

Abstract Volume

11th Biennial International Froebel Society Conference

‘Froebelian Pasts, Present and Futures’

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Erfurt, Germany



Thursday, 31.07.2025

- 13:00 Registration
- 13:30 Official Welcome
- 14:00 **Keynote:** Dr. Jens Beljan "Pedagogical Understanding: Childhood as a sphere of expressivity and resonance"
- 15:00 **Mixed Sessions I**
- 16:00 Tea & Coffee Break
- 16:30 **Mixed Sessions II**
- 18:00 Get Together

Keynote

Pedagogical Understanding: Childhood as a sphere of expressivity and resonance

Presented by PD Dr Jens Beljan

Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany)

Friedrich Fröbel developed a pedagogy grounded in a living, holistic relationship with the world. With his sphere-philosophical principle of “making the internal external and the external internal”, Fröbel points to a core pedagogical structure that remains highly relevant today. It is this principle of expression, realized above all through play, that opens up spaces of resonance in which children are not merely instructed, but can be sensually engaged, physically responsive, and creatively active.

This lecture invites us to consider Fröbel’s pedagogy not only as a historical legacy, but as an open space of thought through which contemporary challenges in education can be reexamined. This reading offers a vision of education that departs from functionalist paradigms. In place of the “*dividing spirit*”, it emphasizes the resonance of unifying connectedness; instead of instrumental control, it foregrounds the creative, expressive power of play.

Thursday – Mixed Sessions I

Toys in Early Childhood Education: Are toys necessary for play?

Presented by Dr Yukiyo Nishida, Dr John Mynott, Dr Maria Gregoriou
University of Aberdeen (UK)

This study aims to synthesise international research on toys in early childhood settings. This literature review is part of our planned comparative and international research on no-toy projects in early childhood education. Using search engines such as ERIC, JSTOR and/or Google Scholar, we will explore different views on the degree of conceptual compatibility with toys in early childhood education. Historically, no-toy kindergartens are not new. At the beginning of the 20th century, the first project was seen in Denmark by a Froebelian. In Germany in the 1990s, *Der Spielzeugfreie Kindergarten* was a popular project (Caldwell, 2019). By the end of the 2010s, several European countries and the UK were experimenting with no-toy projects in early childhood education. For example, no-toy projects were introduced as a sustainability-focused practice, they were also considered in play-based learning, or they were associated with loose part theory and curious approaches to implementation (Besse-Patin, 2018). Newspaper articles, blogs, and websites of the early childhood services where the projects were implemented reported that children's creativity, communication skills and social development are enhanced in toy-free play environments. Although no-toy projects appear to have some benefits for young children, this has not been scientifically proven. Before we start our research, several questions need to be answered, such as: Which toys were removed or kept in the no-toy projects? What are considered toys in early childhood education? Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) stressed the importance of play. He developed materials and activities to support children's development and learning through play, in line with his principles of *forms of life, knowledge and beauty*. The question arises, however, whether Froebel's Gifts and Occupations are toys. Many questions are raised when we discuss 'toys'. Simply, are toys necessary for play? In this presentation, we will find some degree of our definition of what toys are in early childhood education through the literature review whilst raising many questions to find an answer.

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The Value of Clay in a No-Toy Nursery

Presented by Thelma Miller

Froebel Trust (UK)

A joyful practical hands-on workshop exploring the importance of Clay, Froebel's 20th and last occupation, linking with Yukiyo Nishida's paper exploring the concept of a no-toy Early Years Setting.

We will consider why Froebel thought clay was so important an activity. Clay is from the earth, and it is found all over the world, it is a plastic medium that is quite unique. It provides a very satisfying tactile experience for children and adults of all ages, both energising and therapeutic. The earliest traces of human beings thousands of years ago are often in the form of clay bowls and pots. Bricks made from clay are a major building material and useful artefacts made of clay continue to be made and reflect diverse cultures all over the world. In a future world where technology and AI become ever more prevalent it seems to me that giving children and adults the opportunity in the future to engage through our hands with the earth's energy continues to be vitally important.

Feeling the clay, rolling, pounding, joining, creating, there is no right or wrong with clay. Clay provides experiential playful learning which children and adults can engage in at any stage of their life.

The Froebelian principles which I will offer for discussion include:

- How engaging with clay deepens our understanding of the Forms of everyday life, of beauty and of knowledge
- The many ways that clay work reflects the law of opposites
- The connection of clay to the natural world
- Exploring clay and its valuable role in developing children's understanding of symbolic representation

For the practitioner in the nursery or kindergarten the clay table is a valuable place to sit with children, to listen to them, to play, encourage and value their open-ended activities. We are considering the importance of Slow Pedagogy, of giving children time and space to develop their sense of self, and to be encouraged to develop a playful disposition.

Creating a space for clay in a setting and ensuring it is part of the daily continuous provision enables children to develop their holistic knowledge and skills. Such a valuable resource needs care and thought to be managed and I propose to discuss how this can be achieved.

Being and Becoming a Froebelian Community of Evidenced Practice

Presented by Dr Helen Lyndon, Sally Cave, Anne Denham, Sara Stewart

Centre for Research in Early Childhood (UK), Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre (UK), Seven Stars Kindergarten (New Zealand), The Cottage Kindergarten (New Zealand)

This symposium would be delivered by **The Froebel Partnership**, this partnership was grant-funded by the Froebel Trust 2021-2024. Educators in two countries worked with researchers in practice-led research that was guided by Froebelian principles and has led to transformations for educators, researchers, children and their families.

This symposium aims to establish an up to the minute interpretation and application of Froebelian principles, theories and pedagogic actions developed by an ethically principled, democratic community of practice in two early childhood settings set in two very different countries, England and New Zealand. We would aim to provide an innovative, Froebelian inspired, and evidenced approach to Professional Development that promotes ethical practice transformation using Froebelian principles and practices. It will promote a radical shift in approach to better support the professionalisation of an ailing early childhood workforce through the promotion of Froebelian communities of practice. The symposium will be in three parts:

Presentation 1 will provide a contemporary account of Froebelian principles and practices and an overview of the global challenges which face young children and the educators that work with them.

Presentation 2 will provide an illustrative and reflective narrative of the practice evidence that has emerged from each of the three overarching Froebelian research projects that were conducted by the Communities of practice in England and New Zealand and which led to the creation of a new professional reflective tool '*Reflection with Guidance*'. These 3 projects are: Engaging with Nature, the relevance of Froebel's Gifts and Occupations today, Exploring the Layers of Play.

Presentation 3 will provide portraits or case studies from each of the 3 research projects set in England and New Zealand demonstrating the application of the Froebelian Reflection with Guidance framework that has inspired and developed the work of educators within the Froebel Partnership's work.

Encounters with Blocks

Presented by Catriona Gill & Jane Whinett

Froebel Trust (UK)

The Law of the Sphere (Bruce, 2021; Liebschner, 2006; Wasmuth, 2020; Winkler, 2023), illustrates Froebel's pantheistic ideas about the unity and interconnectedness of all things. His pedagogical materials were developed as a tool to illustrate these ideas, the gifts and occupations being a "constant, itself mutually explaining and benefiting, internally connected whole" (Fröbel, 1836c, p. 14)" (Wasmuth, 2020, p. 76).

Froebel's monistic concept of unity has clear connections to post humanist perspectives which can offer a way of thinking differently about practice. Deleuze & Guattari (1987), share an intellectual tradition with Froebel, drawing on the ideas of the materialist strand of German idealism developing at the University of Jena, during and after his time as a student (MacLure & MacRae, 2022). Recent new materialist perspectives (Barad, 1996; Haraway, 2008; Lenz-Taguchi, 2010) suggest that "Materials are not immutable, passive or lifeless until the moment we do something to them: they participate in our early childhood projects. They live, speak, gesture and call to us." (Kind, 2014, p. 865) New materialism enables us to think differently about how young children and educators experience the material world (Clark, 2019).

This presentation examines material from 18 practitioner enquiry projects in which educators explored contemporary unit block play within their ECEC settings. Focusing on assemblages of relationships which develop around actions and events with the "capacity to affect or be affected" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xvii), the presentation will make clear links between theory and contemporary practice. Bringing participatory methods together with new materialist theories, to offer new understandings about early childhood environments, Froebelian block play and the role of the educator.

AI object recognition and 3D modelling apps as tools for recording and representing children's physical block play constructions

Presented by Michael Rumbelow

University of Bristol (UK)

As well as being an innovator of block play pedagogy, Friedrich Froebel was also an innovator in representing block play, through hand-drawn illustrations of block constructions, in 3D perspective from a block-builder's point of view, often including hands positioning the blocks. In this practical workshop we will explore some of the affordances of digital technologies to create virtual 3D models of young children's constructions with physical blocks, and some pedagogical opportunities this offers for recording children's constructed forms and re-proposing them to children and their educators. For example, 3D models may be experienced in augmented reality, to view them from different perspectives and at different scales, or as simple animations of blocks 'dancing', inspired by some of Froebel's drawings of sequences of symmetrical block arrangements illustrating 'Forms of Beauty'.

The key technologies –all free-to-download –we will use in this hands-on workshop are AI object recognition apps (e.g. Magiscan and blockplay.ai) and 3D modelling tools (e.g. Unity 3D and Minecraft). I will also reflect on early trials of using these technologies in early years settings in the field, and some of the challenges and opportunities they present pedagogically and practically. The experiences are drawn from my doctoral study of block play in early years settings in south-west England.

‘Ahoy there, Captain’: Symbolic puppet play as a unifying literacy experience

Presented by Dr Kate Smith

Froebel Trust (UK)

In this session I will explore the implications for Froebelian practice gathered from the evaluation of The Little Angel Theatre’s ‘Reading for Pleasure’ initiative — a twelve-month project inspired by Julia Donaldson’s *Charlie Cook’s Favourite Book*. This project involved drama and puppetry workshops in 182 schools and 24 libraries across England with a focus on young children’s explorative play with materials and freedom of symbolic expression. Findings will be shared that demonstrate how exploratory and symbolic play, as a unifying process, can be an integrative and emotionally resonant learning encounter for both children and adults. Participants will have the opportunity to play creatively with some of the materials used in the project.

Symbolic play, as an integral part of the workshop activities, enabled the children to make meaningful connections between different and overlapping forms of knowledge essential for literacy; bringing together elements of speech, storytelling and reading (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). The children conveyed their own literary resources and interests and collaborated with others to develop new imaginative opportunities in order to extend their creativity (Bruce, 2020).

Opportunities to transform everyday materials into puppets as storytelling tools encouraged the children to externalise their inner narratives (Froebel, 1887), develop empathy, and explore character motivation through dramatic retellings. The open-ended and adaptable activities on offer combined with sensitive facilitation by adults created inclusive spaces to play; spaces that were particularly accessible for children with learning support needs. Adult participation enhanced teacher and parent/carer confidence in using puppetry and drama, supporting the potential enrichment of classroom practices and home reading experiences.

The project shows how Froebel’s principles (Tovey, 2017) are able to successfully support and extend the unique work that arts-based organisations do to enhance young children’s education.

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Understanding through your hands: 10,000 scribbles are 10,000 neural connections

Presented by Sabine Plamper & Titia Sprey

Atelier in een koffer (Netherlands)

Creativity is so much more than drawing or painting something that is “beautiful”. It is a way of understanding the world through your hands and learning through play, art and sciences. For example, it’s important for children to learn by doing and to be allowed to make mistakes. Children get in flow when they can follow their own marks and ideas. Making their own images intensifies their experience and knowledge and makes them grow.

Creativity is what happens for children when they're exploring and discovering their environment by themselves. It often takes place without a plan, without pre-constructed craft materials, and even without the explanation of an adult. We don't want to talk here about definitions of creativity, we focus on understanding through your hands. This presentation with hands on part gives surprising eyeopener about creating and playing; it offers a feasible and sustainable alternative to traditional crafting where an adult demonstrates how it should be done.

Threads of Connection: Unravelling Froebelian kinship and the art of shared knowing

Presented by Dr Lynn McNair

University of Edinburgh (UK)

In order to navigate the world of early childhood, like-minded individuals greatly benefit from being around one another (Froebel, 1887). Human beings are fundamentally social creatures, and kinship is an important aspect in our survival. This presentation will focus on educators who have proclaimed their interest in the work of Friedrich Froebel, e.g., his emphasis on play, his analogies linking the spiritual to the physical and so on, and as a result the educators formed a social category of intellectual kinship (Bruce, 2021). This presentation explores the story, from one Scottish practitioner / academic who shares a compelling journey of her, sometimes bumpy, journey towards intellectual kinship. Evidence of kin detection and altruism will be shared. It is a story of rich dynamics and survival in early learning and childcare (Education Scotland, 2020). It then proceeds to share how understandings of intellectual kinship developed slowly over time (Clark, 2023); and how Froebelian kinship in Scotland has been ongoing and relentless, as practitioners have noted their affinity with Froebel's ideas. Accordingly, this presentation will additionally briefly introduce an appreciation of Froebel, sharing narratives and resemblances of Scottish practitioners who reveal their histories, their very thorough knowledge, their theorising/philosophising of Froebelian ideas and practices; and, importantly how they as professionals made knowledge and related to one another with particular intensity.

A Froebelian Early Learning Space: What Does It Offer? What Should It Offer?

Presented by Fatemeh Sadeghi
University of Edinburgh (UK)

Early learning spaces are dynamically constructed by children, educators, and materials within unique environments. Friedrich Froebel's principles of unity, connectedness, and the interplay between freedom and guidance remain foundational to early childhood education. While Froebelian pedagogy has extensively explored practices and interactions, less attention has been given to the spatial and aesthetic dimensions of where children learn. This research (a Ph.D. research) examined Froebelian early learning spaces through a spatial and aesthetic lens, integrating Froebel's foundational ideas with insights from fieldwork in Froebelian-inspired nursery settings.

Drawing on Froebel's concept of harmony and unity (Froebel, 1826), this study explores how children perceive and engage with their learning spaces. The research identifies spatial arrangements and materials that foster an appreciation of the space as an element of cognitive, emotional, and sensory development. Froebelian gifts, with their emphasis on patterns, symmetry, and interconnectedness, serve as exemplars of how children develop aesthetic sensibilities through play and exploration (Tovey, 2017). Open-ended materials and adaptable layouts encourage self-directed discovery while embedding the Froebelian ideals of freedom with guidance.

The study also highlights the participatory role of children in co-creating their environments, aligning with Froebel's holistic vision of education as a reciprocal relationship between the child and their world (Clark, 2010). The inclusion of natural materials and outdoor spaces extends Froebel's belief in the interconnectedness of humans and nature, enhancing sensory engagement and fostering ecological consciousness.

This article invites educators to reimagine early learning environments as dynamic expressions of Froebelian philosophy, where unity, connectedness, and self activity support holistic child development.

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Thursday – Mixed Sessions II

Intergenerational practice and dance with the Gifts: a spiritual journey of sustaining the Froebelian heritage

Presented by Dr. Fengling Tang & Rachna Joshi
University of Roehampton (UK)

Drawing on a Froebel Trust funded research project (Tang and Zhao, 2022-2024), this first part shares research findings with a focus on nurturing spirituality in early childhood via intergenerational practice. The research addresses the value of adopting Froebel's concept of Unity (Froebel, 1887; Bruce, 2021) and Froebelian principle of 'Unity, connectedness and community' (Tovey, 2020) as the theoretical framework for researching spirituality in early childhood. Spirituality involves a process, in which the child develops awareness of the surrounding world with an ongoing pursuit for a sense of her/his place in the family, community, nature and wider world. The research evidences the important role of intergenerational practice in nurturing spirituality among both children and the 'grand friends', who interacted with each other via music, movement, creative activities as well as cultural and religious rituals in one of the four research sites. We will then explore the dance of the Gifts as adapted from Froebel's Pedagogics of the Kindergarten (Froebel, 1895). Here we explore the beauty in movement between the Gift 3, making connections to spirituality through movement and dance by embodying the cubes and moving as a group.

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Crafting connections: developing reflective practice through felting a ball

Presented by Bridget Steenkamp

Froebel Trust (UK)

This workshop is rooted in the Froebelian principles of unity and connectedness. It champions a non-verbal engagement with the natural world and the divine core in each of us. Building on the academic work championed by the Froebel Trust's slow woodwork and slow stitching, the focus will be felting a ball for Froebel's first Gift.

As participants create felt we will explore together craft as a reflective practice. Froebel's writings on the inner and outer, on how the first gift is used with his Mother Songs and Love Songs for the Child will be kept central during our time together. This workshop invites participants to slow down and enjoy the sensory richness of the repetitive, meditative, craft of felting. Being present in the present will allow us time to slow down enough to look at both the past and the future.

Through tactile engagement with natural fibers, we will explore how craft-making fosters deep connections with materials, self, and others. Intentional spaces for silence and time for reflective dialogue will encourage participants to consider how slowness, mindful moments, and intentionality can be fostered in their practice. Creating the crafted felt ball offers a firsthand experience of how craft can promote calmness, focus, and accomplishment across all ages and abilities.

Group discussions will develop organically, inviting reflective connections to Froebelian principles. Designed as an interdisciplinary experience, this workshop welcomes participants of all abilities who seek to deepen their understanding of Froebelian pedagogy through creative, embodied learning.

Froebel (2005, p. 287) observes, "Nothing but the First Gift can so effectively arouse in the child's mind the feeling and consciousness of a world of individual things." Through this playful engagement with the first Gift, participants will nurture unity, connectedness, and soft resilience, leaving with a crafted ball and practical ideas to integrate reflective craft into educational or professional settings.

Kindergarten as Loanword Around the World - Insights into Kindergarten Pedagogy in United States Around 1860

Presented by Stefanie Vochatzer
Paderborn University (Germany)

Friedrich Froebels kindergarten is known as a loanword around the world. When the idea spread to the world his writing was translated or interpreted by German practitioners such as Margarethe Schurz (1833-1876), Maria Kraus-Boelté (1836-1918), Mathilde Kriege (1820-1899), and Emma Marwedel (1818-1893) (Bruce, Yukiyo, Powell, Wasmuth, & Whinnett, 2023; Engelmann, 2019; Sauerbrey, 2013; Sauerbrey, Winkler, & Zipf, 2015). Within this translation process, the idea was modified due to the difficulty of understanding Froebel's original writing (Engelmann 2023). Despite translation difficulties, the concept of kindergarten, for example, has made it as far as the United States. However, the term kindergarten is used to refer to educational institutions that are different from those we know in Germany. In my presentation, I will explore how Friedrich Froebel and his pedagogy were received and implemented in the United States. Specifically, I will look at the American kindergarten pioneer Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) who founded the first English-speaking kindergarten in 1860 in America. As editor of the first magazine for kindergarten teachers 'Kindergarten Messenger', which first appeared in 1873, and as the founder of the professional association for kindergarten teachers called "Froebel Union", founded in 1877 (Cantor 2013) Peabody is the person who advanced kindergarten at the institutional level (Lascarides and Hinitz 2000; Miller 2011; Snyder 1972). In my presentation, I will elaborate on the views of kindergarten pedagogy considered important in America around 1860 and show how the establishment and modification of pedagogical concepts depend on the context in which they arise.

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The reception of Froebel's ideas on children's play by childhood researcher Martha Muchow

Presented by Prof Ulf Sauerbrey
University of Erfurt (Germany)

Martha Muchow (1882-1933), internationally known as research assistant to the psychologist William Stern (Schoggen, 1985; Wohlwill, 1985), made a fundamental contribution to social science-oriented childhood research with her empirical study “Der Lebensraum des Großstadtkindes” (‘The Life Space of the Urban Child’) (Muchow & Muchow 1935/2012; Mey & Günther, 2015). However, her reception of Friedrich Fröbel’s ideas on early childhood play is less well known (Konrad, 2021). The paper focuses on three publications by Martha Muchow. These are an essay entitled “Friedrich Fröbels kinder- und bildungspsychologische Anschauungen und die moderne Psychologie” (‘Friedrich Fröbel’s child and educational psychological views and the modern psychology’) from the journal “Kindergarten” (Muchow, 1927), a joint book with the Montessori advocate Hilde Hecker on the so-called “Fröbel-Montessori-Streit” (‘The Fröbel-Montessori controversy’) in the 1920s (Hecker & Muchow, 1927) and a monograph entitled “Psychologische Probleme der frühen Erziehung” (‘Psychological problems of early education’) (Muchow, 1929). The lecture will examine the influence of Fröbel’s ideas on the scientific thoughts of a central actor in modern childhood research.

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Creative Storytelling and Froebelian Pedagogy: The Early Reception of Froebel's Methods and Building Blocks in Japan

Presented by Mie Nojiri

Jissen Women's University (Japan)

In *A Practical Guide to the English Kindergarten* (1858), J. and B. Ronge proposed an approach that integrated storytelling with building block play. This practice, rooted in Froebel's method of using educational blocks, was later disseminated in the kindergarten education system of the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Japan, Froebelian educational methods began to be adopted towards the end of the 19th century. Particularly in Christian kindergartens established by female missionaries from North America, Froebel's educational principles—*FORMS OF LIFE*, *FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE*, and *FORMS OF BEAUTY*—were implemented and adapted to suit the cultural and social context of Japan.

In contemporary Japanese kindergartens, it is common practice to introduce a theme or story prior to beginning group activities. This approach serves to capture the children's attention and encourage active participation, effectively enhancing their engagement. The educational method proposed by the Ronge couple in 1858 continues to influence modern educational practices.

This presentation aims to examine the use of creative storytelling in Japanese Christian kindergartens during the 1910s and 1920s, based on the lecture notes of students who studied at the Christian kindergarten Teacher's school. By analysing these materials, the study seeks to illuminate the process by which Froebelian education was introduced and adapted in Japan.

Entanglements with Life, Beauty and Knowledge: Story-making as a practice in Sustainable Froebelian Pedagogies

Presented by Luke Addison & Dr Lynn McNair

University of Edinburgh (UK)

Drawing on data from final-year PhD research (Froebel Trust Funded), this paper presents an iterative methodological exploration of how Froebelian principles can inform sustainable pedagogies. Conducted over six months in an outdoor, Froebelian-inspired early years setting in Scotland, this ethnographic study engaged with children's experiences and relationships with the more-than-human world.

The research initially utilised pedagogical documentation 'lived stories', incorporating a variety of media such as photographs, observations, GoPro video footage, transient art, clay models, and more. These materials were collaboratively reflected upon by the researcher, setting staff, and children, emphasizing children's agency in interpreting and narrating their own experiences.

Grounded in children's questions and interests emerging from this reflective process, the project then generated both fictional and non-fictional stories. These narratives—exploring themes such as the lives of forest fairies, the habits of birds, and existential inquiries like "Why do trees grow?" and "Where does water go?"—became tools for fostering sustainable thinking and deepening connections with nature. Through a story-making methodology, and creative exploration, the researcher and setting staff worked with children, developing a nuanced understanding of their relationships with the natural world.

This paper details the process of story-making, beginning with the compilation and use of pedagogical documentation and extending to examples of children's artwork and video contributions. The final stories are analysed to demonstrate their impact on children's sustainable thinking, attitudes, and relationships with their environment.

Framed within Froebelian principles, the research highlights the philosophical depth of Froebelian storytelling and its intersections with children's own narrative practices, touching on themes of aesthetics, interconnectedness, and the essence of life. This paper situates itself within an academic discourse, offering insights into Froebelian pedagogy while inviting deeper reflection on its potential to inspire sustainable educational practices.

Visions of Irish Froebelian graduates' professional identities through a dynamic systems lens

Presented by Prof Niamh Fortune & Sinéad Magee

Maynooth University (Ireland)

The education of primary teachers and early childhood educators through Froebelian philosophy has been ongoing in Ireland for more than eighty years through the Froebel College of Education, now the Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education at Maynooth University. For these Irish graduates, being educated within Froebelian philosophy means learning about Froebel's principles of education, learning through these principles, and ultimately learning to teach and work according to these principles. These principles focus on the whole child and the concept of unity; engagement with nature; play, imagination, creativity, and the symbolic life of the child; and the importance of nurturing relationships. Informal conversations with graduates and observations of their actions suggest that their Froebelian roots form a fundamental part of their professional identity, grounding their professional practice. However, there are differences of opinion about what exactly constitutes a Froebelian graduate identity in Ireland and how it might be recognized. To explore this matter, each of eight faculty members at Maynooth's Froebel Department chose a graduate who demonstrates a Froebelian graduate professional identity, interviewed them, and together with the graduate, constructed a narrative of the graduate's professional journey, and the role of their Froebelian education within it. We then analysed these narratives to create professional identity profiles of the graduates using Kaplan and Garner's (2017) dynamic systems model of professional role identity, which views it as the actions that professionals take as a result of interacting components, both external and internal to the individual. These components are sociocultural context, dispositions, relevant ontological & epistemological beliefs; self-perceptions & self-definitions in the role; purpose & goals and perceived action possibilities in the role. Following this analysis, we worked together to compare profiles to investigate whether we could identify commonalities across these Irish Froebelian graduates' professional identities.

A Froebelian perspectives toward 'Restorative Care' during infant rest and sleep routines and rituals in the 21st century domestic home

Presented by Dr Amanda Norman

University of Winchester (UK)

Friedrich Froebel (1782 - 1852) was a pioneer of early childhood education and the kindergarten with his philosophy often, including his Family Song book, studied from an early educator's perspective. My research offers an alternative perspective in light of a Froebelian philosophy to the wider connections of infant restorative care during rest and sleep routines and rituals, within the domestic home. By arguing for the relevance of a Froebel approach to the introduced term, 'Restorative Care' during rest and sleep in the home I will be introducing how interactions, and transitional approaches build and maintain positive emotional healthy relationships, contributing to, as well as challenging the existing advice and literature within rest and sleep praxis. My methodology will be qualitative and include an initial analysis of the lullabies and finger rhymes. Interviews, reflecting about rest and sleep rituals and routines will be conducted with parents across England to highlight beliefs, advice received, choices and practices with their infants. Ethical considerations is sought within the ethical framework of the University of Winchester, UK. From the review and data garnered a monograph will be developed, illuminating the relevance of a Froebelian perspective within home-based care. This paper will share and discuss the initial findings from the interview data collected and will be framed within the Forms of Life, Beauty and Knowledge. Forms of life, developing and representing things and experiences from the world around, as rest and sleep routines and rituals are created and re-created to support both needs of the infant and the family. Forms of Beauty and Forms of knowledge will also include considerations and explorations about harmony, the learning of time, space and the rhythms of nature associated with quantity (routine) and quality (rituals) in relation to infant rest and sleep.

Froebel's Mother Songs and Finger Plays

Presented by Steph Harding & Paula Lester

Froebel Trust (UK)

We will be looking at the Mother Songs in terms of a developmentally sensitive sequence of increasing complexity supporting children's physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and communication skills.

This practical session will explore Froebel's ideas based on his observations of babies and young children. It will explore the complex way that Froebel expressed these ideas and demonstrate how music and movement can support and develop children's learning. We will explore how the developmental progression moves from emerging self-awareness, through deepening relationships and singing with a primary carer, family or community to developing a greater knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

The connections to the theoretical paper are an emphasis on how the rhythm and rhyme of lullabies and songs can enhance emotional and social connections to develop learning and how representation grows in complexity through the Forms of Life, Beauty and Knowledge.

We will look at the whole and parts aspect of Unity and how this is illustrated in a Mother Song. How using songs that name separate parts of the body give opportunities for exercise and nurture a child's developing awareness of their own body. Simple representation using gesture, movement and expression, as well as the voice, will be explored.

We will also look at the importance of the song content having meaningful links to children's everyday real-life experiences, how this can help develop a sense of self and promote positive relationships with others and also how it articulates the sense of being a part of nature and the wider world.

Participants will be asked to share a song that they use with young children and to reflect on how the song links with the Forms of Life, Beauty and Knowledge.

Friday, 01.08.2025

09:00 Registration

09:30 **Keynote:** Dr Maria Cooper "Ka mua, Ka muri (Walking backwards into the future): Nurturing the whole child across time and place"

10:30 Tea & Coffee Break

11:00 **Excursions**

18:30 Dinner at Radisson Blu Hotel

Keynote

Ka mua, Ka muri (Walking backwards into the future): Nurturing the whole child across time and place

Presented by Dr Maria Cooper

University of Auckland (New Zealand)

Embracing the Māori proverb *Ka mua, Ka muri*, I explore how Froebel's emphasis on unity, connectedness, and community aligns with contemporary approaches to nurturing children's holistic identities. Drawing inspiration from Aotearoa New Zealand, and speaking from my position as *Tangata Tiriti* (non-Māori), I examine potential synergies between Froebelian philosophy and Māori worldviews. In particular, I explore how Māori concepts of interconnectedness, such as *whānau* (family) and *whakapapa* (genealogy), inform the nation's bicultural early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. This exploration offers unique insights into fostering children's holistic development from birth, demonstrating how understanding our pasts and interconnectedness can enrich early childhood education practices, across time and place.

Saturday, 02.08.2025

- 09:30 Registration
- 10:00 **Keynote:** Prof Helge Wasmuth "Froebel: The past, the present, and the future"
- 11:00 Tea & Coffee Break
- 11:30 **Mixed Sessions III**
- 12:30 Tea & Coffee Break
- 13:00 **Mixed Sessions IV**
- 14:00 Conclusion & End

Keynote

Friedrich Fröbel: The past, the present, and the future

Presented by Dr Helge Wasmuth

Mercy University (USA)

The interest in Friedrich Fröbel's pedagogy has intensified over the last few years, to the extent that one can speak of a "reconceptualization movement." However, Fröbel's pedagogy and examining its core ideas can have different meanings and purposes for scholars and practitioners.

In my talk, I will discuss what it means to think about Fröbel as a historian ("the past"), the importance of Fröbel's thinking for practitioners and us as a community in the current early childhood education and care landscape ("the present"), and how we can think and act with Fröbel in a society that is threatened by climate change and the global decline of democracy ("the future").

Saturday – Mixed Sessions III

Fröbel's forms of life, beauty and knowledge. Can we also find them in his family book of the mother and nursery songs?

Finden wir die Lebens-, Schönheits- und Erkenntnisformen auch in Friedrich Fröbels Familienbuch der Mutter- und Koselieder?

Presented by Dr Christiane Konrad

The question of whether Fröbel also considers his concept of forms of life, beauty, and knowledge in his Family Book on early childhood education and how he does so, if applicable, will be discussed in a bilingual workshop. After a brief review of the play gifts, in which Fröbel developed examples of the forms, an introduction to the family book of mother and lullaby songs follows. The focus will be on the play songs. In a subsequent small group activity, additional play songs are to be developed. Finally, the working hypothesis of integrating forms of life, beauty, and knowledge into the family book will be discussed. The workshop will be conducted in German, but a parallel English-language PowerPoint presentation will be available for additional participants. In the working phase, the game songs are provided in the original German or in the English translation. The evaluation of the results is conducted in two languages.

Die Frage, ob Fröbel sein Konzept der Lebens-, Schönheits- und Erkenntnisformen auch in seinem Familienbuch zur frühkindlichen Erziehung berücksichtigt und wie er das ggf. tut, soll in einem zweisprachigen Workshop erörtert werden. Nach einem kurzen Rückblick auf die Spielgaben, in deren Zusammenhang Fröbel Beispiele zu den Formen ausgearbeitet hat, erfolgt eine Einführung in das Familienbuch der Mutter- und Koselieder. Der Schwerpunkt wird dabei auf den Spielliedern liegen. In einer anschließenden Kleingruppenarbeit sollen weitere Spiellieder erarbeitet werden. Abschließend wird dann die Arbeitshypothese der Integration von Lebens-, Schönheits- und Erkenntnisformen in das Familienbuch erörtert. Der Workshop wird deutsch moderiert, doch über eine parallel geführte englischsprachige ppt-Präsentation für weitere Teilnehmende zugänglich. In der Arbeitsphase werden die Spiellieder im deutschen Original oder in der englischen Übersetzung zur Verfügung gestellt. Die Auswertung der Ergebnisse erfolgt zweisprachig.

Beyond the Mother Songs – A Froebelian approach to early childhood music for the 21st century

Presented by Steve Grocott

The session aims to embody the Froebelian principle of learning “in life and through doing” by engaging attendees in tried and tested musical activities and ways to encourage children to respond to it in their own ways.

- Forms of beauty - exploring the musical elements that help us provide aesthetic experiences that engage children holistically
- Unity and connectedness - experiencing how these activities connect the physical, emotional, and intellectual aspects of all of us and also connect us socially with each other.
- Freedom with guidance - how this relates to providing musical and mathematical frameworks that, presented well, facilitate improvisation and creative play
- Starting with the child - listening without judgment in order that children’s own music can be seen heard and valued – this includes a discussion of music children bring from home and hear in videos and television etc.

Attendees will have a joyful experience, personal and social, that provides an opportunity for reflection and discussion about the how and why of music provision with peers.

It is anticipated that attendees will gain valuable content and overarching ideas for use in practitioner training.

Being and Becoming: Reflections on Froebelian Journeys

Presented by Marcella Towler & Dr Alison Moore
University College Cork (Ireland)

This paper will focus on the reflections of educators in University education as Froebelian principles and pedagogy were incorporated into their work with Early Years and Childhood Studies students as they developed their understandings of outdoor learning spaces. The discussion will draw on aspects of a Froebel Trust funded two-phased research project (Moore and Towler, 2024) which have previously not been disseminated. It will describe the central role of reflective practice from the embryonic exploration of project ideas to enactment of research methods, evolving professional development and the enduring legacy of our respective Froebelian journeys. The account will thus emphasize that “Developing a Froebelian approach takes time. It requires critical reflection, discussion, and a willingness to question taken for granted ideas” (Tovey, 2020,p.22).

The presentation will incorporate the concept of liminal spaces in education which will be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it will relate to the physical site in phase one of the research, the School of Education Outdoor Learning Space in University College Cork. Secondly, it will metaphorically document the oscillating between the known and the unknown, the “betwixt and between” state (Turner, 1974,p.223) of both students and educators in both phases of the project. It will characterize the link and flow between different areas of experience and the connectedness therein as both students and educators aspire to become the knowledgeable, nurturing reflective educators espoused by the Froebel Trust. The narrative will refer to chance encounters and personal anecdotes in the educators ongoing Froebelian journeys. It will demonstrate that during the study and beyond, the educators were “...teacher and scholar, educator and pupil, all at the same time” (Froebel cited in Michaelis and Keatley Moore, 1915,p. 77).

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The ownership of wisdom: provocations on early years as a context for 'thinking together'

Presented by Dr Busra Kumru

Istanbul University-Cerrahpasa (Turkey)

This proposal invites imagining Froebel in conversation with Lipman and Sharp (1978), constructors of contemporary dialogic pedagogy based on doing philosophy for/with/by children, abbreviated as P4C. Froebel's ideas on early childhood education and care have led to ever-expanding studies highlighting the need for a transformative change in its current state, often highlighting the fragility and uncertainty of our lives. This proposal thus adapts the necessity of re-turning dialogue stemming from the Froebelian past, which is weaved into the present by reading Froebel diffractively through Lipman and Sharp's perspectives. This endeavour aims to question the ownership of wisdom by examining the viability of such ownership and considering whose knowledge counts in early childhood contexts. Accordingly, Froebelian thinking and Lipman and Sharp's propositions are broken apart "in different directions" (Barad, 2014: 168). Reading diffractively exposes (at least to some extent) shared ontological underpinnings between the two across childhood and adulthood within the concept of pedagogy. Elaborations on Froebel and Lipman and Sharp's notions connect, as they 'threaded through one another' (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019), for reconceptualising pedagogy that extends beyond mere teaching and involves a thoughtful engagement where both child and adult think together. As diffraction troubles dichotomies (Murriss and Bozalek, 2019), the implication of reading Froebel in conversation with Lipman and Sharp also allows unpacking epistemological possibilities for dismantling dichotomies between children and adults to achieve learning environments where knowledge is co-constructed rather than transmitted (Sellers, 2013). Finding the resonances between Froebelian approaches and P4C practices accentuates some provocations to be discussed on integrating philosophy on children's experiences in early childhood and care to promote (a) agentic spaces for children's worldviews, (b) diverse and equitable early childhood practice and (c) relational pedagogies centred around the process of learning rather than the outcome per se.

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Is it possible to have a children's outdoor nursery within a botanic garden?

Presented by Caroline Walsh & Dr Lynn McNair

Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (UK), University of Edinburgh (UK)

In maximizing the opportunities associated with making cities greener places to live, the existing under-utilised spaces of botanical gardens for learning should not be overlooked. Botanical gardens play an increasingly important role in the fight against biodiversity loss and the climate emergency, however for young children they are often seen as restricted environments where they are prohibited from running around, playing on the grass or climbing trees. Underpinned by Froebelian principles, the Royal Botanic Garden (Edinburgh) launched a 6-month outdoor nursery pilot in a disused corner of the garden. Affectionately known to the children as 'Our Wee Garden' the aims of the pilot were multi-faceted, with aspirations to engage children and their parents with the wonders of the garden, to embed best practice research in outdoor learning, to create greater links with the wider community and to gather knowledge to share with other early years practitioners. Working with colleagues from the University of Edinburgh and Thrive Outdoors, the pilot aimed to answer one very simple question – can you actually run an outdoor nursery in a botanic garden? Over the period of the pilot, the garden worked with around 20 children aged 2 – 5 from two demographically different nurseries - one existing city based outdoor nursery and one indoor based social enterprise - to identify the benefit of outdoor learning for young children within a botanical garden setting and attempt to answer this question.

21st century ways to incorporate Froebel's gifts and occupations into the classroom

Presented by Susan Wood & Melissa Samples

The Children's Center at Caltech (USA)

In the 21st century, as educational contexts evolve with advancing technologies and a growing emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), there lies a timely and powerful opportunity to revisit and reimagine Froebel's methods for today's learners. At The Children's Center at Caltech, a constructivist, STEM-focused early childhood program in the United States, we weave theory and practice together to nurture children's natural curiosity as the foundation for lifelong learning.

This presentation will share how Froebel's pedagogy continues to inspire our work, alongside the influence of other early childhood theorists, as we design rich, meaningful experiences for young children. Through hands-on exploration, open-ended materials, and an inquiry-driven approach, children at our center engage with patterns, structures, and relationships—reflecting the spirit of Froebel's gifts and occupations while embracing current understandings of scientific thinking and cognitive development.

Attendees will gain a practical look at how timeless elements of Froebelian practice—such as block play—remain central in our classrooms, having evolved into dynamic tools for exploration, collaboration, and problem-solving. This session offers a window into how Froebel's legacy lives on in modern, STEM-rich learning environments, and invites educators to consider how these enduring principles can support the developmental needs and curiosities of today's learners.

Saturday – Mixed Sessions IV

How do open-ended resources support representation through forms of life, beauty and knowledge?

Presented by Dr Stella Louis & Julia Manning-Morton

Froebel Trust (UK), Bath Spa University (UK)

Play is a foundational principle of a Froebelian approach (Froebel Trust n.d.). Froebel described play with the Gifts as representing the forms of life, beauty and knowledge. In this session, we will explore theoretical perspectives about how play with open ended resources supports children to express their inner ideas in outer forms and relate these to current practice.

The aim of Froebel's educational approach was to know yourself, know others and know the universe so that life was a complete whole known as 'unification of life'. Froebel (in Lilley, 1967) observed babies' fascination with a ball and developed his first Gift of six soft woollen balls. To develop his ideas of unity and connection and the law of contrasts the following Gifts exemplify these ideas in concrete form.

Froebel emphasised the importance of self-activity for children from birth to investigate and learn about the world around them. Exploration through the senses supported by loving relationships with family led to autonomy. The role of the adult to 'observe, support and extend' (Bruce, 1987) exemplifies the Froebelian pedagogical approach of 'freedom with guidance' (Liebschner, 1992). Goldschmied developed Froebel's ideas about the benefit of playing with open ended resources to create treasure baskets for babies who can sit and heuristic play for children who were mobile (Goldschmied and Jackson 2004). The open-ended resources can be used in many ways to explore and possibly begin to represent their experiences and ideas. So, in this session, we will explore how play with everyday objects and with Froebel's Gifts and Occupations, support children's development and learning.

Fuzzy Play? An exploration of how play is portrayed on early childhood education websites

Presented by Marcella Towler

University College Cork (Ireland)

This paper will explore the play narratives employed in the advertising texts of early childhood education providers in Ireland. The tendency of such texts to “disseminate discourses of play, and work to appeal to parents as enterprising consumers” has been noted by Drew (2019, p.125) in the context of the United Kingdom. Focusing on children as investments for the future can have a “devastating impact” on early education and can contribute to the endorsement of a push down curriculum and a standardized approach with an emphasis on core subjects with the potential for academic school subjects to feature in the early education sphere (Sims, 2014, 2017, p.1). The study utilizes multimodal critical discourse (MCDA) analysis to explore the communicative potential of websites to depict play in specific ways. MCDA is based on a social semiotics which considers the choices of signs used for communicating specific aims (Machin and Mayr, 2023). This approach demonstrates how language and image work together to convey information with contradictions between the texts and images used becoming evident. There is a propensity to portray play as a means to get to a specific outcome rather than the Froebelian idea that “play is learning” (Wasmuth, Sauerbrey, Winkler, 2023, p.191). The role of the adult in children’s play continues to be a source of debate (Bruce, 2021). The analysis will include reference to whether children are activated or passivated within the play representations. The contradictions of switching play on and off within the discourse leaves a fuzzy depiction of the central importance of play in early childhood education.

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Froebel Pedagogy: The Nexus between Then & Now

Presented by Prof Andrea Schmid & Nikolas Rathert

University of Erfurt (Germany)

Friedrich Fröbel's pedagogical principles, introduced in the 19th century, continue to influence early childhood education today. The development of Fröbel's pedagogy in the past, present and future is an interesting approach to historical research. The focus here is on the historical use of Fröbel materials, current empirical research and consideration of the influence of future technological developments on individual elements of pedagogy (Schmid, Rathert & Schamberger 2023).

Historically, Froebel's educational philosophy emphasised the importance of play and creativity for child development. His materials, such as the Fröbel gifts and activities, were designed to stimulate sensory and cognitive development. These materials, based on natural materials and geometric shapes, promoted a hands-on approach to learning that is still relevant in today's pedagogy (Fröbel 1826).

Today, empirical research has confirmed many of Froebel's pedagogical findings. Studies have shown that the play-based learning propagated by Fröbel promotes the cognitive, social and emotional development of children (Bodrova & Leong 2024). In modern educational practice, Froebel's principles are often taken up, adapted to contemporary contexts and linked to current educational theories. In the recent past, empirical studies on the effectiveness of Froebel's gifts have been presented for the first time (Rathert 2022).

The future of Froebel's pedagogy harbours exciting possibilities, particularly through the integration of technology. The digitisation of Froebel's written works with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) can make his pedagogical insights more accessible and interpretable for modern educators. In addition, the development of a Froebel app with a physics engine could simulate the Froebel materials, enabling interactive and immersive learning experiences for children. This technological improvement could bridge the gap between traditional and digital learning environments and make Froebel's principles even more relevant in the 21st century.

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Froebel today - Explorer dialogues with children

Presented by Dr Ines Freitag-Amtmann

Agentur für Digitale Medien und pädagogische Werkstatt (Germany)

Friedrich Froebel can be seen as explorer in different fields. Communication with children is central in his ideas. The relevance of hands-on, experiential learning is often discussed.

This presentation uses data from a study about cognitive activating dialogues in German kindergarten. The aim of the study was to develop an ideal type of Inquiry-based Dialogue – Explorer dialogues- which will support children's in-depth understanding of natural phenomena. In this presentation the description and definition of Explorer dialogue will be discussed. Five different types of dialogues during inquiry with children will be presented, and it is also shown how to start and support dialogues during research. This is intended to arouse motivation to carry out dialogues while researching. At the same time, it is made clear how educational professionals can encourage children to communicate while researching so that activity-integrated language development takes place.

Numbers, Shapes, Words and Communication Using Origami. A Case Study of Froebelian Group Work in the Training of Early Childhood Educators and Elementary School Teachers in Japan

Presented by Prof Naoko Matsumura
Yamaguchi-Gakugei University (Japan)

The purpose of the paper (report) is to explore how to introduce Froebel's ideas to university students who are not yet familiar with his educational philosophy and practices. I want to introduce my approach to conveying Froebel's educational philosophy and practices in training early childhood educators and elementary school teachers in Japan. Inspired by Froebel's gifts and occupations, particularly the wooden tablets, I designed this workshop using origami as the primary material.

The workshop begins with participants folding an origami shape called "Paku Paku" (known as a *fortune teller* in English). Typically, children enjoy this creation as a finger-play activity. However, in this workshop, participants are instructed to flatten the origami back into a two-dimensional form after engaging in the usual finger play. At this point, I suggest to them: "You can see many lines inside the square. Now, let's focus on those lines. What shapes can you find?" This question encourages participants to recognize and become aware of numbers and shapes from a cognitive perspective.

The next part of the workshop stimulates the participants' imagination. I instruct them: "You will now cut the origami along the folded lines, separate it into parts, and arrange those pieces to create a new two-dimensional composition. Imagine what you can construct by combining the parts you have." I then introduce a rule: "You may exchange parts with others if the pieces are the same size and shape."

Ultimately, participants complete creations entirely different from the original Paku Paku. Through this process, the workshop promotes not only an awareness of numbers and shapes but also the use of language and communication, which are integral to collaborative learning.

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Educational Policies and Trends in China in the Age of AI: What role can Froebel pedagogy play in early childhood education in the AI era?

Presented by Grace Choi

International Froebel Society (China)

China has been actively incorporating AI technology into its educational system. The Ministry of Education in China has launched initiatives to enhance AI education in primary and secondary schools. They have selected schools as pilot bases to explore AI education models and develop exemplary cases. These schools are incorporating AI into their curriculums and providing hands-on experience with AI technologies from an early age. While the current focus is primarily on primary and secondary education, the principles of integrating AI into early education will likely extend to the early childhood education sector. Collaborations with tech giants such as Huawei, Tencent, and Alibaba have led to the development of AI-powered educational tools and resources, fostering innovation and digital literacy from kindergarten to higher education.

Based on interviews with representatives from the Chinese Ministry of Education, leading technology companies, and current educators, this report will offer the latest insights into the current dynamics and trends of AI integration within China's early childhood education sector. It will also examine the perspectives of Chinese Froebelian leaders on the potential and necessary roles of Froebelian pedagogy in navigating this transformative era.

11th Biennial International Froebel Society Conference

**‘Froebelian Pasts, Present and
Futures’**

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