

Sewing, weaving and threading



Links with Froebel's gifts

Transformation is central to the occupations. Froebel's wooden gifts cannot be transformed, merely rearranged. Transformations explore reversible and irreversible processes - linking to nature and science. Sewing and weaving however can be undone and recreated.

"The Gifts are three dimensional, whereas the Occupations explore two dimensional shapes, lines and points. The Gifts can be returned to their original forms after use, whereas many of the Occupations cannot, for example paper cutting, pricking or sewing." (Whinnett 2020 p1)

Through the introduction of the gifts, Froebel demonstrated the importance of the law of opposites, for example, how the sphere would roll, the cube could slide and the cylinder had elements of both. He believed that this was an important educational principle and that understanding is developed by knowing about its opposite. Sewing, weaving and threading provide an abundance of opportunities to explore opposites in a practical, hands-on way; in and out, push and pull, up and down, back and forth, under and over. These concepts will naturally occur, as will the vocabulary, and are consolidated throughout.



Benefits

- Experiencing and understanding that a line has a start and an end
- Crossing the midline; passing from one hand to the other. This promotes brain development between the right and left hemispheres
- Developing manual dexterity and manipulative skills
- Managing risk whilst providing challenge
- First hand experience of sequences: creating and exploring pattern and colour
- Opportunities to practice and rehearse new skills
- Including the wider community, such as, families, including different generations, who provide equipment and share their skills

"A sense of belonging matters in Froebel's thinking. It is interesting that Froebel chose to found his school in a rural community, in a small village, where everyone knew everyone and there was interconnectivity in the way they worked together and were neighbours. He wanted the school to be at the heart of his community." (Bruce 2021 p126)

Making connections

Froebel was fascinated by the connections between childhood play and adult work. He felt that through their play children begin to develop important attributes that they need in order to work in adulthood with commitment, skill and understanding.

Sewing was first used to join skins and furs together for clothing or shelter. Weaving was used to interlace branches and twigs to create fences, shelters for protection or baskets to gather food or firewood. Both were used for practical purposes (work) rather than for pleasure.

Many children within the nursery setting had not experienced sewing first hand, however, most could talk about some of its uses, such as, how a fallen button can be sewn back on. There was a need to develop the idea that these skills could be used for both practical purposes as well as purely for the pleasure of creating something that holds a form of beauty; exploring pattern, shape and colour.

"Connectedness is a key Froebelian principle. Froebel argued that making connections is fundamental to learning as children link different domains of experience and make sense of the new in relation to what is already known." (Tovey 2013 p36)



Context in a nursery school setting

It was observed in the setting that there was initial interest in; fixing and attaching; using hole punches in which to thread string or treasury tags, using construction to build and join pieces. The children also explored whole body experiences, using songs such as, 'In and out the Dusty Bluebells' or 'Hokey Cokey,' already developing ideas around the elements of sewing and weaving.

"Movement is essential for growing brains and bodies. Froebel emphasised the connections between movement, thought and feeling." (Tovey 2013 p67)

Children, and families, were aware of some of the risks involved with using tools such as needles with one child expressing her concern, "But this is dangerous for me, the needle, it hurts me." It was agreed that, yes it could, and that we needed to be mindful of that and consider how we used them, with the children becoming involved in the risk assessment.



References

- Bruce, T. (2021) *A Critical Introduction to Key Themes and Debates* London: Bloomsbury
Tovey, H. (2013) *Bringing the Froebel Approach to Your Early Years Practice*. London: Routledge
Whinnett, J. (2020) *Froebel's gifts and block play today*. Available at: [Layout 1 \(froebel.org.uk\)](https://froebel.org.uk)