

## **8<sup>th</sup> International Froebel Society Conference, Hiroshima**

**6-8 September 2018**

The following are individual reports and commentaries from the Trust funded participants. The consensus is that funding and planning that went into the activities to promote the Trust were extremely valuable and effective.

**Sue Robson, Peter Elfer and Sacha Powell**



Conferences offer many opportunities, formal and informal, to network and draw participants' attention to the role of organisations, new initiatives and developing trends, as well as learning about these from others. An international conference is particularly productive in this respect.

The IFS conference was no exception to this. With a 100+ participants from Japan, China, Taiwan, Europe, America, Singapore and Australia, we had a very diverse community to whom we could describe the role of the Trust and its priorities and aspirations.

The setting and context for the Conference was highly appropriate, and very successful. As a city, Hiroshima has a demonstrable commitment to peace, and this came through in all aspects of the conference, including a speaker with personal memories of 1945, and opportunities to visit the Peace Park, museum and monuments. The pairing with the Japanese Society for the Study of Pestalozzi and Froebel was also a strong idea, alongside keynotes from

Japanese presenters making excellent links with Froebel and Japanese traditions such as origami, and the developer of an extensive system of blocks and block play, who made links to Froebel's Gifts.

One of the key events at which this was able to happen was in the pre-conference visit to the Gaines Kindergarten on the outskirts of Hiroshima. This kindergarten was established in 1981 and has become renowned as a Japanese nursery centre of excellence, based on Froebelian principles. As a prelude to the conference, the richness of the opportunities for play and learning in the outdoor environment of the nursery, provided the most practical, 'Froebel in Action', demonstration of the power and contemporary relevance of Froebelian principles.

We were able to build on this visit to promote the work of the Trust in two key ways during the conference.

First, at the formal conference dinner, Sue Robson led the Froebel Trust Reception, and either introduced or indicated all delegates with a connection to the Trust, including Trustees past and present, Oksana Lissovets as Finance Manager, PhD students with Trust Bursaries, and researchers funded by the Trust. These all stood up to show who they were, and she invited conference delegates to talk to any of them about the Trust and their part in it. Sue said a little about the Trust, and used the 2 pamphlets as a means of explaining the Trust's mission, to promote the value and relevance of Froebelian principles to the education and learning of children in the 21st century. She encouraged delegates to find out more about the Trust, to get involved themselves, and to apply for funding for their own projects. Sue concluded by introducing Peter Elfer and Jane Whinnett, as co-chairs of the Education and Research Committee of the Trust, and Research and Education Sub-Committee Chairs.

Peter was able to tell the conference about the research committee and its primary roles of advising the Trust on research priorities, commissioning research work, and monitoring research in progress and ensuring dissemination of findings. We were able to speak to the commitment of the Trust and the committee to a broad range of research commissioning, valuing both quantitative and qualitative studies. We were able to alert the conference to the major expansion of research funding awarded by the Trust in the last two years, with two major open calls, partner grants and doctoral bursaries. Members of the research committee were thanked for their contribution to the research activity of the Trust but this also provided an opportunity to invite others interested in supporting the research work of the Trust to consider contributing to the committee. Current research grant holders and others attending the conference and funded by the Trust, were invited to stand up so that conference participants could identify them and feel welcomed to approach them for further information on their projects.

Jane Whinnett spoke about the work of the Education Sub-Committee and will report in more detail on that directly. Our presence together on the platform was important and powerful. We hopefully communicated visually and verbally the Trust commitment to being 'more joined up' in our research, education and practice development endeavours, underpinned of course by the Froebelian principle of an holistic approach.

Second, there were numerous informal opportunities in plenary and seminar sessions as well as in the more social aspects of the conference to introduce ourselves as Trustees, describe our work, both that funded by the Trust and other work and to build connections. Alongside informal discussions, more formal potential contacts were made with delegates from Japan, China, Taiwan, and Australia (Sue), which will now be followed up.

In parallel sessions presenters all ensured that the Trust logo was prominent in their powerpoint presentations. Between us, we ensured that we attended sessions with presenters whose work has been funded by the Trust, and it was very positive to see, first, how strong the work is, and second, how well it was received by attendees.

### **Sandra El Gemayel**

I am truly grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend and present my paper at the 8<sup>th</sup> Biennial IFS Conference which took place in Hiroshima, Japan. It was an unforgettable experience that will stay with me for a lifetime. The theme of the conference *Education for Peace* deeply resonated with me both on a personal and on a professional level. My PhD thesis, the impact of armed conflict and displacement on refugee children's play and childhoods in Lebanon, fit in perfectly with the theme and I was able to link between the presentations and my own work, and to think of my study within a much broader context. One of the most profound and moving moments that I experienced during the conference was listening to Keiko Ogura's first-hand experience of the atomic bomb. Listening to her story, I was able to draw many parallels between her experience as a child who lived through the atomic bomb and its aftermath, and the experiences of the refugee children who took part in my study. Decades apart, on opposite sides of the world, and coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds, it was clear that armed conflict in its different forms has been deeply wounding children all over the world and the only permanent solution is to put an end to these conflicts. Regardless of her harrowing experience, Keiko does not want revenge. She wants to educate the youth and show them how pointless and destructive war is and how its effects can last for generations. This was a recurring mind-set that came up not only during the conference itself, but also as I walked around Hiroshima and visited the Peace Memorial Park, different monuments and the Atomic Bomb Dome. Similarly, although my study looks into the effects of war on children and into ways of improving children's play opportunities in Lebanon, one of my main points of discussion focuses on not simply adopting the notion of the 'resilient child' who can overcome such terrifying experiences, but on shifting the responsibility from the individual back to those who are actually responsible for the armed conflict and finding an end to these conflicts.

Furthermore, presenting my paper 'Play between armed conflict and displacement: The cases of Ahmed and Maria' at the conference was a great opportunity for me to share my findings with others and to get feedback from attendees of the conference. The three presentations that were presented on my panel seemed to share the common theme of social justice. Taking into account the time and place in which Froebel developed his theories, my presentation and those of Grace Choi and Jane Read all demonstrated how Froebel's principles are still relevant today and in different countries around the world. A rich panel discussion followed the three presentations as we looked into children's rights violations in the three diverse contexts of our respective studies and at how theory was

used in each context. Moreover, Dr. Yukiko Nishida's Keynote speech *Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something Froebel?: The development of Origami in Early Childhood Education* paid particular attention to the way in which *Transitology* can be used when transferring theory from one place to another. The theory being adopted should be translated and adapted based on the new country and so transformed based on local culture. This was of interest to me and made me think about how I was implementing Froebelian theory in my study with refugee populations in Lebanon.

In addition to presenting my paper and attending presentations and keynote speeches, many networking opportunities arose throughout the conference. I met Froebel Trust members and PhD students, and also discussed my work and that of the Froebel Trust with other conference attendees. I had meaningful discussions with a few people who had an interest in working with refugee communities and/or with young children in particular, talking about our work and possible future collaborations. It was particularly rewarding for me to meet so many members of the International Froebel Society and discuss Froebel and the implementation of his theories across such a diverse range of contexts. It was exciting to meet people whose books and articles I've read, to build relationships with researchers in the field and to discuss my work with other researchers and listen to them talk about their own studies.

The conference was extremely informative and useful in terms of networking, increasing the Froebel Trust's profile and learning about other colleagues on an international level. During the course of the stay, speaking and networking with people from a wide range of different countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Germany etc it was evident that there was much enthusiasm about Froebelianism and a real desire to know more and work with us in the future. Managing to attend all the presentations made by our own Froebel Trustees, students and colleagues we fund, it was evident that we have a range of very talented and passionate Froebelians.

The organisation, content and supportive atmosphere of the conference was excellent, thanks to the staff at the Froebel Trust, colleagues in Japan and the IFS. The success of the conference has very much raised the Froebel's Trusts profile on an international platform having had colleagues comment on how well the Trust was doing and increasing its engagement both in the UK and abroad. It is important to continue and expand our work such as these through which there is much to be gained in helping young children in the long term and increasing the Trust's profile.

### **Sultana Choudhry**

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### **Valeria Scacchi**

The opportunity to participate to such a diverse and highly regarded conferences has been invaluable. For this I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Froebel Trust for making this possible. The conference has been a stimulating experience where I had the chance to network with a variety of experts in my field from Japan, China, Taiwan, Europe, America, Singapore and Australia just to name a few.

The conference theme 'education for peace' has helped me to think about my PhD study on 'reconceptualising professional development for educators in London and Tuscany' in different ways and as having a multitude of applications that I didn't think possible before.

The concept of education for peace has helped me to see how my work will not only contribute to a more Froebelian approach to professional learning and development and an increase in knowledge on the subject, but also it will contribute to promoting the concept of an educated workforce for peace in Early Childhood. The conference and the several presentations I watched have inspired me to see my field of study in a much more open way that I thought before. The keynote from Dr Yukiyo Nishida from the University of New England in Australia has resonated with me because of the concepts presented of transferring, translating and transforming Froebel's philosophy in different contexts. These transformations and adaptations are always done in the upmost respect for both the context and Froebelian education. It was inspiring to see Froebelian tradition to be carried in different contexts such as the one showcased by Libby Lee-Hammond, Elizabeth Jackson-Barrett and Sara Langridge in one of Australia's indigenous communities. In this presentation I have seen and appreciated a modern approach on Froebelianism that is mindful of the context but also true to its roots.

The presentation designed around my PhD study titled 'Professional Learning and Development opportunities in Early Childhood settings: an exploration of current provision through a Froebelian lens' was well attended. I was honoured to see that academics at the conference were interested in my topic of study and that they deemed it worthy of a PhD study. I have had some overwhelming positive feedback, and this has given me more confidence in my study and in the value of its results for the Froebelian and the wider academic community. I have used this opportunity to promote the Froebel trust bursary that I receive and without which I wouldn't be able to study. The work of the Trust was very well showcased during the conference by other members present but especially so during the formal conference dinner where Sue Robson led the Froebel Trust Reception and introduced the delegates that were affiliated with the trust to the audience. This opportunity has helped us all, including the PhD students present,

to network and promote the trust during our dinner conversations to other delegates. Thanks to this opportunity we were able to speak about the commitment of the Trust to a broad range of research.

Through the conference I have listened to presenters not being stuck in the past but being passionate about bringing the Froebelian philosophy to the present times without taking anything away from it. I have been reminded of how adaptable Froebelian philosophy is, how not prescriptive its elements are, and I have seen how still very relevant his teachings are. I felt like I belonged and that all the reasons why I am a Froebelian are shared by other like-minded academics. I have formed some important connections that have opened my mind, the Froebel Trust support in making this happen has been central and for this I thank you for supporting me to be who I am.

### **Jane Read**

My paper was entitled: British Froebelians abroad. Lucy Latter in Mysore and the Froebel Trust project in Kolkata: (post) colonial encounters

The intention of the paper was to discuss how Froebelians have always travelled from what we might refer to as kindergarten's Western heartlands to disseminate a child-centred, play-based pedagogy in what might be very different cultural contexts, and to highlight the ethical issues this might raise, especially in previously colonized countries.

The theoretical stance drew on Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony' – such projects may impose particular views of the child which might conflict with 'local' conceptions of the child as a worker and an economic contributor to the family income (Balagopalan 2014). We also need to consider how language has served as a powerful tool for reproducing the cultural norms of colonising powers (Ives 2010), with implications for indigenous children and teachers when education is delivered in English.

The research enabled me to highlight the historical lineage of the Froebel Trust's project in Kolkata and to point out how developments, such as the widespread adoption of the UNCRC and the use of English as a 'lingua franca', suggest that a more nuanced view of cultural hegemony is more pertinent for projects today.

The paper drew on the current interest in transnational and colonial histories which explore what are frequently 'connected and entangled' stories. Key questions addressed included:

Why was it thought that western kindergarten methods would benefit the children of Mysore in 1907 or Kolkata in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

What practices did Froebelians seek to introduce and what adaptations were needed to meet local conditions?

Did they encounter problems or resistance as they sought to introduce methods which differed from conventional practice?

While there were differences between Latter's work in Mysore and the Kolkata project, there were also significant similarities in terms of aims and intentions. Both Latter's work and the Trust's project demonstrate commitment to culturally sensitive approaches designed to support local ownership of projects - which is essential for long-term success in embedding Froebelian principles and practices.

The findings which emerge from this research reflect the Trust's 5-year growth strategy, specifically:

The importance of focusing on training and support for teachers

The value of making strategic alliances with local partners in good standing (such as universities) that link the Trust's work with their programmes

The paper was well-received by the international audience and elicited some interesting questions/discussion. I was subsequently asked to send it to colleagues in Japan and Australia. The session was well-planned, in presenting two other papers discussing application of Froebelian pedagogy in non-Western contexts.

During the conference, in sessions and at the two evening social events, I had many interesting discussions with both old and new Froebelian colleagues where I was able to discuss the Trust's international outreach work in more detail, linking the Kolkata project with the work in Soweto. It is fair to say that knowledge of the Trust's work in supporting international projects was not widely shared.

I have to thank the Froebel Trust for supporting my attendance at this conference.

### **Oksana Lissovets**

It was an absolute privilege to attend the 8th IFS conference in Hiroshima. Above all to meet the professional educators and researchers from across the world (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Israel, Denmark, Australia and UK) and because Hiroshima is such a special place. For me personally was extremely important to see the Froebel Trust representatives (researchers, PhD students and Froebelian practitioners) in action – their presentations, the parallel sessions and further discussions, their thoughts and opinions on the Froebelian movement.

As part of the pre-conference trip I have visited the Gaines Kindergarten – the modern Froebelian Japanese kindergarten. I was really impressed by the general atmosphere and harmony between children, practitioners and surrounding nature...Out there we had a pleasant and productive discussion with educators from Denmark and Taiwan. During the actual conference FT was represented in most of the parallel sessions, demonstrating the full

range of our grant programmes such as research, PhD, international education projects and strategic partners grants.

In my opinion the Froebel Trust reception made a significant impact! Brilliant presentations by Sue, Peter and Jane have unveiled the vision and direction of the FT strategy.

There was a lot of interest paid in our research grants programme during the conference, most notably by Kids' Garden Ltd. from Taiwan, Dr. Nishida and Dr. Rogers from University of New England, Australia.

It was very symbolic for "Education for Peace" conference to be held in the city which was reborn from the rubble and where peace is of great value for all...

### Yordanka Valkanova

Firstly, my sincere thanks to The Froebel Trust for this opportunity to attend the IFS conference in Hiroshima in September 2018. This report outlines my participation in the conference and the value of the support provided by the Trust.

In my view, the conference was well organised and very successful. It was held over three days with visits to kindergarten and museums, key talks, presentations, seminars, workshops and social functions for all participants, engaging practitioners, students and academics, and demonstrating how the principles of Froebel education are relevant today.



I presented two papers at the conference. The first paper was: Valkanova, Y., Wiseman, Clare, Hampton T., "Autistic children's block play: The teacher's view". I gave an oral presentation on teachers' attitudes toward block play enhanced learning of children with autism in an early years' mathematics classroom. As a result, it was received successfully by academic researchers and experts. Additionally, the paper was retweeted on Twitter. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Twitter reactions to our research.

The second paper "The developing child in the laboratory schools in Revolutionary Russia, 1917 -1929", I presented on Friday. The subsequent discussion centered on policy implications on normativity and the dynamics of social change.

During lunchtime on Friday 8th Sept, I met with my fellow researcher Professor Yael Dayan (Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel) for a discussion about the outcomes of our research project: "*Literary culture and the professionalisation of early childhood teachers: The case of the Hebrew institutes in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1909 – 1925*", funded by the Froebel Trust. In addition, I met with a head teacher from China, who attended my invited lecture on Froebel's pedagogy *Play, development and learning: A Froebelian perspective*, presented at the *World Principal Conference*, held at the National Convention Centre in Beijing in June 2018. Friday night concluded with a spectacular Froebel Trust reception. The event was also the perfect opportunity to acknowledge the new grant programmes that have been established recently.

Overall, the most positive experience was meeting with Froebelians who provide excellent examples for me. With new knowledge and new contacts I can take my research a step further. I am grateful for the funding of the Froebel Trust that made it possible for me to attend this inspiring conference.

### **Vasiliki Erinaki**

The 8th International Froebel Society Conference was held from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2018 in Hiroshima. This conference that I attended, presented useful topics on "Education for peace: Froebelian contributions at global and local level". The aim of the conference was to reclaim the roots of Froebel's philosophy and rediscover how Froebelian research, based on his philosophy in which he longed for unity of all living creatures, can make a useful contribution to an education aimed at international peace. Since my research is based on Froebel's theory and at the same time, it aims to revisit Froebelian principles at a different point in time with different research capacities that technology offers (i.e., video-based observation), this conference provided a full opportunity for constructive dialogue with experts in the field.

My oral presentation took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September at 9.00. My presentation was under the title "The effect of maternal postnatal depression on infant's verbal and nonverbal communication skills: within a Froebelian framework". It supposed to be a 30-minute presentation including the 10-minute questions and answers session ("Q&A"). However, due to the fact that we were two instead of three speakers in the panel, my presentation lasted 45-50 minutes. The interaction with the audience, the attendees' interest in my topic, their thought-provoking questions and their positive feedback proved to be very beneficial to me; these made me not only feel confident about my theoretical approach and methodology but also think differently. It was also beneficial for my presentation skills and for improving my Q&A experience. Overall, it was a great opportunity and honour for me to present my research work at a conference in which professionals, academics and researchers from all over the world took part.

Given that I attended all days of the conference, all the sessions provided me with an invaluable learning experience. However, I found extremely inspirational the followings: First of all, the tour to Hiroshima Jogakuin Gensu Kindergarten; it is an extraordinary kindergarten where Froebel's philosophy becomes a reality. Secondly, Mr. Yozo Waku's presentation, who is the creator of Block Play based on Froebel Philosophy. Mr Waku's enthusiasm, ingenuity and broad-minded ideas proved to be an important life lesson. Finally, Ms. Keiko Ogura's (Hiroshima Interpreters for Peace) speech on the "Atomic Bomb Experience" it was a life time experience. At this point, it is quite important to be mentioned that Hiroshima, the venue of the IFS conference 2018, is the first city in history to have been the victim of an atom bomb. Having the opportunity to attend the speech of people who had the atomic bomb experience and visit this city where this memory is still alive, it was so strong and overwhelming experience that benefited my development as a person.

In my opinion, this conference was very well organized and very successful. I firmly believe that the programme was designed to provoke thought, to broaden knowledge and to promote the networking. For instance, it was an excellent opportunity to gather together, interact and exchange views during conference sessions, coffee breaks, museum visits and conference dinner. Consequently, I have known a number of professionals from different countries who have similar interests to me. Finally, I would like to thank the Froebel Trust for giving me the opportunity to attend the 8th International Froebel Society Conference in Hiroshima. This conference was very interesting and enriched my experience with more information, knowledge and confidence.