



A Froebelian approach

Connecting with parents, families and communities: a starting point

by Holli Williams
with Rachna Joshi

Contents



This is an interactive document

The top toolbar and contents buttons allow you to navigate through the different sections of the guide.

Froebelian principles

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) was the inventor of kindergarten 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.

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

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.

Introduction

“Today the most urgent need in education is that the school should be united with the life of home and family.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967, p.156

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) valued the role that the family had in their children’s education and life. This was fundamental to his vision for early childhood education. His pedagogy built upon the child’s home life experiences, starting from what they know and understand and building on this, to introduce them to a world outside of the home.

As educators welcome new children into their settings, the relationships they create with families will form and affect part of each child’s educational journey. We owe it to them to get it right.

‘Relationships matter’ and ‘Unity and connectedness’ are two key Froebelian principles that are woven throughout this pamphlet. They guide educators and families to work together. By embodying these principles in practice, the connection between child, family, community and setting strengthens.



Fig. 1: Parents joining in with their child’s play

“The family is at the heart of the education process in the Froebelian tradition.”

Bruce 2012, p.20.

Establishing a sense of belonging for families is a key consideration for educators. Finding commonalities between families provides a secure foundation for children and families to create bonds of trust and build mutual respect. Today, experiences of family life are unique for everyone. For children to feel valued and represented, it is essential for settings to celebrate all types of family structures by recognising the similarities, as well as the diverse identities between them.

This pamphlet explores how educators can use Froebelian pedagogy to nurture genuine partnerships and empower families to enhance children's holistic development and sense of self.



Fig. 2: Educators can make meaningful connections with children by sharing in their interests

“[Froebel] wanted to support parents in their huge task of bringing up children and did not wish to undermine them in this. He wanted to support and illuminate the importance of parenthood.”

Bruce 2021, p.113



Fig. 3: Igniting the joy of exploring the drums together and singing favourite songs

Getting to know the child and family

When working with children and families, educators must make it their priority to get to know the child and family well. Settings may use a key person approach to support the development of positive, meaningful relationships with children and families (Elfer 2019).

The key person is the main point of contact for families. Getting to know the immediate and extended family of their key children helps to widen the image of the child in the educator's mind. This benefits educator, child and family in building a sense of belonging and trust. When the child and family feel secure in the setting, it enriches the experience for all. The key person will use what they have learned about the child to support and extend the child's learning and development.



Fig. 4 a-b: Being available when needed by key children allows secure relationships to form

One way to get to know the family could be to offer a home visit before a child is due to start at a setting. This is where the key person can visit the child's home and spend time getting to know the child and family in their own environment. The key person acts as an attachment figure that reassures families that their child will be looked after and cared for once they attend the setting (Manning-Morton 2024).

During the settling-in process, educators need to be open-minded and respectful of each child's family experiences. They must listen carefully and not assume or judge. If they are unsure of something, asking a question to clarify in a sensitive way is the best way to approach any situation. The key person should take this time to sit alongside parents/carers and really get to know what family life is like for them and their child. Positive relationships are built during these initial interactions and, if done well, go on to foster a child-centred relationship where everyone wants the best for the child.



Fig. 5: Settle sessions lay the groundwork for building strong, positive relationships with families



Fig. 6 a-b: Educators making time for conversations at the end of the day to share knowledge about a child's learning and development

After the initial settling-in process, the key person will have regular conversations with families and parents about what they have observed. Family members can share their observations and experiences at home. Each interaction has the potential to strengthen the relationship between educators and families. Interactions can be a mixture of in-person, on the phone or online.

An early years setting, whether it be a nursery, childminder, playgroup, crèche or packaway setting, is often a child's first time away from their parents, family or familiar people. Educators need to recognise this is a big step for both children and families. Being sensitive to the emotions felt by children and families supports the transition process.

Riley's story

Riley is two years old and attends a private nursery setting. Riley has two mums and is adopted. He calls his parents 'Mummy' and 'Mama'. Before Riley settled into the nursery, the manager created the time and space to meet with his parents to learn all about Riley's first-hand life experience so far. His parents were anxious about how educators and other children would react to Riley and to them. Riley's educators needed to understand the key events in his life and how to support him from there. This lays foundations for positive relationships to develop between Riley and his educators, as well as between the educators and

his Mummy and Mama. For example, they spent extra time having conversations about Riley's family history and ensured they called Riley's parents by the familial names they had chosen.

Knowing what a child calls their parents or family members and replicating this in the setting is a simple act that could have a huge impact on a child's well-being and identity. Given names and family names need to be used and pronounced correctly by educators to demonstrate respect and acceptance.

"By working closely with children and their parents, the names that children use can be acknowledged by practitioners. This will help to support children in seeing their family as valued equally with any other."

Price and Tayler 2015, p.63



Fig. 7: Daddy and Papa flying a pride flag with their son

Unity in diversity

The setting should be a safe and welcoming environment where children and families can be proud of who they are and where they come from. Educators should recognise positive family influences (such as social connections, good mental and physical health, coping skills and strong values). Understanding these strengths and nurturing them will support children to thrive. These include the benefits of parents, carers, grandparents, siblings and extended family members who can offer unity in love through sharing life experiences. By recognising these, the unity in diversity that shapes the inner lives of children and brings communities together is celebrated (Tovey 2017).



Fig. 8: Dancing with each other fosters connection as these children enjoy the music together



Fig. 9: Reading a favourite story to a friend shows children that their interests matter to others

Educators who look at the lives of the families in their setting begin to recognise their uniqueness. Some families are made up of a mother and a father, others with two mothers or two fathers. Some have step-parents that bring together step- and half-siblings. Other families have a bi- or multi-racial identity. Families may be single parent, grandparent or kinship care. Kinship care is a legal arrangement when family or friends take responsibility for a child in a crisis and the child's parents cannot look after them (Kinship n.d.).

Some children have experiences of being in care, or of having foster or adoptive parents. Educators must seek to understand children's experiences of family life in a non-judgemental way (Louis and Betteridge 2024).

“No two families are the same, and no two families live in exactly the same way.”

Bruce 2021, p.126

By knowing who is present and who is absent in a child's family, educators help to support and understand a child's place within it. Educators can do this by building a rapport with family members through consistent, warm interactions. A 'settle pack' or an 'all about me' form will give educators key information, such as important people, pets or celebrations in a child's life. This can be used as a starting point during regular meetings. The more educators understand children and families, the better they can plan for their individual learning and developmental needs.

There is no one way to be a family. Sometimes friends, neighbours and pets are considered part of the family. Families might change and adapt over time - a birth, marriage, divorce or loss are just a few factors that might impact the family structure. Educators must be aware that this could happen to anyone, and they can help to maintain consistency by supporting families in times of need. Sharing books and stories could be one strategy to aid this process. You can see examples under Further Reading.



Fig. 10: Celebrating diverse family structures

“In the family [the child] is to be seen again as both an individual and an essential member of a living group. Only within the entity of the family is it possible for [them] to become a whole person.”

Froebel in Lilley 1967, p.94

Family identities

When educators invest time in building relationships with families, a sense of ease will naturally develop for both parties over time. Families may feel more comfortable to share stories about their lives. During these conversations, educators can ask open-ended questions to support their understanding. If educators are parents themselves, they may share stories about their own children. Drawing on their own experience can help to reassure parents.

Educators can harness their knowledge about families to understand the identities within them. A wide range of factors can contribute to a person's identity and sense of self. These factors include gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, nationality, social class and disability – and how these are perceived by others. Values and experiences can also shape a child's identity and how they see themselves reflected in the wider world.



Fig. 11: Supporting children to notice and value their own unique identity

“Let us learn from our children. Let us attend to the knowledge which their lives gently urge upon us.”

Froebel 1885, p.92



Fig. 12: Educators can celebrate family traditions by having a diverse range of foods in the role play area

“Lots of positive support for all children – about who they are, how precious they are, how much their culture, faith, language and skin colour are valued – promotes positive identity and gives positive messages to everyone that they all belong.”

Lane 2008, p.135



Fig. 13: The relationships children have with educators can be very special

“The consistent, continuous care of warm responsive adults, who know them well, enables children to build trusting relationships that foster confidence and self-esteem and influence their future relationships and their social competence.”

Manning-Morton 2024, p. 191

Alik's story

Alik was three years old when his family were forced to leave their home country of Ukraine and move to England due to the war. At four years old Alik attended a nursery school. His key person, Jessie, worked very hard to build a good relationship with Alik and his family, ensuring they knew where to access further help and support and always being available should Alik need her. Jessie recognised that Alik's nationality was an important part of his identity. She learned key Ukrainian words to communicate with Alik and purchased books and flash cards to aid his transition. Jessie sought help from a translator to ensure his parents had all the necessary information and when they were not available, she used Google Translate.

Over the year, Jessie saw Alik's confidence grow as he learned some English words and interacted more with other children. When he moved into the Reception class, Alik would still ask to visit Jessie and show her his achievements.

The relationship that Jessie built with Alik and his family did not happen overnight, it was a slow approach. Listening to their journey from Ukraine to England, Jessie was able to think about how to approach the matter sensitively. Jessie reflected on her current practice and strategies, seeking advice from others when they were not the right approach for Alik.

Engaging with the community

Settings and schools are important spaces within the community, as well as being their own community. In these spaces parents and families come together with a shared interest in their child's education. Sometimes a simple 'stay and play' makes families feel welcome. Planning events around specific times of the year or religious holidays gives families a reason to get involved and share food, stories or songs.

Educators can support families by finding out whether they are new to the area or have lived in the area for a long time. Families who are unsure of what the community has to offer can be guided by educators. Families who have lived in the area for years or have grown up there can be an excellent source of local knowledge and insight.

Educators can harness this knowledge by creating a 'community notice board' and encouraging families to add to it. Newer families who are less familiar can be directed here for a range of events such as local parent support groups, playgroups, or open days at nearby schools.



Fig. 14: A parent and child exploring different herbs grown at the setting during a stay and play session

Building connections with local groups, schools and small businesses fosters a real sense of community. These links can also stretch to public areas such as parks and allotments. These enrich the lives of the children and help them learn the joy and value in supporting, protecting and giving back to others.

"Froebel believed that each individual child is unique but gains in significance as part of a whole supportive and loving community."

Tovey 2017, p.44

Taylor's story

Taylor is a single parent to six children, ranging from four to 18 years old. She accessed a community food bank run by the church. As her youngest child started school, Taylor volunteered to run the stay and play group within the same church.

The parents and childminders who attended the group were looking for somewhere warm to go, someone to talk to, and somewhere to be with their children.

Taylor's lived experience of the challenges within the education and social care systems helped her to support those who attended the group, offering space, time and a listening ear. She understood how isolating it can be, questioning "who is looking after parents?"

Taylor's story demonstrates her determination to create a space free of judgement that nurtures parents, which is something she would have benefitted from herself.

Understanding communities

The community team at a children's centre faced challenges in connecting with the local Orthodox Jewish community. To address this, the hub manager reached out to some families for input on how to boost attendance. They requested specific timings and services run by those who are within the community. With some additional funding, an educator from the community joined the centre and co-led stay and play activities with the current team.

By asking for feedback and responding in this way, the team were able to nurture a connection with the community through the stay and plays. Eventually, the children and families from the Orthodox Jewish community were accessing many of the services that were provided. In this case, having a facilitator with an understanding of the community reduced the barriers to access and participation.

Single parents with large families are often judged negatively in our society.

It is vital that we are mindful to counteract this prejudice and discrimination (Louis 2020).

Empowering families is an important part of working with them. Building confidence and finding opportunities to develop skills and experience can impact individual lives in positive ways.

Parents often hear of people saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Few families may have this experience when societies become fragmented, and some families may feel isolated and unsupported. Educators should be aware of the external pressures parents may feel when they do not have a local support network.

Froebel's underpinning ideas focused on the unity of self with others and the world (Bruce 2021). By understanding oneself, individuals are better able to understand others and be more aware of cultural differences and practices in the world.

For educators to be successful in this, they need to have developed relationships with the child and their family and have an interest in the cultural experiences and practices of the communities the child belongs to. In a Froebelian approach, an educator's practice starts from where the child and family are, and gradually builds from this foundational knowledge and understanding.



Fig. 15: Inviting families into the setting to play with or alongside their children can foster positive experiences of education for both parent and child

“Froebel also reminds us that children are interconnected with their families and, through them, to the communities and the wider world.”

Bruce 2021, p.127

Building relationships

All relationships matter in the setting and must be worked on and valued to be successful. This includes children's friendships with one another.

Educators should be aware of complex family circumstances such as any child protection cases, behavioural concerns or trauma from parents' previous experiences with the education system. Families like to be approached sensitively and individually, but certain groups may need further consideration, for example, refugee families. Educators should take time to understand their individual circumstances and offer support. Listening and empathising is often the first step to building meaningful relationships.



Fig. 16: Supporting the development of friendships helps children's sense of belonging

"Relationships are of central importance in a child's life."

(Froebel Trust n.d.)



Fig. 17: Caring and responsive educators lay the foundations for learning

Educators often find it easier to develop bonds with the children in their settings than with their families. This could be due to various factors including parents' time constraints, language barriers or lack of educator confidence. Educators should feel enabled and supported to make connecting with all families a priority. Sometimes training or mentoring might be needed.

Collaboration and communication with parents fosters the trust and respect required to build and deepen relationships. Families need to know that their children matter. Furthermore, spending the time to strengthen these relationships can positively influence families' perceptions of their child's education. If parents/carers speak a different language or are deaf, using visual cues, such as photos and finding an interpreter that parents/carers feel comfortable with, can support this process.

Families who are less likely to attend events due to work commitments or lack of confidence should be approached individually. Conversations could begin with celebrating what the parents are already doing and working together to build on this (Kambouri et al 2021).

Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller families - especially those with nomadic lives - may have had many different experiences of educational settings.



Fig. 18 a-b: Allowing time and space for parents and families to immerse themselves in their child's play shows them that they matter too



Fig. 19: Engaging in conversations about what captures a child's curiosity offers families a meaningful glimpse into how they see and experience the world

Each family's knowledge and expertise can help to create positive relationships and experiences for their children and contribute to the community of the setting. This begins with the very first interactions – how everyone is welcomed – and thoughtful approaches to the ways that information is shared. Educators can ask families how they prefer to be communicated with. Having child-centred conversations can support this process.

Fullerton (2024) describes a 'connect with' group that was designed to help families develop a deeper connection with their children. This helps to create a community of parents that can reflect together on their child's learning, development and behaviour. The educator can facilitate conversation to ensure it starts from a place of understanding and curiosity. As parents begin to connect more deeply with the lived experiences of their children, they will notice the positive impact it has on their relationship with them.

A kitchen garden in Caerphilly

A nursery in Wales has a kitchen garden. Some staff observed that families were accessing the food bank that opened next door. To support them, they offered surplus produce which was grown at nursery but not used.



Fig. 21: An example of a pantry in a setting in Falkirk, Scotland

Some families felt embarrassed to take the food so the staff decided to change their approach to maintain the dignity of those who might need the food but who did not want to show it. They invited families into the nursery to share recipes, learn from one another and cook and eat together. They developed connections with the food bank and grew food that was needed. This initiative strengthened the community links in a non-judgemental and sensitive way.

The continued development of this project required staff to be reflective, considerate and to think carefully and plan effectively. It relied on staff having a genuine deep connection with the community, to empathise and understand their experiences and offer something that is beneficial to everyone involved.

Similarly, another nursery used the term 'pantry' rather than 'food bank' which removed some of the stigma for families.

They recognised how language can convey different meanings to different people in different circumstances and responded sensitively to their community.

As bridges were made between settings and families, parents expressed how much they got out of the sessions. As families became immersed in activities, such as cooking and baking, they spoke to one another and to the educators. They shared candid stories quite happily about their children and their interests. Educators were able to ask open-ended questions and learn more about the families.

These types of interactions have a positive impact on educator-parent relationships which can often be felt long after their children leave the setting. Although educators spend most of their day with the children, it's worth remembering that parents and families may need them just as much.



Fig. 20: Watering and feeding the produce in the nursery garden

“[S]ettings and schools need to build the relationships with and between parents that bring a sense of belonging and feeling supported.”

Bruce 2021, p.127

Representation matters

Educators need to think about how families are represented within their setting. Taking the time to get to know a family begins the process while demonstrating this within practice shows consistency of the approach. Educators can do this through observation, reflection and conversations with children and families. By actively including and celebrating the diversity of all families, the relationship between the setting and home life strengthens.

Within a Froebelian environment children need to have real-life first-hand experiences to support their symbolic play and help them to make meaning of the world around them (Bruce 2023).



Fig. 22 a-c: Educators actively sharing books which represent different family identities and cultural heritage shows children that they matter



Fig. 23: A child's drawing of herself with her teachers and friends at the kindergarten

It is important for children to see themselves reflected in the environment. Children's literature and stories that are shared should have illustrations and narratives that are inclusive, representative and help children make connections to their own lives (Tovey 2017). This includes dual language books in the languages that children speak at home for families to borrow. If a child who attends the setting has same sex or non-binary parents, then books representing their family should be available at all times.



Fig. 24 a-c: A rich and varied selection of books supports children's sense of self and helps them to understand the world in which they live



"One of the reasons literature exists is to transform human experience, and reflect it back to us so that we can better understand it. Through the mirror of literature we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience."

Bishop 1990, p.3



Fig. 25: A lending library can foster a child's interest in literature from an early age

Language should be inclusive, for example, using the names that a child uses for the people who care for them instead of defaulting to 'mummy and daddy' when talking about primary carers. It is also important that educators know that they have a responsibility to foster a child's sense of belonging by reflecting on their own practice (Imray 2023).

Educators can include parents and families in the conversation if more ideas are needed by asking them about their culture and experiences and what the setting can do to celebrate these with the children. Cooking, singing and recognising key events and celebrations (such as religious or national events, pride parades, birthdays etc.) are all ways to practise inclusivity.

"[Children's] physical and emotional dependency, their developing sense of self and their need to communicate with attuned adults require that educators and parents/carers prioritise working closely together and communicating well."

Manning-Morton 2024, p.208



Fig. 26: When children feel valued, they can express themselves freely

Arlo and his dad's story

Arlo attends a private day nursery three days a week. The nursery has been converted from a house, which has two floors. Arlo's dad has Cerebral Palsy which affects his movement and coordination. When Arlo was in the baby room, on the ground floor, his dad was able to access the area without much difficulty. Since moving to the toddler room Arlo is now on the first floor. This caused some difficulty for Arlo's dad on days when he is feeling more fatigued and unable to climb the stairs.

Arlo's key person recognised this and spoke with his dad. They offered ways to help, such as bringing Arlo downstairs when requested or moving garden time so Arlo could be collected from the garden on the ground floor instead.

As Arlo moved through the nursery, other children made comments about how Arlo's dad walked. The educators took this opportunity to talk to the children about people with disabilities. They shared books and talked about how their own bodies move. Arlo's key person told his dad about their conversation and asked if there was anything he would like to contribute or anything else they could bring to the environment.

Having open conversations with parents helps to reduce barriers. Arlo was able to see his family being respected, whilst the other children were introduced to differences between people and what makes them unique.

Some ways to support an inclusive and welcoming environment through a Froebelian lens could be to:

- Build on the information from the home visit to recreate some familiar features of home.
- Have family photos on display or in a photo album and refer to them to create meaningful interactions and connections.
- Have a wide variety of books which represent all types of families and cultures, starting with the families you have in your setting.
- Think carefully about how open-ended resources are used, such as fabrics and materials, to include a variety of cultures.
- Display common words/phrases in the languages of the children/staff at the setting and ensure staff know how to pronounce them.
- Show an accurate understanding of local communities by engaging with them and bringing ideas back to the setting.
- Actively include parents and families in conversations about their child and the provision.
- Recognise and celebrate the diversity of staff, children and families.



Fig. 27: A welcome sign in languages of those families and staff who attend the setting showcases inclusivity



Fig. 28: Sharing books that show children families which are different or similar to their own



Fig. 29: Displaying the diversity of staff teams can help families connect to staff who are from the same country as them or speak the same language

Harnessing the knowledge of educators and families

Froebel emphasised the importance of educators being knowledgeable about child development and recognised the responsibility they have to support families and the wider community. He acknowledged the role of the mother and highlighted the crucial role parents have in educating their children. Bringing together the knowledgeable educator and reaffirming the parents' knowledge of their child, empowers families and can enhance children's learning and development.

"[A] trusting, working relationship between parents and teachers is essential for the successful education of children."

Liebschner 1992, p.138

"Parents and carers often appreciate opportunities to come together to learn more about and with their children where there is an equal partnership with the educator and information is shared in a spirit of mutual trust and communal interest..."

Whinnett 2024, p.177



Fig. 30 a-b: Understanding what families know about their children is a good starting point for educators

Stay and play sessions

A Froebelian nursery looked at the impact of directly involving parents and families in their children's learning during play sessions (Kraskiewicz 2024). During these sessions parents were invited to observe their children's play alongside educators. The educators commented on what they were observing with the families, highlighting the learning that was taking place.

Sharing knowledge in the moment and pointing families to resources such as 'Schemas for Parents' (Louis 2019) gives families more ideas on how to support their children's development.

Having 'in the moment conversations' highlights how educators can support and learn from parents. These interactions are a key reflective tool for both educator and parent to gain a deeper understanding of the child.

Risk-taking in play

An educator leading a trip to the park explained to the families how risk and challenge were vital for children. They explained how risk provides children with an opportunity to assess situations, confidence to make decisions and actively explore their whole body (Tovey 2007). The families had not realised the benefits of risk-taking and were able to reconsider how they responded to their children taking risks in their play.



Fig. 31: Exploring local green spaces in an urban environment

“Parents and teachers have different jobs to do. Neither can operate effectively without the other. The partnership is complementary, and reciprocal and should raise everyone’s self-esteem.”

Bruce 2020, p.141

“We are trying to build from the point where the family is. We need to find out what we can build upon, and need to tune into each family, just as we try to get to know each child...”

Bruce 2020, p.137

Educator self-awareness and the impact on families

All educators bring their own expertise, strengths and traditions. They also come with their own biases based on their histories and experiences of the world (Louis and Betteridge 2024). Froebel emphasised the need to be self-aware. Throughout his writing he explains the role of an adult as being attentive to their own self-development (Froebel 1885). In an educational context, this could mean reflecting on how bias impacts the educator's pedagogy and values.

“As educators, we are placed in a trusted position of power, with a responsibility to act in the best interests of the child. Whether we act consciously or not, our words and our behaviours matter.”

Betteridge 2024, p xvi

Debbie's story

Debbie has been an educator at a setting for many years. She knew the families well and had many positive relationships. When Josiah, a younger sibling of one of her previous key children, joined her group she found that she was assuming many things that Josiah could do based on her experience with his brother. This realisation caused Debbie to modify her approach – starting with Josiah's interests, strengths and needs, instead of comparing him to his brother.

Debbie demonstrated self-awareness of her bias, but training and group discussion may be needed to further support educators to develop reflection and self-awareness.

Educators must consider the implications their assumptions and comments may have on individual children.

Educators can build trusting relationships with their colleagues through peer observations, learning walks and informal conversations.

In a Froebelian environment, educators are encouraged to reflect deeply on their practice. This includes how their words and actions impact the children and families in their care.



Fig. 32: Making time to reflect on practice and share ideas

Final thoughts

Some examples of ways you can develop and deepen your partnership with parents, families and the community could be by:

- Creating an inclusive setting which recognises and celebrates the diversity of all families.
- Valuing the uniqueness of each family.
- Spending time getting to know the child and their family and building on the information that parents and families have shared.
- Being aware that in a genuine partnership people will do and say things that you don't agree with. You must find ways to work with that and try to reach a consensus.
- Addressing judgements and biased attitudes to ensure the identities of all children and their families are understood, supported and valued.
- Supporting children's identity and sense of self by being culturally aware and sensitive.
- Including families by inviting them to share their skills and experiences and learning from them. This can help to empower those who are less confident.
- Making meaningful links with the local community.
- Reflecting on your indoor and outdoor provision to carefully consider whether it is representative of the lived experiences of the children who attend.
- Finding creative ways to engage parents and families who may experience barriers or be reluctant to engage, or who are unable to volunteer their time.
- Observing alongside families to make links to their child's interests and development. Learning together and offering further advice and practical tips when appropriate.
- Creating safe spaces for educators to have open and honest discussions about their practice and to feel supported and enabled in their work with families.

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The authors

Holli Williams

Holli Williams is a Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor. Holli is Head of Schools at Linden Tree Nursery Schools, a small chain of privately-owned settings in Southwest London. Linden Tree has completed all six of the Froebel Short Course Elements, which began their transformation to a Froebelian educational approach in all their settings.

Holli is also a Trustee of the Froebel Trust.

Rachna Joshi

Rachna is a Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor and an early childhood teacher, action-researcher and consultant. She works with under-threes, Nursery and Reception children in classroom settings and holds an MA in Early Childhood Studies. Rachna also writes for organisations like Tapestry and Early Education. Her recent work includes embedding music into settings via grants to purchase outdoor music walls, open-ended music resources and workshops for children and their families.

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Froebel Trust

Clarence Lodge
Clarence Lane
Roehampton
London SW15 5JW

w: froebel.org.uk

t: 020 8878 7546

e: office@froebeltrust.org.uk

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