



A Froebelian approach

Observing young children

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Contents



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Froebelian principles

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) was the inventor of kindergartens and a pioneer of early childhood education and care. Froebel's work and writing changed the way we think about and value early childhood.

Froebel's ideas were considered revolutionary in the 1850s. The principles of his work continue to challenge and be relevant to modern mainstream early years educational practice.

Unity and connectedness

Everything in the universe is connected. The more one is aware of this unity, the deeper the understanding of oneself, others, nature and the wider world. Children are whole beings whose thoughts, feelings and actions are interrelated. Young children learn in a holistic way and learning should never be compartmentalised for everything links.

Autonomous learners

Each child is unique and what children can do rather than what they cannot, is the starting point for a child's learning. Children learn best by doing things for themselves and from becoming more aware of their own learning. Froebelian educators respect children for who they are and value them for their efforts. Helping children to reflect is a key feature of a Froebelian education.

The value of childhood in its own right

Childhood is not merely a preparation for the next stage in learning. Learning begins at birth and continues throughout life.

Relationships matter

The relationships of every child with themselves, their parents, carers, family and wider community are valued. Relationships are of central importance in a child's life.

Creativity and the power of symbols

Creativity is about children representing their own ideas in their own way, supported by a nurturing environment and people. As children begin to use and make symbols they express their inner thoughts and ideas and make meaning. Over time, literal reflections of everyday life, community and culture become more abstract and nuanced.

The central importance of play

Play is part of being human and helps children to relate their inner worlds of feelings, ideas and lived experiences taking them to new levels of thinking, feeling, imagining and creating and is a resource for the future. Children have ownership of their play. Froebelian education values the contribution of adults offering 'freedom with guidance' to enrich play as a learning context.

Engaging with nature

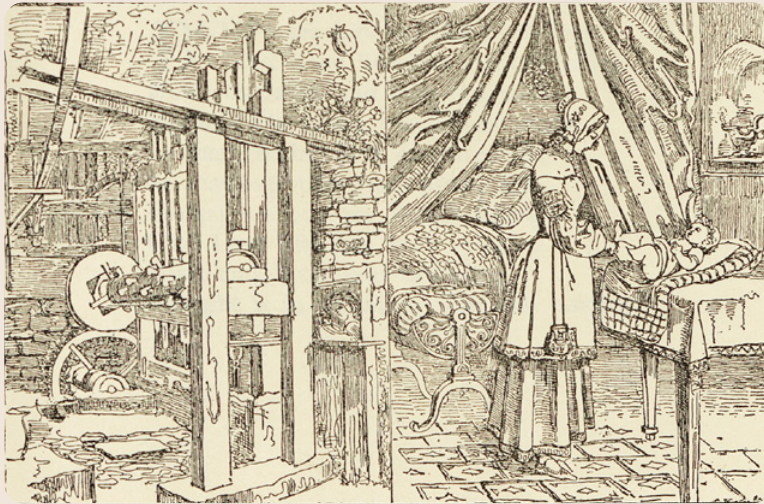
Experience and understanding of nature and our place in it, is an essential aspect of Froebelian practice. Through real life experiences, children learn about the interrelationship of all living things. This helps them to think about the bigger questions of the environment, sustainability and climate change.

Knowledgeable and nurturing educators

Early childhood educators who engage in their own learning and believe in principled and reflective practice are a key aspect of a Froebelian approach. Froebelian educators facilitate and guide, rather than instruct. They provide rich real life experiences and observe children carefully, supporting and extending their interests through 'freedom with guidance'.

Find out more about a Froebelian approach to early childhood education at froebel.org.uk





I.

Kicking Song.

WHEN happy Baby moves his arms and feet,
 In Mother stirs the love of play most sweet.
 God-given hint! to teach her Heaven doth send
 Early and lightly,
 Skilfully brightly,
 Through outward things his inner life to tend;
 Through games and gentle dalliance she's taught
 To rouse his Feeling, Sense, and waking Thought.

COME! you little kicking toes,
 Flax and hemp we will pound with blows,
 Oil for Mother's lamp there flows.
 See the flame! how clear it grows,
 While Mother's love, so clear and bright,
 Guards little Baby all the night.

Figs. 1a and 1b: 'Kicking Song' – words and illustration from Froebel's *Mother-Play and Nursery Songs* (first published 1843)

Introduction

Learning through observation

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) learned much from observing children when playing alone, with other children or with their parents and families.

He used his observations as a way of coming to understand children's development and learning. He encouraged parents and educators to observe babies as well as older children. Froebel wanted educators to study how children develop their own learning through their self-activity, senses, interests, and everyday experiences. He emphasised that learning was multifaceted and integrated – and that children develop understanding of subjects through connecting knowledge of mathematics, the arts, nature, and humanities. This pamphlet explores how educators can use observations to support children's development and learning.

“Since the behaviour of even the youngest child is of great significance and the expression of his thoughts may so easily be forgotten or confused, parents ought to keep records of the child's life in which they note down the first signs of his mode of thought, describe and interpret his development in all its aspects.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967: 79

Observing, supporting and extending learning

“Froebel’s vision of education developed out of observations of children and a quest for what is important to them.”

Bruce 2021:115

What do we mean by observation?

Observation is about much more than describing what a child does. It means really watching and listening, being aware of the child’s actual development, recognising what interests, motivates and engages them, and then reflecting on what these observations tell us about the child’s learning. Observation means registering these details as significant and important and knowing how to use them to extend learning.

“At this age play is never trivial; it is serious and deeply significant. It needs to be cherished and encouraged by the parents.”

Froebel 1826 in Lilley 1967: 84

As the quote above shows, Froebel believed that play was of central importance. It must be closely observed by adults so as to learn what children are thinking, how their interests and ideas unfold, and how educators can give them any support or guidance that they might need. Adult guidance is most effective when it is based on observation of children’s play.



Fig. 2: Froebel observed the way that babies love to kick with their legs against people and things - here a father is using his hands for the baby to kick against



Fig. 3: Educator sitting close by, watching, listening and on hand to give support



Fig. 4: Adult standing apart and taking time to observe at a distance

Ways of observing children at play

A Froebelian observer is ‘internally active, externally passive’ (Kalliala, 2006:124). There are various ways of observing children at play and reflecting on its meaning. This might be through quietly watching the play and gathering thoughts through writing or taking a sequence of photos, while consciously thinking about what the children are doing and why.

Rather than questioning the child as to why all the bricks have been loaded into the truck, the child’s play is respected and trusted. There might be sensitive interaction through commentating, if it’s appropriate, through tuning into what the child is doing and what their intentions are (Bruce 2015). Play always has a reason, purpose, or goal in the child’s mind and in their feelings. The challenge is to figure out what it is and to act accordingly. Froebelian observers recognise that children develop best when they are encouraged to be autonomous learners.

What makes a good observation?

A good observation takes account of what babies and children say and do – not what we think they are saying or doing. It captures the baby or young child as an individual, showing how they are progressing holistically and identifying any concerns. A good observation provides the necessary detail and insights to allow us to make informed decisions and take appropriate action, making changes to the learning environment and providing continuous opportunities for revisiting experiences or engaging in conversations with children, so that we ‘observe, support and extend’ (Bruce 1987:65).

We need to observe children across the learning environment, indoors and outdoors, and not make assessments or come to conclusions based on a single observation. We should try to avoid duplicating when we record observations. Sometimes we just need to make a mental note of what we have seen as not everything that we observe has to be recorded.

“Education... should in the first instance be passive and watchfully following and not dictatorial and interfering.”

Froebel 1826 in Liebschner 1992: xiii

How are observations interpreted?

By using what we know about the child through written records, photographs, and films we can interpret what the child is doing. This important process involves us thinking about what we have seen and striving to make sense of it, helping us to figure out and gain insight into how and what a child is learning. Our interpretations are likely to be subjective, based on our own personal knowledge of child development, cultural background, relevant curriculum and our understanding of what we observe. Having regular opportunities to discuss our observations with colleagues will help us to think more deeply about our unconscious biases.

How are observations used?

Observations are used when we talk with parents, carers or colleagues about the child's or baby's development, giving examples of their play and learning. They can be used for assessment and planning, to inform individual learning and interests, enhance the immediate learning environment, or review a child's development and learning over time in relation to relevant curriculum frameworks.

“Observation is more than watching, it means listening carefully, being open and wanting to know more.”

Tovey 2017: 112



Figs. 5a, b and c: A child taking great care in preparing wool - weaving under and over and then starting a new row

Why do we observe?

Froebel believed that adults need to closely observe the growth and development of the child and be familiar with their individual development and relationships with other children. Through observation we can learn a lot about why and when children do certain things. Observations help us to understand what children might not yet be able to articulate but are trying to tell us in their own way. Babies are not yet talking but they still 'tell' us what is important to them and what they find interesting to explore. Our observations of babies' and children's actions, interactions, behaviour, gestures and words give us valuable insights.

This is especially important in working with children with special educational needs, disabilities, different home languages and cultural contexts and in ensuring children are safeguarded.

From his observations Froebel recognised that as soon as a child starts to use symbols, (that is to make one thing stand for another), they are moving away from the real and concrete to something that is more imaginative and abstract (Bruce 2015).

“If the child is quietly observed, it will be easy to see how he follows spontaneously the road implied by the laws of human thought, proceeding from the visible to the invisible and more abstract.”

Froebel 1887: 81



Fig. 6: Clint (5 years) explores his experiences of circular shapes by creating a pizza and then cycle wheels – an example of symbolic representation

Getting to know children

Fostering relationships between children and adults

Froebel believed that educators gain insight by observing children, particularly when they are engaged in self-chosen play. The observations we make provide us with information we can use in creating a learning environment which is responsive to and connects with what we have seen children doing. Observation allows us to get to know children well (and vice versa) and at the same time helps to develop our relationships with them.

It opens up opportunities to help children think, discover, explore, and acquire new skills. Babies and children in early years settings need a key person so that they feel secure and supported to develop their ideas, watched over by a reflective educator. Relationships matter as part of observations. For Froebel, educators and parents/carers working together can significantly enhance children's development when they base their understanding on close observations.

Fig. 7b: A child expressing himself by striking the bars



Fig. 7a: A child creatively expressing his feelings and ideas



Group observation

Group observation can help us to focus on how children interact. Observing specific events, such as listening to a story or in the home corner, can broaden our understanding of how a child responds in this context. It is important that we observe what all of the children are doing. How do they react to the experience? Do they have their own ideas? Are they able to connect with others? How involved do they become?



Figs. 8a and 8b: Educator observing a child using a fire steel to make sparks - supporting the child to strike the steel - giving the right support at the right time



Fig. 9: Children are observed engrossed in the story and helping to tell it with puppets



Fig. 10: Children playing collaboratively, making up their own rules as they go

Informing our planning and adding resources

Adults and children working together highlights a relationship based on the reciprocity, equity and mutual respect which underpins Froebel's educational philosophy. Our observations inform our responsive planning. We might respond to a group of children playing by finding more resources such as boxes, paper and pencils, and fabric. A sitting baby might consistently select circular objects from a Treasure Basket (Hughes & Cousins 2017). Providing more round objects might be helpful to the baby's enjoyment, concentration, and overall learning.



Figs. 11a, b and c: The treasure basket designed by Elinor Goldschmied offers the sitting baby opportunity to make choices about what to select, when to do so, and for how long. We can observe the exploration, manipulation, discovery and practising of new skills or whether a consistent hand is used to reach for objects. Here, the circular rim of the bowl and the circular curtain ring are selected and seem to interest Dylan

Understanding the individual

For Froebel, understanding the individual child was dependent on three things:

- Equity – recognising, valuing and supporting each child’s diverse experiences, unique attributes, qualities and ways of being.
- Equality – experiencing fairness as their relationships with the world around them expand.
- Diversity – understanding the relationship between the whole of humanity and the multiplicity of different groups that make up that whole.

Fig. 12: A child mixes soil, water, grass and a range of other natural materials



Fig. 13: Two children pretending to have imaginary tea – one child is pretending to pour the milk



“To observe without reflection was ‘empty observation’ and could never lead to real understanding.”

Liebschner 1992: 141

Fig. 14: Two girls applying what they know to their play – wrapping their hair with fabric

Fig. 15: A group of girls playing mummies carrying their babies and preparing a meal side by side

Recording observations

Fig. 16: Kendrick is playing out his ideas with the dinosaurs creating characters and narrative



In his letters, Froebel encouraged his friends and colleagues to send him observations of children using his Gifts and Occupations. In current practice, there is a growing range of methods and techniques to observe and record. They include narrative, anecdotal and learning stories.

Example 1: An anecdotal observation that captures specific events

Observation of Olivia (four years) across several weeks.

01.06.2020 – Olivia first spent time at the clay table, making a clay bracelet and then a ring. Shoba and Beatrice copied her and then danced around the table waving their arms. Olivia did not join in. Olivia then spent 15 minutes painting tall, connected vertical lines using all of the different colours. She did a similar painting of connected vertical lines yesterday. After painting she went outside, clambering up and down the climbing frame. Later she went inside and built tall towers with blocks.

17.06.2020 – Olivia went to the role play area and pulled some women's high heeled shoes from the shelf. 'Look,' she said to Shoba, 'I can wear high heels just like my mum.' She then said, 'You are the daddy. Let's go out for a burger.' She took hold of Shoba's arm and walked around the room wearing her high heels.

26.06.2020 – Olivia sat by herself for 20 minutes. She built a complex structure out of construction straws.

Analysis of the observations

Olivia chooses to play alone, particularly when she is developing her ideas. Olivia is exploring height and she is also involved in the process of connecting herself and things together (Athey 1990). She is able to take on an imaginary role in her pretend play and direct others. She is moving from literal to more abstract and symbolic representational play.

“We need only put into words what he is doing and discovering.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967: 86

Example 2: Narrative observation of John (two years, three months) when offered a bowl and coloured wooden balls for the first time

After rolling the balls inside the bowl, John turned it upside down and placed them on top. They didn't roll off (unlike on the tabletop) and formed themselves into a triangle. He placed the balls on the table around the circumference of the bowl. He asked for a cloth to 'polish' the balls. He said the orange ball was like a tangerine – his grandmother gave him a lemon and a plum from the fruit bowl and he spent some time rolling the yellow and purple wooden balls and comparing them to the way that the fruit rolled. He placed a small whiteboard over the empty bowl, placed his hand underneath and said, 'The train goes under'. He placed the whiteboard vertically outside the bowl and dropped the balls behind it, saying with a smile, 'Where they gone?'



Fig. 17: John exploring the Japanese balls and bowl. The bowl is slightly concave underneath

He spent some time experimenting with the whiteboard to find various places for it to pivot on the edge of the bowl. Later, he stuck a pencil through the top hole on a piece of file paper, noticed the angle of the paper, and said that he had made a 'crane'. He placed the bowl on his head saying it was a hat and an umbrella. He held the bowl in front of him and said it was a 'steering wheel'. He rolled it on its edge, pretending it was a wheel. He put all the balls in the bowl, put two pens on the middle, said it was a 'birthday cake' and sang Happy Birthday to himself!

Analysis of the observation

Here, John was doing some important observing and experimenting by himself. When he placed the balls around the circumference of the bowl, he was extending his knowledge of circles. He was able to think in more abstract and symbolic ways, making an umbrella, steering wheel, crane, and birthday cake. In his game, John was exploring topological space (Athey 1990), inside, outside, under, behind and on top.

Example 3: Recording learning stories

Dear Luna,

Today you watched and helped as flour was poured onto the table. You pulled yourself up to the table and started to move your hands through the flour, making marks. You looked at the marks you had made and then pushed the flour on to the floor.

You bent down and started to make marks in the flour on the floor. Once there were marks across the small space of floor, you smiled and clapped your hands.

From Kerrie

Dear Lara,

You have recently become a big sister and have since shown a particular interest in looking at and writing different names. Your mum wrote down all the names in your family, including middle names, which you copied and brought to nursery to show your teachers and friends.

Then at nursery you continued to write names - this time they were those of your friends in your class. You also made marks from memory based on those you already know, especially letters such as 'A' and 'L' which are in your name.

From Monika



Fig. 18: A girl representing her ideas and feelings as she draws, circles and connects lines

Dear Freddie,

This morning you came to me and told me you wanted to make a card for your grandparents for their golden wedding anniversary. I helped you by writing the letters on the whiteboard for you to copy one by one. You asked for some help when you were stuck to form the letters that you were not familiar with. Your resilience and perseverance showed how engaged and focused you were. You did not give up and were very proud once you had completed it and it was just how you wanted it to look.

From Nora



Fig. 19: A boy drawing and naming his drawings

“The purpose of the child’s activity is to discover from its various aspects the real nature of an object and its relation to himself, and so to establish its attraction for him.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967: 86

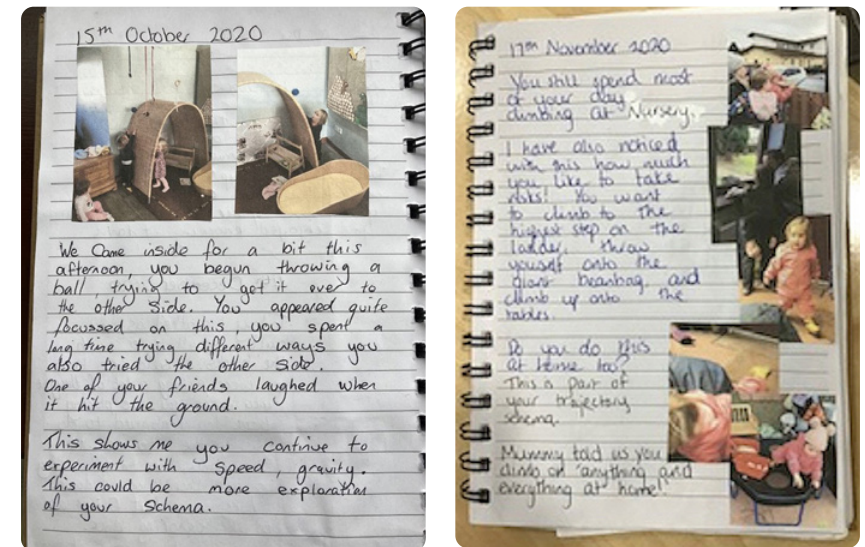
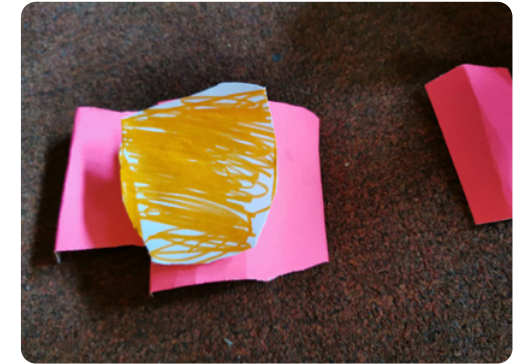


Fig. 20a and b: Every setting finds a format which works for them. In these examples narrative observations are combined with learning stories

Interpreting using a different lens

Froebel placed much emphasis on observing movements. Finger play, songs and dance were key features of his educational approach.

Similarly, Mollie Davies (1995) discusses the importance of observations that describe children's movements. These provide insight into the expressive way that they move, think and feel. For Froebel, the role of the adult is key in beginning where children are at and valuing their stage of learning while supporting them to express their inner thoughts and encourage creativity.



Figs. 22a, b, c, and d: Capturing children's early literacy – paper-folding easily creates opportunities for mark making, writing and reading



Fig. 21: A group of children responding to the music and controlling their rotational movement as well as experiencing the properties of a ribbon

“...systems of knowledge under which photographs are interpreted also have considerable power over both the interpreted and the interpreter of a photograph. In the case of photographs that are interpreted in light of child development, the very notion of predetermined targets or outcomes has its own power over how the photograph is seen by the interpreter.”

Flannery Quinn & Manning 2013: 273

Digital observations

Using digital technology to take photographs and films is an easy and accessible way to record and share information.

We need to agree policies for gaining permission from both child and parents to take photographs and videos. How these are used, stored, and disposed of needs to be in line with General Data Protection Regulation legislation, or the equivalent in different countries. Flannery Quinn and Manning (2013) urge us to recognise the power and purpose of our photographs, suggesting that we need to think carefully about what image we want to capture to provide clear evidence of our observations.

In order to observe children sensitively and see beyond the camera, we must make every effort to ensure that we do not only view the child through a tablet or device and be prepared to respond if the child shows distress or discomfort.

How we choose to observe and record is influenced by our knowledge of child development.



Figs. 23a and b: Two boys working together, pouring and mixing soil and water

Example

An informed educator took a series of three photographs of 19-month-old Theo in the garden over a two-week period. They illustrated Theo's development, showing his perseverance and disposition to set himself a challenge and master it. The first photograph captured Theo's initial attempt to climb over a large fallen log. The second, taken a few days later, showed that Theo was able to climb further by lying flat. The third showed Theo was able to stand on the log. A less experienced educator may have taken a single photograph at the end of the process to demonstrate a predefined outcome and not consider the actions or interest of the child, missing the wider implications for Theo's development.

Discussing observations

with parents, carers and colleagues



Froebel viewed every child as an individual person and, at the same time, part of a larger whole, promoting his ideas of wholeness and unity in all aspects of his work.

Observations are liable to reflect unconscious biases because they are subjective – they are based on our interpretation of what we can see (Louis & Betteridge 2020). When we make observations and record them, we must consider every child’s ‘wholeness’ and parts of the whole.

As educators we have a personal responsibility to recognise our biases and need to guard against stereotyping children by gender, race, ethnicity, religion, cultural background, economic circumstances/household income, home language or disability. There are ethical decisions to be made about the images and records that we share. We cannot assume that dominant cultural values will be shared by all members of our community.

Fig.24: Educators talking about their observations

We also need to reflect on what influences our views of children. Discussing our observations with colleagues, parents and carers can seem daunting at first, but it is essential that we share our understanding and interpretations to support children’s progress.

“Each of us should look at our assumptions and attitudes in relation to the notion of respect for others. This requires inspecting our actions and values.”

Conolly in Bruce 1987: 149

Sharing observations

When educators share observations with parents and carers, they enable them to see what their children are doing in the setting. This helps to provide a link between home and the setting where parents and carers have opportunities to share their observations of what children do at home. Permission to share information about children in any way needs to be sought and granted by parents.

Many of us work within a multi-agency context, requiring us to share our observations with other professionals such as teachers, children's mental health services, social workers, psychologists, doctors, speech and language therapists, play therapists and health visitors. Sharing information with other settings and schools supports transition and settling in.

We need to be aware of what is already known by whom about a child, their previous learning, their interests and what their starting point is. We should consider the observations that parents and carers share with us so that we can work together and keep written and digital records of children up to date (Flewitt & Cowan 2019). Parents and carers know and understand their children best and their involvement in early learning leads to better outcomes for children.

We must ensure that they have regular opportunities to contribute to their children's records and the decisions educators make about their children. These decisions are about how, what and where children are learning. Information from parents and carers will help us to get to know and value the child's play at home and their strengths and interests, recognising their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez 1992). Our observations need to be shared with parents and carers and made accessible to them. Instant-access digital records can be useful during the settling-in period to help reassure parents and carers that their child is happy and content.

Our observations need to recognise the child's perspective in making sense of their own learning, emotions and ideas. As children express their views through their play, our observations can make a valuable contribution to an holistic understanding of their experiences and their learning and development.



Fig.25: Educator sharing observations

Using observation to support children with special needs and disabilities

Context: Khadiya attended the setting. An educator was asked by the mother of Khadiya (7 months) to observe her at home. The educator noticed that Khadiya took items from people and picked up objects with her right hand. Her left hand appeared to be much weaker and she rarely used it to explore. Khadiya also crawled in an unusual roly-poly way and the educator had only observed two other children who crawled in the same manner.

With her mum's permission the educator alerted a specialist because she had knowledge of child development which enabled her to recognise and understand the implications of her observation. Khadiya was diagnosed with cerebral palsy soon afterwards. Observations gathered by Khadiya's mother, the early childhood educator with knowledge of child development, her doctor and physiotherapist led to diagnosis and action. Khadiya was given excellent specialist help including physiotherapy and daily exercises at home and in the early childhood setting. Her mother joined a parent support group.



Fig. 26: Observations can help educators to support a child with special needs in many ways - here an educator is communicating with a child by signing

Understanding observations

Educators can use observations in different ways to support their own learning and to deepen their understanding of the significance of the children's learning; these will include personal reflection and discussion with colleagues. Each setting will do things slightly differently according to shift patterns and operational organisation. The purpose of the observation may determine how educators understand it and a child's key person will review and interpret observations much more frequently as they will need to understand the child more deeply.

In the example below, the same video observation of Melissa's block play was interpreted differently by four educators, only one of whom was present to see it:

Melissa spent 30 minutes in the block area arranging large and small blocks into a shape. Melissa said that her construction was 'a harbour with lots of boats'. When this video was shared with the staff team, there were differing interpretations of what she had been doing:

- 1 The educator who had taken the video thought that Melissa was enjoying playing with the blocks
- 2 Another educator commented that Melissa could build things well
- 3 A third thought that Melissa was very creative
- 4 Another saw Melissa as a bit of a tomboy because she thought she was enjoying an activity that boys like



“Later on, the child in his quiet diligence tells us that we must know the properties and uses of all the things he finds, but we dismiss his activity as childish because we fail to understand it or see, hear and feel as the child does.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967: 85

Fig. 27a (above): An adult observing children's block play

Fig. 27b: A girl using large hollow blocks to represent 'The Shard' (a tall building in London) symbolically

Discussion of the observation included a need for detail as to why it was thought that Melissa enjoyed and showed creativity and skill at building. There was also robust discussion challenging the gender stereotyping of what constitutes "boys'" and "girls'"

activities. This example shows how educators can have different understandings. It was only when they looked closely at the video that they realised Melissa had built a complex structure that became a prop in her imaginative pretend play.

Identifying schemas

“A schema is a pattern of repeatable behaviour into which experiences are assimilated and gradually coordinated. Co-ordinations lead to higher-level and more powerful schemas.”

Athey 1990: 37

“Nothing gets under a parent’s skin more quickly and more permanently than the illumination of his or her own child’s behaviour.”

Athey 1990: 66

Babies and young children can be observed repeatedly moving up and down, back and forth, side to side, or round and round, enveloping, transporting and enclosing in their play and exploration. This process of repetition helps children to experiment as they explore their thinking through their actions. The process of repeating behaviours is sometimes called schemas. Schemas are biological and cut across gender, culture and race and how they are expressed in play is dependent upon children’s first-hand encounters and experiences, as well as the cultural context in which they grow up (Athey 1990).

Chris Athey was interested in how parents respond to the patterns of behaviour that emerge in their children’s play. Her research focused on encouraging parents to observe what their children actually do and becoming more aware of how they respond and interact with them. Being able to identify repeated behaviour enables parents to support and enrich their child’s play with new resources and experiences.

Figs. 28 a, b, c, and d illustrate the transporting schema



(a) Carrying water for an experiment



(b) Transporting a collection of stones from one place to another



(c) Transporting a baby



(d) Moving things using a truck

Using observations to support and extend children's learning

Froebel emphasised the importance of children developing at their own pace and in their own way. We need to observe and get to know children individually so that we can support them according to their needs. This means the essence of the child's play needs to be nourished and sustained. However, Froebel warned of the dangers of underestimating the child's actual development. How we support children really matters and, for Froebel, support had to be based upon an understanding of a child's needs and first-hand experiences to help them develop and learn. In practice, this means supporting a child to use their existing knowledge in a number of different ways, as well as providing opportunities for extending their learning.

In the following photos, educators had observed the children and left appropriate resources to enable them to choose to extend their play.



Fig. 29: A group of children experimenting with building slopes out of guttering and bamboo to see the effect on water



Fig. 30: Two boys using a crate and tyre to build an enclosure

Knowledgeable educators

Froebel placed great emphasis on adults being highly trained and knowledgeable about child development and the importance of play. For Froebel, adults were important in guiding babies and children to develop holistically, giving them the freedom to explore and providing them with experiences that stimulate, engage, and embed their learning. Froebel believed that teaching should be related to everyday life, otherwise it will have no meaning for children. Babies' and children's life experiences are the most important foundation for their learning.

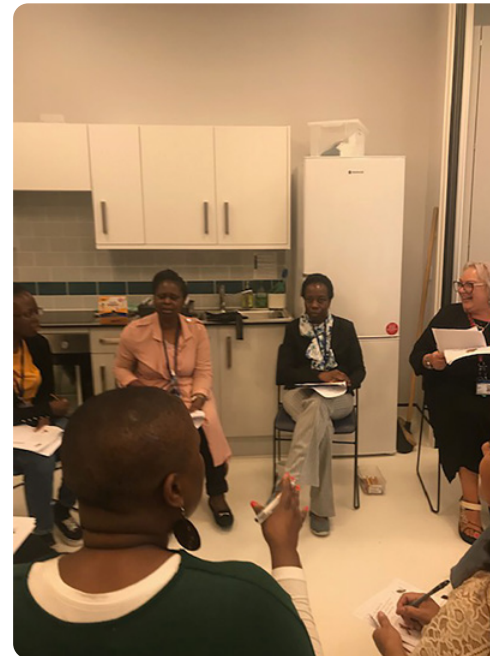
Adults have a vital role to play as observers, sometimes standing back and observing, at other times interacting, or playing alongside, supporting and extending play. Froebel understood that holistic pedagogy requires holistically educated adults. As such, the role of the adult is central to Froebel's ideas. His insights about supporting babies' and young children's learning through observation remain just as relevant today.



Figs. 31a, b, and c: Staff training - educators discussing and reflecting on their observations, responses and interactions with young children and their families

“In Froebel’s view the educator needs to develop observational expertise rooted in the understanding and knowledge of how children develop, which becomes a resource from which the educator can draw.”

Bruce 2021: 116



Final thoughts

- Froebel reminds us that our observations help us to learn about what babies and children know and can do.
- There are a number of different ways that we can record what we observe. It is useful to use a combination of ways to record the detail of how a baby or child is learning to ensure that we capture not just physical behaviours, which are easy to see, but also the child's interests, strengths and disposition for learning.
- The quality of our interpretations is influenced by our focus and purpose as well as the knowledge and understanding we have about how a baby or child develops and learns.
- We can interpret our observations by reflecting on our own and through discussion with others. We should look for patterns within each observation and use this to inform us about a child.
- The help that we offer a child must be based upon what our observations show us that they need for their further development and learning.
- Being conscious of our often unconscious bias matters during the observation process, whether in relation to race, gender or disability.
- Regularly examining our own value systems will help to ensure that our observations are fair and free from influences of stereotyping and personal assumptions.



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