

Do Froebel's Gifts (3-6) have any relevance in the 21st century?

Introduction:

Most authors of Froebelian pedagogy explain the Gifts, and Froebel's principles of unity and connectedness in relation to the Gifts, but it is hard to find any who have observed and recorded present-day children playing with Gifts 3-6. Most seem to move from explaining the historical importance and significance of the Gifts into block play.

"But another part of Froebel's doctrine, the detailed method of using the Gifts and Occupations, has been completely superseded ... the pre-occupation with a few tiny bricks have all gone, and only the materials affording more creative scope, such as clay, sand and paints, have been retained." (Evelyn Lawrence in Bruce, 2021:98)



Method:

The Gifts were presented to the children in order to observe what they did and said; and the adult role was to follow the children's lead.

The children chose to come to the table of Gifts or not, they chose their Gift, they decided how long they stayed. The only guidance from the adult was to present each Gift to each child as Froebel intended.

When the child wished to finish, they were expected to put the parts of the Gift back as a whole again.

Findings::

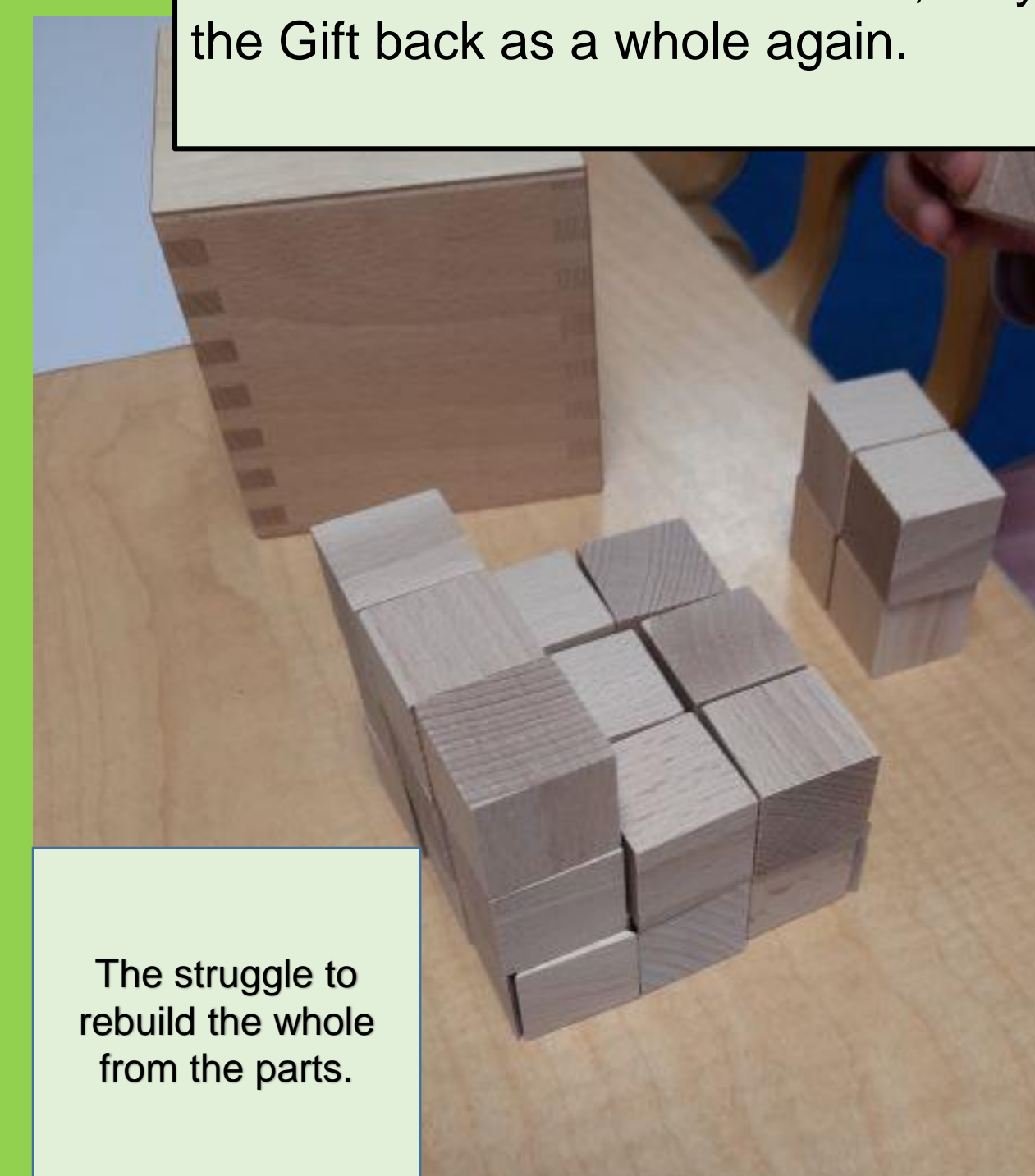
The concepts of unity, connectedness, whole to parts were obvious in every child's pleasure and fascination of seeing the whole cube, its parts and then the whole again. Children enjoyed the struggle of putting the parts back into a complete whole.

This whole to parts to whole relationship is a unique benefit of playing with Gifts 3-6. Whilst this is possible within block play, it is fundamentally different. *"Small boxes give children the consciousness that they can reunite them into a whole, a consciousness lost when they can choose as many or as few as they wish."* (1992:6)

It was apparent that each child valued having their own Gift. There was no expectation to share either the Gift or the space or the time and this seemed to really please and relax the children.

The more they played, the more the children explored the different forms particularly those of life and knowledge. Equally all the representations and the children's interpretations could be called beautiful. It was evident that the children delighted in the feel and smell of the blocks and they took obvious satisfaction in each of their models.

Adults need to ensure *"the agency of the child is respected and play is neither intruded nor interfered with, but sensitively supported as a means towards individual learning and discovery."* (2019:68).



References:

Bruce, T. (2021) *Friedrich Froebel: A Critical Introduction to Key Themes and Debates*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gura, P. (1992) *Exploring Learning Young Children and Blockplay*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

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