

Froebel Research Fellowship
The Voice of the Child: Ownership and Autonomy in Early Learning

Professor David Hargreaves (Froebel Research Fellow)
with Sue Robson, Hiroko Fumoto, Sue Greenfield, and Victoria Rowe

The Froebel Research Fellowship project has been running since 2002, when David Hargreaves was appointed as the first Research Fellow by the Froebel Research Committee and the National Froebel Foundation, who have jointly funded the project since then. Phases 1-3 of the project, 2002-5, were carried out by Sue Robson and Veronica Towers, from the Early Childhood staff of Roehampton University's School of Education, working alongside David Hargreaves: during that period Dr. Hiroko Fumoto replaced Veronica Towers in the team, which has subsequently been joined by Sue Greenfield in Phases 4-5 of the project, running from 2005-8. Phase 5 of the project, running from 2008-11, has a focus on the contexts of creativity in early learning. Hiroko Fumoto has left Roehampton University, but remains part of the project team as its external consultant: Dr Victoria Rowe has joined the team in 2009 as part-time Research Associate.

Research team

David Hargreaves

Sue Robson

Hiroko Fumoto

Sue Greenfield

Victoria Rowe

P. 1 Background

Friedrich Froebel placed great emphasis on the growth of knowledge from inside rather than from outside the child, which involves the unfolding of principles rather than merely learning rules by heart: 'what the pupils know is not a shapeless mass, but has form and life. Each one is, as it were, familiar with himself.....' Accordingly, he opposed education which seeks to impose knowledge from the outside: 'We possess a great load of extraneous knowledge, which has been imposed on us and which we foolishly strive daily to increase...we have very little knowledge of our own that has originated in our own mind and grown with it' (Froebel, 1826, p.156).

The Froebel Fellowship Research project is investigating the extent to which such Froebelian ideals might be met within the demands of contemporary early childhood education: this is a highly active and important part of current education policy with a prominent political profile. Froebel's ideas underlie the main concerns of this research, which are to look at ways in which practitioners can 'find a space' for children's own ideas and thinking, and thereby promote their personal development. To what extent are children allowed to learn autonomously and to gain ownership of their learning within the constraints of contemporary early education? This is an important current concern, since recent Government Education Departments have consistently identified children's personal, social and emotional development as underpinning aspects of the curriculum for young children.

P. 2 Phases 1-3, 2002-5

Phases 1-3 investigated the attitudes and practices of the practitioners in relation to the development of children's personal and social and cognitive (thinking) skills, within the context of the current demands of the Foundation Stage curriculum.

There were two main strands: the Teachers' strand, designed to investigate effective practitioners' intentions, attitudes, and practices, and the Children's strand, designed to investigate the views that children express about their activities and environments, and their interactions with peers and adults.

Phase 1 collected in-depth interview and observational data from a small sample of teachers, identified by peers as good practitioners in this field, and their classes/groups of children, aged 3, 4 & 5. The data collection from the teachers' strand turned out to be more fruitful than that from the children, and a focus developed on teachers' attitudes towards pupils' thinking: a teacher interview study has been published on their perceived roles in supporting and facilitating children's thinking (Robson and Hargreaves, 2005). In summary, our data showed that:

- There was a high level of commitment amongst the teachers towards extending children's thinking, although this often remained implicit rather than explicit in their planning and their own thinking'.
- There were differences in their views about the extent to which they felt they should intervene in children's activities, and in their views on the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, and the impact it has had on their practice
- There were clear differences between those who worked in nursery settings (3 – 4 year-olds) and those in reception classes (4 – 5 year-olds).
- The importance of ensuring time to enhance children's thinking was highlighted in the study.

Phase 2 was a questionnaire study which pursued some of the issues identified in Phase 1, investigating 80 professional practitioners' perceptions of their roles in supporting and extending children's thinking, and their experience of their own process of thinking being extended by the children. The publications and presentations arising from this phase focus on the 'ownership' of children's thinking, and the specific issue of time available to extend children's thinking. The results showed that:

- Early childhood professionals place children's thinking high on the agenda in their practice.
- Their experience of facilitating children's thinking involved the extent to which they felt able:
 - to provide enough time for children to complete activities
 - to play with the children
 - to 'stand back' and observe the children
 - to provide opportunities for children to make decisions for themselves
 - to involve parents/carers in promoting children's thinking
- Their feelings of self-efficacy as early childhood professionals are strongly associated with the extent to which they feel they have enough time to enhance children's thinking.

Phase 3 followed up the issues raised by Phase 2 with an in-depth interview study of 13 of the practitioners who had taken part in Phase 1, investigating in particular their views of making time for children's thinking. The focus was on the ways in which professionals working with young children aged 3-5 believe that they make time to extend children's thinking. A preliminary analysis of the interview data revealed the importance of:

- Prioritising the development of thinking in professionals' day to day interactions with children
- Shared understandings between team members
- Confidence in working within a statutory curriculum.

These results illustrate the need for further exploration of:

- Children's experiences of their involvement in activities
- The quality of interpersonal relationships in early childhood settings: these may facilitate or inhibit professionals' opportunities to promote children's thinking.

P. 3 Phases 4a-4c, 2005-8

Phase 4 (September 2006-August 2007) and phase 5 (September 2007-August 2008) are investigating the ways in which social relationships in early childhood settings support and influence children's creative thinking. The project is based on both Froebelian and socio-cultural perspectives on children's development (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff 1990) and draws on theoretical frameworks such as developmental systems theory (Ford and Lerner, 1992). The main research question addressed in the investigation is as follows:

How do social relationships in early childhood settings support and influence children's creative thinking?

This is considered from three points of view:

- **Phase 4a:** Children's perspectives: What are the children's perspectives on their activities in early childhood settings, and how do they reflect upon these? The investigation involves observation and video recording of episodes of children's play. These episodes form the subject of reflective discussions between the children and their teachers. **(Sue Robson)**
- **Phase 4b:** Parents/ carers' perspectives: What opportunities do parents provide for children to engage in creative thinking? Parents/ carers' perspectives are elicited through questionnaires and one-to-one semi-structured interviews involving commentary on selected video extracts. **(Sue Greenfield)**
- **Phase 4c:** Teachers' perspectives: How are teachers' experiences of relating to young children shaped by children's developing creative thinking, and vice versa? The examination of teachers' perspectives involves questionnaires, one-to-one semi-structured interviews involving commentary on selected video extracts, and the administration of Student-Teacher Relationships Scales (Pianta, 2001). **(Hiroko Fumoto)**

This work has included the development of a framework for analysing observable behaviour in young children's creative thinking, which has been successfully used in an in-service session with a local nursery school, two maintained nursery schools/early years units and one private workplace nursery. Data collection includes video recording of play episodes, reflective discussions with children, parents and teachers, and completion of Student-Teacher Relationship Scales, as well as the development of specially designed research instruments.

P. 4 Phase 5, 2008-11

Phase 5 is characterised by two main features. First, we retain our emphasis on the differences between the perspectives of the children, their parents, and their teachers, as that produced some unexpected and interesting findings in Phase 4. Perhaps the most striking of these was that in some settings there is a tension between some parents' assumptions about their involvement and relationship with teachers in the setting, and their knowledge of their children's creative thinking.

The second main emphasis stems from the development of our theoretical thinking, and in particular in our renewed emphasis on the social context of early learning, and on the perspective of socio-cultural psychology. We focus accordingly on the two main environments within which young children develop and learn: the home and the school, and we investigate differences between their play and creative activity in these two contexts. We shall do this by making video recordings of children engaged in play and creative activities at home and at school, investigate any differences between them, and interview teachers, parents and the children themselves about various aspects of these, which derive from the following research questions:

Research questions

The central research question is 'what are the main differences between children's play and creativity at home and at school?' This leads to several further questions:

- (5a) What views do children express about their own roles in these activities?
- (5b) What views do teachers express about their own and the children's roles in these activities?
- (5c) What views do parents express about their own and the children's roles in these activities?
- How do teachers see the role of parents in these activities, and vice versa?

Methods

To investigate the main research question above, data from the videotaped play episodes will be analysed using a specially designed Analysing Children's Creative Thinking (ACCT) Framework which was developed in Phase 4. The remaining research questions (5a-c) will be addressed by using video-stimulated reflective dialogues (Hargreaves, Moyles and Patterson, 2002), which will take the form of semi-structured interviews with children, teachers and parents, designed to elicit their underlying beliefs about the nature of their respective roles in preschool activities, based on selected recordings. An interview schedule, developed from that currently used in Phase 4 of the project, will be pilot tested and refined in order to cover three broad areas:

- activities and environments (eg. What do (children) like to do best? 'Who are (children) doing (this activity) for?' 'Why are (children) doing it?')
- peers (eg. Do (children) work with others? Who do (children) choose who to work with? How do (children) do (this activity) together?;
- teachers and other adults (eg. 'Who tells you what to do? 'Whose idea was it?')

p. 5 Froebel Research Fellowship: Publications and presentations

Books

Robson, S. (2006). Developing thinking and understanding in young children. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-36108-7 (PB).

Fumoto, H., Robson, S., Greenfield, S., & Hargreaves, D.J. (in preparation). Creative thinking in young children: What, where, and with whom?

Journal articles

Robson, S. & Hargreaves, D.J. (2005). What do early childhood practitioners think about young children's thinking? European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 13, (1), 81-96.

Fumoto, H. and Robson, S. (2006) Early childhood professionals' experience of time to facilitate children's thinking. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 14 (2), 97-111.

Robson, S. (2006). Supporting children's thinking in the foundation stage: Practitioners' views on the role of initial training and continuing professional development. Journal of In-service Education, 32 (3), 341-357.

Fumoto, H., Hargreaves, D.J. & Maxwell, S. (2007). Teachers' perceptions of their relationships with children who speak English as an additional language in early childhood settings. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 5(2), 135-153.

Marshall, N.A. & Hargreaves, D.J. (2007). Musical style discrimination in the early years. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 5 (1), 32-46.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2008). Commentary. Special issue of the International Journal of Educational Research, eds. D. Miell, K. Littleton & S. Rojas-Drummond on 'Music education: A site for collaborative creativity', 47, 75-77.

Robson, S. & Fumoto, H. (2009) Practitioners' experiences of personal ownership and autonomy in their support for young children's thinking. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 10(1), 43-54.

Conference papers and seminars to professional groups

Hargreaves, D.J. (2004). Developing creativity in music and the arts. Invited keynote address, 2nd International Early Childhood Music Education Conference, Panevežys, Lithuania, 12.4.04. Kūrybiškumo ugdymas muzikoje ir mene, in Vaiko Muzihkos Pasaulis, pp. 6-11.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2004). The inner and the outer in artistic and spiritual education. Invited keynote address, International Research Conference on 'Parallels of Artistic and Spiritual Education', University of Šiauliai, Lithuania, 14.4.04.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2004). Developing creativity in young children's songs and drawings. International Froebel Society Conference, Froebel College, University of Surrey Roehampton, 2.7.04.

Robson, S. (2004). Children's thinking in the early years. First Roehampton Education Research Conference (ROERCE 1), 16.12.04.

Robson, S. & Fumoto, H. (2004). Who owns children's thinking? International Froebel Society Conference, Froebel College, University of Surrey Roehampton, 2.7.04.

Fumoto, H. (2005). Making professional identities through relationships between teachers and children in early childhood settings. ESRC/TLRP Seminar on 'Enactments of professionalism: classrooms and pedagogies' at King's College, University of London, 5.7.05.

Fumoto, H. and Robson, S. (2005). Adults' experiences of extending children's thinking in the Foundation Stage. European Early Childhood Education Research Association: 15th Annual conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education. Dublin, Ireland, 2.9.05.

Fumoto, H. & Robson, S. (2005). Making time to extend children's, thinking in the foundation stage. Second Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 2), 15.12.05.

Greenfield, S. (2005). Creating parent-teacher partnership through home visiting in early childhood settings: a consideration of the balance of power Second Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 2), 15.12.05.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2005). Why do children do creative arts work at school? Teacher and pupil views. Second Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 2), 15.12.05.

Robson, S. (2006) Unleashing children's creative thinking. Hillingdon Local Authority Professional Development Day, 24.06.06.

Robson, S. (2006) Children learning and thinking. Eastwood Nursery School Professional Development Day, 30.6.06

Fumoto, H. (2006). Teacher-child relationships and children's creative thinking in early childhood: the teachers' perspective. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, Third Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 3), 14.12.06

Fumoto, H. (2006). Teacher-child relationships in early childhood settings: teachers' perceptions and children who speak English as an additional language in England. Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference: 7th Annual conference. Seoul, Korea, 27.7.06.

Fumoto, H. (2006). Making time to extend children's thinking. Barnsley Foundation Stage Conference, Woolley Hall, Wakefield. 4.9.06.

Greenfield, S. (2006). Parent teacher partnership: can this be achieved without training? European Early Childhood Education Research Association: 16th Annual conference on Democracy and Culture in Early Childhood Education. Reykjavik, Iceland, 1.9.06.

Greenfield, S. (2006). Creating parent-teacher partnership in early childhood settings; a consideration of the balance of power between parents and professionals. Symposium on Methodologies and Early Years Research, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference 8.9.06.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2006). Ownership and autonomy in aesthetic learning: the Froebel Research Fellowship. Invited contribution to symposium on Research on aesthetic learning during early childhood, Academy of Music and Drama, University of Göteborg, Sweden, 23.11.06.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2006). Introduction: the Froebel Research Fellowship. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, Third Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 3), 14.12.06.

Robson, S. (2006). What are the children's perspectives on their activities in early childhood settings, and how do they reflect upon these? Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, Third Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE 3), 14.12.06

Robson, S. & Fumoto, H. (2006). Supporting children's thinking: Ownership and autonomy in early learning. European Early Childhood Education Research Association: 16th Annual conference on Democracy and Culture in Early Childhood Education. Reykjavik, Iceland, 1.9.06.

Fumoto, H. (2007). Developing effective teaching and learning methodology. Keynote speech at United Kingdom & Malaysia: Forward Together in Developing Nursery & Pre-School Education Conference & Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, 15.3.07.

Fumoto, H. (2007). How do social relationships support children's thinking? Somerset nursery school, Professional Development day, 19.4.07.

Fumoto, H. (2007). Teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationships and their evaluation of children's creative thinking. Pacific Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference: 8th Annual conference, Hong Kong. 5.7.07.

Fumoto, H. (2007). Teacher-child relationships and children's creative thinking in early childhood settings. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, 6.9.07.

Fumoto, H. (2007). Teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationships and their evaluation of children's creative thinking. Fourth Roehampton Educational Research Conference, 14.12.07.

Greenfield, S. (2007). Parents' and carers' perspectives on children's creative thinking at home. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, 6.9.07.

Greenfield, S. (2007) Parent's views of the children's creativity. Panel session on Creativity. CIRCLE symposium, Roehampton University, 13.11.07.

Greenfield, S. (2007) Parents' and carers' perspectives on children's creative thinking at home. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, Fourth Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE4), 14.12.07.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2007). Ownership and autonomy in early learning: The Froebel Research Fellowship. British Educational Research Association Annual conference, 6.9.07.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2007). Thinking about creativity. Panel session on Creativity. CIRCLE symposium, Roehampton University, 13.11.07.

Robson, S. (2007). What are the children's perspectives on their thinking and learning? Somerset nursery school, Professional Development day, 19.4.07.

Robson, S. (2007). What are the children's perspectives on their learning and thinking?, Balham Nursery School, Professional Development Day, 18.5.07.

Robson, S. (2007). Children's perspectives on creative activity and thinking in early childhood settings. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, 6.9.07.

Robson, S. (2007) Children's perspectives on creative activity and thinking in early childhood settings. Symposium on Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning, Fourth Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE4), 14.12.07.

Robson, S., Greenfield, S., Fumoto, H., & Hargreaves, D.J. (2007). How do social relationships in early childhood settings support and influence children's creative thinking? Symposium on Children's Learning and Thinking in the Arts: Dialogue,

Interaction, and Social Relationships. European Early Childhood Education Research Association: 17th Annual Conference on Exploring Vygotsky's Ideas: crossing Borders. Prague, Czech Republic 1.9.07.

Fumoto, H., Greenfield, S. & Robson, S. (2008). Autonomy, creativity and social relationships in early learning. Invited Researcher-Practitioner Seminar, Oxford Brookes University, 13.2.08.

Hargreaves, D.J. (2008). Learning to discern: The Froebel Research Fellowship. Invited contribution to international research workshop on Learning to Discern: Department of Education, University of Göteborg, Sweden, 30.1.08 – 1.2.08.

Robson, S. (2008). What are the children's perspectives on their activities in early childhood settings, and how do they reflect upon these? Invited seminar, Cambridge University, 19.2.08.

Robson, S. (2008). Self-regulation and metacognition in young children: the role of Reflective Dialogues. 3rd International Froebel Society Conference, Wheelock College, Boston. 9-12 July 2008.

Robson, S. (2008). Self-regulation and metacognition in young children: the role of reflective dialogues. 18th EECERA Annual Conference University of Stavanger, Norway. 3-6 September 2008.

Robson, S. (2008). Producing and using video data in the early years: ethical questions and practical consequences in research with young children. Fifth Roehampton Educational Research Conference (ROERCE5), 18.12.08.

May 2009