

Tracing the Intellectual Legacy of Froebel

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Abstract: This paper reviews the legacy of Froebel through three areas, namely (1) Early childhood education status and role; (2)The importance of activities such as play and work in early childhood education; (3) The Gifts and Occupations. It further explores the important role that Froebel's legacy still plays in the field of education, using New Zealand as an example. Finally specific aspects of Froebel's influence are explored at the international level and at the national level (using New Zealand as an example). Reviewing the legacy of ideas left by Froebel will allow us to better move forward.

Keywords: Froebel; Legacy; New Zealand

1. Introduction

Kindergarten implementation is an important pillar for maintaining society's functioning and liberating the workforce, as well as a social tool related to citizenship and the attainment of moral value goals (Wollons, 2000). Kindergartens have a prominent place in today's world, its founder, Friedrich Froebel, cannot be overlooked. Looking back over his life, he has made groundbreaking achievements in the education of children (Nishida, 2018). His vestige for future generations is the main focus of this essay. Beginning with Froebel's legacy, the author emphasises three main points: (1)an introduction to Froebel's legacy; (2)The impact of Froebel's legacy, with New Zealand as an example; (3)Froebel's impact on current policies, demonstrating that, while Froebel may be physically dead, he is still alive in many ways (Nawrotzki, 2006)!

2. The Legacy of Froebel

Despite being regarded as a 'anti-hero' or 'unpopular figure' (Baader, 2009, p. 197) in his native country (then Prussia), Froebel has gained the status of 'historical hero' (Hultqvist, 2001, p. 163) throughout the world, and his intellectual legacy to the world has piqued the interest of educational scholars worldwide (Nawrotzki, 2006). He was, indeed, a trailblazer in the field of early childhood education. His ideas valued children and women, and he pioneered reflective practice, establishing a principled approach (Richards-Wilson, 2016). Therefore, this section focuses on the following aspects of Froebel's intellectual legacy to the world.

2.1 Early childhood education's status and role

According to Froebel, the entirety of a man's future life, until the moment he leaves this earth, has its roots in this initial stage of life, whether it is pure or dirty, gentle or rough, calm or stormy, and his future relationships with father and mother, family and brothers and sisters, society and man, nature and God, in accordance with the child's inherent and natural endowments. Much depends on how he lives his life at this point in his life (Froebel, 1968).

2.2 The importance of play and work in early childhood education

Froebel believed that people are born with an activity instinct (including a creative instinct) that manifests itself early in life, such as lifting their own bodies upwards without assistance or being aware of their surroundings (Nawrotzki, 2006). And he emphasises that this activity instinct in infancy is primarily expressed through play (Brehony, 2001). The well-known statement that play is the highest stage of human development during this time period fully supports his point of view

(Downs, 1978).

2.3 The Gifts and Occupations

Froebel designed a progressive and logical progression of games from simple to complex, uniform to varied, and the accompanying activity toys, which he called "gifts and occupation" (Hailmann, 1906), to enable children to play games and other activities (Brehony, 2001). The sphere, cube, and cylinder are the basic shapes used in the "gifts and occupation." The application of the sphere is an application of the law of the sphere, which is central to Froebel's philosophy (Hailmann, 1906). He saw the sphere as the most perfect of all external forms and a symbol of all things' unity (Brehony, 2001). These 'gifts and occupation' can be manipulated in three ways: as life or architecture, as beauty or images, or as awareness or learning (Jackson and Lee, 1996).

3. The impact of the legacy

What we do on this land today, and what our descendants will do tomorrow, is typically shaped by billions of years of geological growth and the cumulative effects of other organisms on various time scales, and education is no exception (Holloway and Carroll, 1996). A good framework evolves and remains as relevant today as it did when it was first created (Macfarlane, 2012). This is evident in one countries, which the author will highlight next: New Zealand.

Dating back to the colonial period, New Zealand launched various movements whose initiators were largely nurtured by interpersonal collaboration across reform-minded organisations, aiming to create a school-independent kindergarten education system for young children (May, 2013). Early Kindergarten in New Zealand can be traced back to the 1840s German kindergarten movement founded by Friedrich Froebel (May, 2018). While independent but choosing to work with the government, political advocacy and multi-subject cooperation with each other have been cited as major factors in the success of the New Zealand kindergarten movement (May, 2013), which also suggests that the New World social colonial utopia efforts embodied the new ideals of kindergarten childhood (Howe, 2019). Froebel's influence on early childhood education in New Zealand was manifested in three main areas: pedagogical principles, professional ideals, and political advocacy, which are the main expressions of Froebel's legacy in New Zealand (May and Bethell, 2017). Gardening and outdoor nature are still present in today's kindergartens, though the details and appearance have changed and more progressive ideas have been introduced (May, 2013). The idea of kindergartens providing a national voice and presence in the education policy arena began in 1912 and 1913, combining the efforts of the settlers and the spread of Froebel's ideas (May, 2018). The New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union Incorporated (NZFKU) was founded in 1926 with the goal of kindergarten training, establishing and raising relevant standards, providing early childhood services, and working for the benefit of young children (May, 2018). The New Zealand Kindergartens Incorporated was founded in 2004, and as it has grown, it has become known as a strong advocate for early childhood and family services, influencing the government's political agenda and forging alliances between various education organisations (May and Bethell, 2017). While the Froebel's legacy can still be seen in kindergartens' day-to-day teaching and learning activities, the service has evolved to meet the needs of an ever-changing population (May and Bethell, 2017).

4. Policy Practice

The examination of historical cases above illuminates current policy and practice, demonstrating the value of research across time and allowing for a better understanding of the changes in Froebelism as it evolves with the times (Read, 2018). Current Froebelism practitioners will reconnect with Froebel's ideas in new historical conditions in a new social context, where educators do not necessarily intend to consolidate the legacy of historical pioneers and where ideas and concepts from the past continue to exist in the educational fabric (McNair and Powell, 2020).

In terms of international policy, some of Froebel's intellectual legacy has been incorporated into the UNCRC. The UNCRC is the practical accumulation of much lobbying around children's rights internationally, heralded as 'undoubtedly the most significant recent policy development intended to promote and protect children's rights'(Franklin 1995, p. 16). To a certain extent, it represents the world's interest and concern for children (Mayall 2002). Froebel's regard for the child and

advocacy for putting the child at the centre of the educational process, based on the child's interests and personal experiences, is consistent with the respect for the child's best interests advocated in Article 3 of the UNCRC, which states that:

The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children (UNCRC, 1989).

Froebel's emphasis on family education and the environment in which children grow up should be closely linked to family life. Family life is an important part of a child's education that cannot be overlooked, and it is also the child's right to enjoy family life (Hailmann, 1906), above all, family life is about respecting children's interests and listening to their opinions (Brehony, 2001). In Article 12 of the UNCRC it states that:

This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life (UNCRC, 1989).

At the national policy level, the authors primarily wish to discuss Te Whariki in New Zealand. The early childhood programme Te Whariki in New Zealand educational practise extends Froebel's existing influence in early education in New Zealand (Bruce et al., 2019). The revised version of Te Whāriki, published in 2017, retains the four principles of early childhood education, which are also found in traditional Māori knowledge: inspiring strength and empowerment, focusing on the whole child, integrating the wider world of family and community into the curriculum, and promoting children's interrelationships with people, places and things (Ministry of Education, 2017). Five major areas of development are also proposed: physical and mental health, belonging, contribution, communication and enquiry (Ministry of Education, 2017). The curriculum proposes a teaching approach that is primarily play-based, advocates open-ended teaching, learning stories and a focus on home-school partnerships, and implements a curriculum that reflects the whole child's approach to learning (Ministry of Education, 2017). These teaching methods and themes express the Froebel principles (Ritchie, 2015): a focus on nurturing families and practitioners guiding children to new experiences while allowing freedom of action and encouraging the development of thoughts and ideas (Bruce et al., 2019). Children are encouraged to explore, with a focus on connection and engagement with nature and an emphasis on first-hand experience (Hamilton and Vermeren, 2016). However, encouraging children does not imply allowing them to run wild; adults must observe children and act on their observations so that education begins where learners are, rather than where they should be (McLachlan, 2019).

5. Conclusion

It is clear from the preceding that Froebel's intellectual legacy has travelled the globe, and that the spread of his intellectual legacy has included adding something new and different to the country's established and accepted social, cultural, political, and educational landscape, and has excelled at assimilating elements of local culture and practise, as well as responding to new ideas and theories from various situations (Read, 2018). Just as the lives of millions of children around the world are today disrupted by covid-19, modern educators can look to Froebel's legacy for inspiration and lessons on how to make education consistent in the face of different and changing social contexts and to promote educational 'transformation' (Said and Bayoumi, 2019). Finally, it has been argued that a Froebelian approach does not entail looking back and attempting to preserve outdated theories and practices from the past. Rather, it is about gaining a better understanding of the origins of current thought and practice. Understanding the origins of thought and practice can help us move forward with more strength and confidence (Tovey, 2017).

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