children; parents cannot exceed a certain number of hours)? Are there private spaces for breastfeeding babies, for praying and others
- Is the space easily accessible to all members of the community (e.g. families, children, grandparents, practitioners, disabled people and others)? Does the space accommodate diverse needs and backgrounds, is it culturally relevant and appropriate)? Is there a babies changing room?
- Do we have instead of restrictive signs, positive affirmations that encourage respectful and fair interactions?
- Do we restrict children from interacting and playing with each other in the space? Or does the space encourage children's creativity? Does the space allow intergenerational interactions?

***"...the whole experience itself was very, heart-warming in a way, because I was able to communicate with parents and children at the same time"***

*(Interview with Nur, Postgraduate Student, Malaysian, about her perspectives of the Froebelian Futures play cafe)*



## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Families and children are in a community space (e.g. a cafe/play space). Some children are in pushchairs and others are walking. There are 'warning signs' around the space that says: 'no running', 'no shouting', 'no drawing', 'no playing'.

How would this look different in a space where adults and children are able to share knowledge and interact comfortably, how can the space foster relaxed, informal and enriching interactions?

# Role of the Adult Matters

Role of the  
Adult  
Matters

The role of the adult is very important. Froebelian approaches believe in something which is called 'Freedom with guidance', which means to let children play on their own or with others freely, with gentle facilitation and guidance alongside them, if and whenever necessary. This gentle and sensitive intervention evolves through attentive and participative pedagogy, through 'open questions' and continuous self/collective reflection.

The play cafe space allows adults (e.g. carers/practitioners) to step back and enable children's independent and interdependent free play. The adults' role is to safeguard and materialize young children's rights in a space which allows collaborative, relational and reciprocal relationships to be nurtured and unfairness to be challenged. The adult is involved in a continuous process of reflexivity, learning and unlearning to ensure socially just, participatory, anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and de/anti-colonial practices are adopted (see Ingredients 8 and 11).



**'It is of course easier for them to have an answer given by someone else but it is far more valuable and stimulating for them to find it out for themselves... [so] we should rather put them in the way of finding answers...'**

**(Froebel, 1830)**



*“Or go to the x as well, because they made suitable places for being parents and kids together at the same time. And the most important thing that I’m really interested in; there playing, is you can play with your children”*

*(Interview with Laleh, Iranian mother of one 5 year old child)*

*“One of the things and actually what I really like in your approach was really, you were kind of like a kindly ghosts! ... so being there but like very in a very gently way and then letting parents to come to you rather than you coming to parents”*

*(Interview with Asia, White Polish, Community Organisation, sharing her perspectives about the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)*

*“...there was no one rushing over saying 'don't do that', it seem quite free and very easy and she could roam around...”*

*(Interview with John, White English, Father of a 2 year old child)*



## Questions / Top Tips

- How do you relate and play with children? Do you talk at or with them? Do you instruct or do you facilitate, collaborate and/or guide?
- What is your body language and tone of voice like? Is it directive, strong, strict? Or gentle, open ended, kind, caring and attentive?
- How can we facilitate child-community-led play experiences, do we restrict children by instructing them to do things that we think is 'best for them'?
- What does 'freedom with guidance' look like for you?
- Do you trust and respect children? Or do you think adults know best?



### Thoughts for action:

Children are playing in a park. There are adults who are shouting to children 'be careful, don't fall', 'don't touch that', 'don't climb', 'don't take off your shoes', 'don't get dirty' or some other adults are always sharing their own ideas about what the children should or should not play, they act as they know best, 'why don't you draw and sit here, don't run around, you are blocking the way'.

### Thoughts for action:

Children are in a coffee shop with their parents. They are excited and want to play. Other adults start to look at them and their parents are feeling stressed and they say: 'we sit nicely in a coffee shop-no running!' or 'sit down on your chair or we will go home, don't make a mess'

How would this look differently through 'freedom with guidance'?

# Pedagogy and Meraki<sup>1</sup> Matters

Pedagogy and  
Meraki Matters

The importance of having a Play Cafe space which is underlined by a principled approach to learning, playing and being and where everything is done with intention, pedagogy and meraki. Meraki is a word used in Greece meaning to do something with soul, creativity, or love; to put something of yourself in your work. The Play Cafe space provides opportunities to practice child-community led, self-directed, free play, slow, participatory and social justice pedagogies as well as 'freedom with guidance' in supporting children's play and learning. A pedagogical practice which supports risks and creativity in play as well as opportunities for outdoor and indoor play. A pedagogical approach which supports 'hands on' and everyday real experiences e.g. cooking. The play cafe provides opportunities for children to play and be exposed to rich experiences with open ended, everyday and high quality resources and materials. Froebelian approaches encourage children to explore their inner and outer worlds, feelings and experiences together with other children, adults and members of the community.



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<sup>1</sup> Meraki

Inspired by Konstantina Papaspyropoulou



## Questions / Top Tips

- Do the resources /spaces / experiences / pedagogical practice inspire children to be creative and curious? Do the children feel enriched and deep in play?
- Do we provide opportunities for interactions between children and adults?
- Is there an essence of love, warmth and care when interacting and engaging with the children and community?
- Is there a principled approach to the resources/space/experiences/pedagogical practice (e.g. Froebelian principles)?
- Do we adopt a proactive and reactive anti-racist and anti-discriminatory approach?

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Imagine a play space where it has a lot of things going on at the same time, creating a very loud sensation for the children and adults. You see children and adults feeling stressed and overwhelmed. The resources at the play space are mainly structured, plastic, vivid colours and there are no opportunities for adults and children to engage and interact amongst themselves. Practitioners are limiting children from playing at certain areas which they consider risky such as climbing, woodwork or where children will get 'messy' or wet. The adults are also constantly suggesting what the children should do rather than being guided by the children or engaging with open questions. Practitioners are also working around a tight time structure and so all the children need to go out to play, go for lunch and to the toilet at the same time. There is no real free flow or child-centred/self-directed play.

*“Yeah I think the Froebelian ethos is also something very unique...basically emphasize the importance of play.”*

How would the above look differently, based on child-centred, social justice and slow pedagogies?

### Further reading:

Green, D. and Clark, A. (2024) A Froebelian approach. Time for childhood: Slow Pedagogy  
[https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT\\_Slow-Pedagogy\\_pamphlet.pdf](https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT_Slow-Pedagogy_pamphlet.pdf)



*“One of the things and actually what I really like in your approach was really, you were kind of like a kindly ghosts! ... so being there but like very in a very gently way and then letting parents to come to you rather than you coming to parents”*

*(Interview with Asia, White Polish, Community Organisation, sharing her perspectives about the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)*

*“...slow exploration with a peer, with herself, but just sort of where like, you know things, you know, enough supervision to make sure they're safe but not enough supervision to get in the way’*

*(Interview with Kevin, American, Parent, 12 December 2023)*

# Human and other-than-<sup>1</sup>human Matters

Human and  
other-than-  
human  
Matters



Everything is important in the world and everything is connected, humans and 'other-than humans' like nature, trees, animals, the planet, technology, sounds, environment, atmosphere, lights etc. The Play Cafe space crucially highlights the importance of both human and 'other-than-human matters' as connected and interlinked. The play cafe provides a sustainable, ethical and socially just way of living. The play cafe offers spaces and experiences that are calm, comfortable, warm, safe and soothing for everyone to be in and it accommodates different types of energy (from intense, more physical and fast, to slower, more introspective moments) and multiple uses. Everything is important from the significance of the lighting design (e.g. fairy lights, natural and warm light), the smell of natural essences [e.g. lavender, natural herbs (although this will depend on each setting and people that attend it in order to be mindful of any allergies)], the flowers, the textures and natural elements (e.g. sand and water), sounds (relaxed music), animals, and food were also mentioned as important in making the space warm, relaxing, safe, welcoming and enriching.



## Questions / Top Tips

- What other forms of elements are included in the space? (think about elements of air, lights, sounds, designs, resources, environment and technology).
- Does the space promote a positive experience for adults and children? Does the space feel warm, relaxing, non-judgemental and safe?
- How can the play cafe provide a sustainable, ethical and socially just way of living? Can you provide some practical examples?

**“The play of this time, as already indicated, is not playfulness: it is highly serious and of deep significance.”**

**(Froebel in Brodbeck, forthcoming)**

## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

Imagine entering a play space that emits a non-friendly, cold, unsafe feeling. There are no natural colours and sunlight, plants and flowers, no soothing music and the space smells and looks dirty/non hygiene. Children and adults in the space do not look like they are enjoying themselves – the adults are not chatting with each other, there is no laughter or sounds of play or conversations among the children. Children get bored easily and are not enthusiastic about the play space. The resources are not looked after, for example books are all ripped, resources are broken. There are a lot of plastic toys which are not sustainable, there is a lot of litter and non-recyclable bins. People are not considerate of the environment, of the light energy used in the space and towards each other e.g. throwing and breaking the resources.

How can we re-imagine this play cafe space so it practices a sustainable, ethical and socially just way of living? What is the role of the adult facilitator in that space too?

## Food

- Food plays an important role in bringing the community, children and their families together:
- Sharing food and eating together is important
- Making food together, including growing food together is important
- Healthy food options and food that considers different diets and religions is very important
- The cost of food for families with children is important

### Thoughts for action:

"Obviously somewhere to eat, you can't take kids out without having you know, them being fed. Maybe different types of eating options as well is important. So food and ice cream and, but I would prefer if it's a sort of more healthy type of place. So that you know, if I go to a place where I, you know, all I can see is sugary stuff, then I would not go back to that place, you know, if I'm taking them out, I would rather have yeah. So I would rather have them have a good healthy meal"

### Thoughts for action:

Artemis is a young mum (white Greek) (she had Katia when she was 24, Katia is 1 years old white Greek girl). Artemis finds it challenging being the only mom in her friendship group, especially a young mom. She often feels quite lonely, as she could not do many of the things that she previously did with her friends, such as going out late at night and making plans on the spot. Artemis often goes with Katia to the only coffee shop in the village which is next to her house which is at the square. This is a great space for her to also meet up with her friends and socialize. This coffee shop at the square is surrounded by some trees and offers much needed shade during the summer months and a protected from the sun play space for Katia. Since Artemis has grown up close to the square, people around know her well. There is a strong sense of belonging and community. Even though the coffee shop is a private business, the owners have known Artemis since she was a teen and know of the personal and financial struggles she is facing. They offer her coffees and food for free and are also a welcoming and supportive space for her and her young child.

In this coffee space Artemis is also allowed to bring her own food for Katia. Artemis has brought some food for Katia; she has cut some apricots into small pieces. She started giving her the fruit piece by piece and her coffee arrived as well. Once Katia finished her food, she came out of the stroller and holding hands with her godmother she starts walking and exploring a little bit along the square. However, once they left the shade from the trees, her godmother was worried about being pretty hot and tried to take her closer to the trees. Summers are becoming increasingly hotter in Greece due to global warming thus it can get extremely hot. Once they moved a bit closer to the trees and the shade, Katia saw two cats lying down, enjoying the shade. She quickly directed her godmother that was with her to them, and the cats seemed unbothered by Katia approaching. Our table was just a couple of meters away so her mom yelled that she shouldn't go toward the cats because they were sleeping and relaxing. Her godmother stopped her from going any closer and instead, they stood around a meter from the cats. Katia was excited to see them and started making loud noises. There are a lot of stray dogs and cats in Greece. Depending on their life experience in the roads some of them are friendly and calm and other times some stray cats and dogs can react in unpredictable and aggressive ways especially if children and adults go close. There always needs to be some caution and respect of boundaries and to gauge if the stray animals want connection or not.

## Questions / Top Tips

- How do human and 'other-than human' matters feature in an entangled way?
- What are the implications of global warming and extreme weather conditions to everyday life and play experiences? How can play and our everyday being and living be sustainable for the environment and socially just?

**Context:** Greece is facing polycrisis from climate crises and increase in natural disasters, to austerity and the refugee crises. More specifically, in Greece there are 'heightened risks from the escalating impacts of climate change and increase in disasters' which will last a lifetime with detrimental effects in children's education, livelihoods, health and wellbeing (UNICEF [2024](#)). According to UNICEF ([2024](#)) '307,763 children are estimated to be at high risk of being affected by climate change in Greece' and highlight that the 'climate crisis is a child rights crisis'. The climate crisis intersects with multiple other crises in Greece, like austerity and the refugee crisis. Greece has faced 'austerity measures and government spending cuts' which has impacted the most vulnerable in Greece (UNICEF [2020](#)). Greece is at the forefront of the refugee/migrant crisis as 'one of the major entry points into Europe for refugees and migrants' and has received over a million individuals since the beginning of 2015, 37% of them children. Recent statistics estimated 44,500 refugee and migrant children living in Greece, 'of which over 4,000 [...] unaccompanied' (UNICEF [2020](#)). The number of children arriving in Greece 'quadrupled in 2024' (Save the Children [2024](#)) with 'one in every four' arriving 'without family or a legal guardian'. These children have faced 'numerous violations of [their] rights' (UNCRC [2022](#)) as well as exposure to 'violence, exploitation and abuse' (UNCRC [2024](#)).

What would happen if there was a sign in the coffeeshop which said: 'Only food and drinks purchased in the cafe allowed. Bringing your own food and drinks is not allowed'

What are the various roles that small local village coffee shops offer here? Think about bringing families and friends together, building community and also providing drinks and food for free when this is a need. How can private businesses provide more social justice agendas, can they?



*“...“I really enjoyed the fact that it was, it was a cosy atmosphere, you know with this corner, with the music, it was very , it was casual and cosy and just simple, you know”*”

*“...there wasn't like, it was the sound wasn't like an adult talking about how things were going to be, or directing or anything the general sound was like a hum, a mixture of parents and carers having a conversation between themselves and children speaking and just experiencing and so...”*”

*(Interview with Rose, White British/Scottish Practitioner sharing her experience of the Froebelian Futures mobile pop up play cafe)*

*‘Yeah, they, I mean it was very obvious how all the children were responding to the atmosphere of the place. Very calm, very purposeful. I didn't hear him cry. And I was there all day. And he was always busy and. All of the children were busy.’*

*(Interview with Eva-Maria Grandmother of a mixed race child, White British, December 2023)*



*“.....they are actually leading what this play equipment is offering rather than the play equipment saying 'okay I am this so play with me in this way...’”*

# Children's Rights



High quality play cafes safeguard and materialise children's rights to live and to play. Play cafes are spaces which enable and nurture deep, unhurried, child-community led, independent and interdependent play and intergenerational experiences. A space which enables deep connections, attentiveness as well as a welcoming, anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and de-colonial environment.

The UNCRC (1989) is a legally binding agreement which outlines children's rights in order to live a safe, healthy and happy life. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland outlines the below in terms of the rights of children (under 18) [https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/articles/?sf\\_paged=2](https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/articles/?sf_paged=2).





*“..I want to play, play all day”*

*Stephanie, 2 years old,  
White Scottish/British  
Greek*

*“...freedom means to play outside”*

*Max, 6 years old, White  
Scottish/British Greek*

*‘One of the children, she was around 9 years old she started connecting with another one of our organisers, Iffah and she started drawing Iffah and they started doing some paintings together, looking at all the details of her clothes...*

*...another instance again Kristina and one of the other organisers, the girls started using the fabric that was there, the dressing up costumes and everything, and started making scarves for them so that was another special way of how they started connecting with the setting and the people organising the play café, through the materials*

*(Interview with Reyhaneh, Iranian, Team Member, 4 November 2023)*



*“Shall we go to the square? When are we going to the square? I want to go to the square to play”*

*(Lampros, White Greek 6 years old)*

# The rights of children (under 18) are

Everyone under 18 has rights

All children have these rights no matter what their differences are

Adults must do what's best for me

Governments must protect and respect my rights

My family should help me know and use my own rights

I have the right to live and grow as a person

I have a right to a name and to belong to a country

I have a right to an identity

I have a right to live with my family if they can keep me safe

I have the right to see my parents if they live in another country

I have the right not to be taken out of the country illegally

I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously

I have the right to find out and share information

I have the right to have my own thoughts and beliefs and to choose my religion, with help from my parents

I have the right to meet with friends and join groups

I have the right to keep some things private

I have the right to get information in lots of ways, as long as it's safe

I have the right to support from both parents, if possible

I have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated

I have the right to be looked after if I can't live with my own family

I have the right to have the best care if I am adopted

If I am a refugee, I have a right to help, protection, and the same rights as children born in this country.

If I am disabled, I have the right to special care and education

I have the right to be as healthy as possible

If I am not living with my family, people should keep checking I am safe and happy

If my family need it, they should get money to help bring me up

I have the right to have a proper home, food and clothing

I have the right to an education

I have the right to an education which develops my personality, talents and abilities.

I have a right to speak my own language and to follow my family's way of life

I have a right to rest, relax and play

I have the right not to have to work unless I am old enough and it is safe

I have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs

I have the right not to be touched in ways that make me feel uncomfortable, unsafe or sad.

I have the right not to be kidnapped, sold or trafficked.

I have the right not to be used by adults in ways that harm me

If I break the law, I have the right not to be punished in a cruel or unnecessary way

I have the right not to join the armed forces

I have the right to help to get better if I have been hurt or badly treated

I have the right to be treated as a child if I break the law

If the laws in my country protect me better than the articles of the UNCRC then those laws should stay.

Everyone should know about children's rights

## Questions / Top Tips

- Are children's rights safeguarded and materialised in the play cafe? What would this look like in practice? How would the children be and play? What type of interactions would we see between children and /or between children and adults? What kind of spaces would be designed when they are based on children's rights?



## Case Studies

### Thoughts for action:

There is a common public space in a square in Greece. It is the only open and free public space in the neighbourhood, so it gets very busy. Everybody is trying to claim or reclaim the space, babies, toddlers, young children, teenagers and adults. The older boys start to play football, they take over the whole square and start playing hard. They start to create their own imagined football goals with the play equipment that are already there, like the swings, the benches and the slides. The younger children get pushed to the sides and also get hurt. The younger children can no longer play in the swings and on the slides, neither in the middle of the playground as they can get hurt. It is hard as they all just want to play but they only have this common free public space.

How can we design spaces that can be used by different children and young people? How can we support both the older children and the younger children to co-exist and play in this space?

### Thoughts for action:

In a park, Dimitris (a migrant autistic 6-year-old) is being excluded, bullied and discriminated against by his friends. The children are ganging up against him, make fun of him and don't play with him. What would you do? How can we ensure that Dimitris' right to non-discrimination is safeguarded and materialised?

# De/anti colonial



The Play Cafe space recognizes that there are things in life, both now and throughout history that are and have been unfair and that it is important to recognize this and to do something about this, with the hope to make things better. This is something that we have to question, work on all the time, it never really stops. The Play Cafe space recognises and challenges the effects of colonialism and racism. The Play Cafe works with families to challenge unfairness through constant asking questions, thinking about people and how we play, work, learn, relax and spend time together and through social justice, anti-racist, anti-bias, anti-discriminatory, and anti-colonial practices. This includes challenging power including hegemonic whiteness and its intersections, dismantling white superiority and power in early childhood. Please see below for further resources, ideas and information.

## Questions / Top Tips

- How do we decolonize the play cafe space? How are we going to learn from those who have been engaging in this work of decolonisation (within and beyond early childhood), to decolonise our own minds, processes and practices? What does this mean practically?
- How do we challenge unfairness and inequalities, including white supremacy? How can we work together for change?



Extract from Scottish Storybook

## Our own reflections:

We have set up a play cafe space. Parents come to share that they have observed that we only have English books. We work together with the staff, parents, and the communities we have access to, to bring in different books from a range of cultures and languages.

Another parent brings in materials and fabrics for the play space so that the children can engage with. The fabrics are rich in colour, texture, patterns and are from India (where this parent is from). The fabrics have histories around identities, power, geographies and culture that the parent shares with us. We reflect as a team that the fabrics we had initially in the play cafe were mainly monochrome bought from a large Eurocentric and Western department store, reflecting in this way Western and Eurocentric ideals. The fabrics that we had initially were not really connected to personal stories (the same about the little tea sets that we had in the 'home space'). When we curated the next play cafe in Greece, we intentionally worked with the local communities and second hand markets to bring in second hand fabrics and tea sets, rich in stories to unfold with the children about 'where they belonged and where they have travelled from'. This is not to say that Eurocentric and Western design materials should not be part of the space, just that they should not be the only ones!

Ideas. Please continue to add below...

- Diversify the resources e.g. books, dolls, pencils, photos, materials
- Diversify the workforce e.g. diverse representation of staff
- Challenge Eurocentric and Western Narratives e.g. incorporate different perspectives, histories, cultures into the play space; incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems, practices and perspectives, respecting and valuing local traditions; incorporate children's and families knowledges and practices;
- Challenge stereotypes, bias, power and inequalities and support children and adults to develop anti-racist and critical thinking to analyse power relations/structures and understand the impact of colonialism and racism
- Work closely with children, families and communities to offer a play space and experiences that values their knowledges and perspectives
- Provide a play space and experiences that are culturally responsive
- Reflective practice
- 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', 'Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life' Tuck and Yang (2012) (see Thoughts for Action about place-stories)

Please continue to add...

*“...but this (Froebelian) play café with the fact that we had people like myself, who was a Farsi speaker or...the other organisers which didn't even speak (....) Farsi but they were so welcoming and so the atmosphere, the whole atmosphere was so welcoming and the other practitioners and the organiser was so welcoming even though they didn't speak through words together they had all of that connections through making that scarf, drawing doing the painting together, or even the grandmother (Afghan refugee) who started stroking Kristina's (organiser) hair all of that was a way that they were connecting to the people and the play café and that really made it feel trusting for them”*

(Interview with Reyhaneh, Iranian, Team member,  
4 November 2023)

# Case Studies

## Thoughts for action:

Alexis is a Black Scottish 3 years old child. She loves playing outside and finding worms and other insects in nature. However, everybody touches or comments about her hair and she doesn't like that. It is getting very annoying when everybody talks about or wants to touch her hair. 'Why does everybody, want to touch my hair?' When Alexis goes into the play cafe space she gets excited to play with her friends, but she notices that there are no black and brown dolls, no black and brown pencils in the drawing space and only white people characters in the storybooks. How do you think she will feel? What do we need to provide in play cafes so that we decolonise play cafe spaces and so that they are diverse and culturally responsive.

## Thoughts for action:

Children playing with and in nature has been a key point of discussion in early childhood education. How can playing with and in nature become de/anti-colonial praxis and thought ? Consider how place is more than just engagement, play and learning in the now. Nxumalo and Cedillo (2017, 99) considers place- stories that 'enact knowledge -making that politicizes, unsettles, and (re) stories place-based studies of childhood'. Place-stories that tell stories of inequitable relations and erasures (past-present-future), place-stories that include indigenous, ancestral stories and stories that discuss children's inheritance of neocolonial relations (Nxumalo and Cedillo, 2017, 104). What does this mean practically for you in your own life, work, practice and play space?

## Further resources

Arshad, R. (2019) Shaping practice: The impact of personal values and experiences. In Arshad, R., Wrigley, T and Pratt, L., (eds) (2019) Social Justice re-examined. Trentham Publications.

Arshad, R. (2021). From inclusion to transformation to decolonisation. University of Edinburgh: Teaching Matters Blog. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/teaching-matters/from-inclusion-to-transformation-to-decolonisation/>

Farukuoye, T. (2021). A'Adams' Bairns? An introductory self-learning tool on anti-racist praxis for teachers and educators. Anti-racist toolkit for teachers. Scotdec. <https://scotdec.org.uk/download/anti-racist-toolkit-for-teachers/>

Louis, S. and Betterdidge, H. (2024) Let's Talk about race in the early years. Routledge: Oxon.

Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (2014) Postcolonial and Anti-Racist Approaches to Understanding Play. In: The SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood. Brooker, L., Blaise, M. and Edwards, S. (eds), SAGE: London.

Pérez M.S. (2017) Black Feminist Thought in Early Childhood Studies: (Re)Centering Marginalized Feminist Perspectives. In: Smith K., Alexander K., Campbell S. (eds) Feminism(s) in Early Childhood. Perspectives on Children and Young People, vol 4. Springer, Singapore.

Resources and support for anti-racist education practitioners across Scotland: <https://www.antiracisted.scot>

Tuck, E. and Yang, W. K. (2012) Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society, 1 (1): 1-40.



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



# The Play Cafe Project

## Reflective Resource

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A team of  
young advisors from  
εργαστήρι  
πολιτισμού

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### Our other work

Find below our other published resources and social platforms to keep updated with our work.

We would love to hear from you, join us on Instagram and on our mailing list.



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