Implementing Slow Pedagogy in Early Learning and Childcare through Froebelian Principled Practice

Introduction

The main aim of this study was to examine slow pedagogy through Froebelian Principled Practice. Research from Clark (2020-21), namely "Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child" (2021) inspired and stimulated the project along with a dissertation titled "Exploring Slow Pedagogy through a Froebelian Lens" (Green, 2021). Clark (2021) and Green (2021) invited others (practitioners/parents/policy makers) to slow down and look deeper into what slow pedagogy means for children.

Methodology

A significant ontological position used for this research was the viewpoint that "children are competent agents who actively contribute to shaping the social world through everyday activities" (Gallagher, 2009:67). The theoretical perspective of critical inquiry is applied, where the participants reflect on early learning and childcare (ELC) practice to inform the social reality and the participatory element of being. The epistemological position within this study was constructionism. The methodology used for this research study was qualitative.

The following research questions where asked within each early years community, practitioners provided a consensus through reflective Froebelian Principled practice and gained knowledge through workshops and literature to increase knowledge of slow pedagogy:

1. What is your understanding of the concept 'slow pedagogy'?
2. From your understanding, what does 'slow pedagogy' practice look like in ELC?
3. In what ways do you think children in your setting have the freedom to decide how, where and when to spend their time?
4. Through observing and reflecting in practice your Froebelian principled practice, in what way does this connect to slow pedagogy?

The use of observation, narrative and participatory methods were used to gather data. Providing real lived stories gathered from real people to truly understand the experiences and tell the story.

The use of research codes from practice of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) were adhered to and enshrined at each stage. In all, Covid-19 guidance (Scottish Government and University of Edinburgh) were adhered to.

Findings

The implementation of slow pedagogy in the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings resulting in the communities cultivating a shared vision through informed theory and literature and then fusing this with the practice. However, this took time to reflect and establish as the interpretation of knowledge required reflective dialogue within each team. The Froebelian Principles (Froebel Trust) supported a shared understanding and was used to reflect on practice which assisted unpicking concepts such as "Freedom with Guidance" (Tovey 2017). Taking time to reflect on these supported practitioners viewing children's perceptions at a deeper level and attuning to what these mean to each individual child. On occasions video footage was used to truly reflect on the lens of the child as there were times practitioners thought children had autonomy, however examples of videos helped reflect further. This evolved into recording lived stories of individual children to document relevant meaningful narratives.

Consistent feedback revealed from practitioners that the support and knowledge gained through webinars, chapter reading (Clark, 2020, 2021) and bespoke project workshops supported a deepening of understanding of Froebelian Principles (Green, 2021) and built further knowledge of slow pedagogy (Clark, 2021) and how this fuses with practice was reflected upon.

In practice became evident, the increased opportunities for children's perceptions and participation in practice created greater autonomy for children and increased staffs understanding of children's individual capacity.

Opportunities for children and practitioners to explore their community through nature, increased and unravelled slow process and slow knowledge.

The project focus was natural and unhurried mealtime, for this project, however, the concepts were naturally spreading through other areas of practice.

The research questions provoked discussions and enabled the opportunities as whole staff teams to respond, which were then reflected upon through observations of practice.

The project enabled practitioners to view children in their own right and provided moments of children's individual capacity. "Now we see that the children are more than unnecessary interruptions" (Tovey, 2017:42). The children's own views on what "time is not 'filled' but is freed from unnecessary interruptions" (Tovey, 2017:42).

The project enabled policies to be reviewed and children's policies to be written.

References


Conclusion

This collaborative project has enabled a learning together community of professionals to focus on Froebelian Principled Practice and deepen their knowledge of slow pedagogy. It facilitated theory and research to underpin practice and provoked deep analysis of how practice is linking to our Froebelian Principles and what this means to the children. It permitted time to reflect and truly observe to inform reflective practice.

New knowledge gained was fused through reflection of practice and changes were made collectively informed mainly through deep observation which led to discussions and improved practice. It aimed practitioners to create a deeper lived understanding of slow pedagogy and Froebelian principles with the main project, focusing on nature in one setting and the other two settings with Marvellous Mealtime.

However, the Unity and interconnectedness became apparent and the sharing through workshops and reflections supported settings to naturally review other areas of practice. Due to the positive impacts these projects will continue to be embedded and sustained. Many robust systems have changed in settings including policy changes which involved children creating policies. Each early years community have identified other areas of practice they would like to spread and focus on slow pedagogy which is underpinned through living the Froebelian Principles to enable reflective holistic experiences which truly value and respect the process and capacities of children and enable autonomy and respect for all.

"Froebelian educators create long periods of open time for children to explore, to create, to imagine, to share, to express" (Clark, 2021). UCL Press. pp.134-150.