

Learning from Froebel...

Intrinsic motivation

In the final part of this series, *Professor Tina Bruce* and *Jane Dyke* explore Froebel's ideas about encouraging self-discipline

Central to the role of the early years practitioner is to influence the moral, social and intellectual motivation of young children, and there are two main approaches to fostering this development.

The 'outside in' approach puts adults clearly in charge so that they manage, control and shape the behaviour of children through extrinsic incentives, rewards and punishments.

Typical incentives that reward 'good' behaviour are certificates, trophies, badges and stickers. So, we often hear four-year-olds saying things like, 'If I eat all my dinner I can choose a star to put on my chart', and we have parents resorting to the likes of the 'naughty step'.

The idea is that by shaping the child's behaviour, they learn to behave as a matter of habit before they understand abstract concepts such as thinking how others might feel, or the consequences of their actions. They learn it is right to do as adult-imposed rules tell them and guide them.

The children are also encouraged to copy the adult's modelled behaviour, the thinking being that good behaviour becomes a habit, which does not require understanding.

This approach certainly produces rapid results, and at a superficial level looks effective, as it makes adults and children feel secure and good. No surprise then that this short-cut approach to getting children to do as adults want them to is in widespread use. We could call it the microwave approach, but fast 'results' come with long-term disadvantages.

It encourages children to think of themselves and to out-do others – 'I have more stars than you!' And it



easily distracts children from what really matters – respecting their peers and so on.

The emphasis is on individual success, winning competitions and striving for outward recognition from those in authority. It does not emphasise community-minded living or a vision of a morally principled world.

The Froebelian approach is very different. It is about what the pioneer educator Friedrich Froebel saw as 'making the inner outer, and the outer inner'. Adults help children to develop their own self-discipline by discussing the consequences of people's actions. The idea is that learning to see the consequences of what they and others do helps children to be thoughtful of others. With such an approach, abstract ideas slowly develop and are understood, such as eating healthily, caring for others, putting yourself at the point of view of some-

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

This six-part series aims to:

- convey Froebel's continuing importance as an early years educator and thinker
- make links between the EYFS and Froebel's principles and approach to early development and learning
- demonstrate 'Froebel in action' at Yellow Dot Nurseries, Hampshire, which piloted training courses designed to help PVI settings embrace the Froebelian approach.

Co-written by Froebelian expert Professor Tina Bruce and Yellow Dot founder and owner Jane Dyke, the six articles will cover:

- the Gifts
- the Occupations
- the place of nature in learning
- the symbolic life of the child
- the importance of nurture
- self-discipline rather than extrinsic motivation.

Linked to the series is a set of posters produced in association with Community Playthings (www.communityplaythings.co.uk), which will be taking part in this year's bicentenary celebrations of the founding of Froebel's school in Keilhau, Germany.

one else, engaging in a community and being part of a helpful team.

DEVELOPING SELF-DISCIPLINE

When adults help children to develop self-discipline (making the inner outer, and the outer inner), we find:

An appreciation of consequences

With growing self-discipline, children can see the consequences of their actions on themselves, on others and on the material world, indoors and outdoors. The adult might explain that if the children help to clear up, there is more time for the stories and music they enjoy.

Clear, consistent boundaries

Children need clear and consistent boundaries to feel secure, and Froebel placed these at the centre of ➤



Being outdoors, and having personal space, aid self-discipline

his approach. An example of a firm boundary is not allowing any damage of people, materials and equipment. Feeling secure also needs a predictable environment, giving a rough shape to the day. For example, children need to have an idea that lunch comes after storytime. However, inflexible rules, with little purpose or unintended consequences, do not encourage children to be feeling, thinking people.

Self-esteem and well-being

Self-esteem and well-being are central to the development of self-discipline. Adults never humiliate or make fun of a child, or allow other children to do so.

Humiliation is a damaging feeling. It can make some children withdrawn, but others angry. Adults keen to develop self-discipline in children always help them to analyse their actions and consider how they might respond differently in future, and support the children next time.

A sense of self

Having a strong sense of self stems from children knowing their physical selves and being able to control their bodies. As they dance, sing and act out finger rhymes and action songs, climb, run, jump, cycle, they learn the effect of hitting out, stamping, squeezing and how to move and act appropriately in different situations. Children begin, quite literally, to set

physical boundaries around themselves, to feel in control and to have a sense of who they are.

It is important that they have high well-being and a sense of pride in their efforts. Hugging rather than squeezing and hurting, leaping and landing next to someone rather than on top of them. Play-punching in a scenario involving goodies and bad-dies is only possible if children have appropriate learning environments, indoors and outdoors.

Children should not be sitting still for periods longer than five or ten minutes, as this requires intense effort and body co-ordination and is very difficult for young children to do. Herding children into large groups is problematic. This becomes important once the children enter

primary schools for their education. In Reception classes which adopt a formal approach to learning, children find it hard to be themselves, and act instead as a herd. They often become less thoughtful of others, and 'crowd behaviour' begins to erupt.

The outdoor learning environment, as Froebel emphasised, is central to the development of self-discipline. Children who have plenty of freedom of movement, fresh air and drinking water behave better and concentrate deeply when looking at books, listening to stories or learning to cook using a recipe.

Space and choice

Children, like all of us, need personal space in which to make choices and reach decisions. Many children now spend much of their day in group care. They need opportunities to initiate their own ideas, rather than constantly following adult-directed activities.

Instead of carrying out low-level activities, such as colouring-in and gluing screwed-up tissue paper onto templates, children need to be offered choices of high-quality open-ended experiences, such as sand, clay, paint and water play. Children who are bored or frustrated by their failure to complete an adult-set task are badly behaved.

Giving children opportunities to make choices and decisions has a deep impact on their ability to develop self-discipline, rather than being controlled through external rules, rewards, incentives and punishments.

Children should not be sitting still for periods longer than five or ten minutes



Eating healthily and caring for others are examples of children gaining a sense of self

Children who feel that they have some control over their lives are more resilient, and are able to be more thoughtful and caring of others. If adults help children to follow their interests, value their ideas and respect their feelings and needs, they are more likely to respond in this way to other people.

The child's level

It is always important to get down to the child's level. Children do not respond well when you tower above them, or shout at them. Such behaviour puts them in survival mode and makes them experience life as if they are dealing with a hostile environment. They are then on 'alert' and they resist interacting positively with adults. Children are people and appreciate adults who speak naturally to them. We all behave better when we feel someone will help our efforts, value and believe in us.

Working from the inside out

Adults not only show children the consequences of their actions, but support them in working out how to behave in similar circumstances in the future. For example, 'I think Jade is feeling sad, Leanne, because you pushed her. Pushing knocks people over, and that hurts. Perhaps that is why Jade is crying. Were you feeling cross because she took your red paint? Next time, you could explain to her that you haven't finished using the red paint yet. Jade, you could tell Leanne that you need to use the red paint, and ask if you could use it after her?'

Children who are helped to analyse what went wrong, and what to do next time, are much more thoughtful of others, at the same time as maintaining a strong sense of self and well-being. They see adults who help them, rather than adults who judge, reward or punish them. This approach is inclusive. It does not argue that children with special needs need to be treated differently.

Froebel believed that behind every bad act of a child is a good intention and that it is the task of the adult to seek out the good intention and to work with that. This is not a microwave approach. It is slow cook, but it leads to self-disciplined people who help each other to make a better world. ■



MORE INFORMATION

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Froebel believed that behind every bad act of a child is a good intention



In practice

How Yellow Dot's nurseries encourage self-discipline. By Jane Dyke

The notion that 'behind every bad act of a child is a good intention' was initially difficult for many of our team to assimilate, and we are still working on this idea with some.

The Froebelian approach starts with observation in order to understand and, therefore, develop positive aspects of children's development. As Tina Bruce notes, 'Froebel believed that we should start with where the child is, not where we want them to be.'

Starting where the child is and understanding the why behind an action is how we have tried to move forward with our practice, rather than reacting to what might previously have been deemed 'negative/challenging' behaviour.

Unpicking negative behaviour and trying to understand or identify the good intention has on occasions been challenging in itself. It takes practice, and practice takes time and commitment. We are on a journey and, as Tina says, it is definitely a 'slow cook'. Taking the time to understand negative behaviour so that we can then discuss and analyse it with the children has improved our key person relationships.

Our attitude towards 'challenging' children has softened and developed

thanks to this greater understanding of their perspective and intention behind the seemingly negative behaviour. Focusing on schemas has been particularly beneficial for some of our team and helped us to communicate more sympathetically with parents. Stella Louis's book *Schemas for Parents* provides an excellent means of helping parents understand their children's behaviour, and opening up shared communication and, therefore, shared resolutions.

A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

As a nursery group, we like to be improving all the time and I encourage our team to find ways to work 'smarter' rather than harder. Generally, our team members are dedicated, committed, hard-working people, who want the best outcomes for our children. Our Froebelian journey has had elements of frustration and continues to develop, as there is no quick fix. The Froebelian approach takes the long-term view and is an investment in our society for the future.

At Yellow Dot we discourage the use of the words 'no', 'not', 'don't', and encourage our team members to articulate what we want the children to do, rather than not do. So, rather than saying 'Don't run', we say 'Please can we walk in the corridor to keep safe'; rather than saying 'Don't spill sand on the floor', we say 'Please keep the sand in the sand tray so there is plenty to play with.'

While it has taken time to embed this change of attitude, I do believe it has had a very positive outcome on our children's behaviour and our team morale. Living and working within a more positive ➤



Children respond well to being told what they can do, rather than can't



Froebel's approach is a long-term investment in the future

approach, where children are encouraged to behave positively, rather than being reprimanded, has enabled our children to understand rules, routines and boundaries, rather than simply 'do as they are told'.

The concept of 'returning', which we have spoken about before in this series, has been quite instrumental in bringing about the change. Before our Froebel training, we would ask the children to 'Tidy away'. This would invariably be met with some resistance and the assumption that everything had to be cleared away, leaving tables bare. Everything was shoved in a drawer or cupboard – out of sight, out of mind!

We now ask children to 'Return the toys and equipment ready for carpet time/lunch/singing, etc'. We are working on everything having a place to be returned to, ready for it to be used again. This may sound quite subtle but it really is amazing the difference it has made to the environment. Where rooms are now less cluttered and more organised, there is an element of beauty to them and the children are able to return toys and equipment successfully because these have a 'home'. Ideally, we would like to be at the stage where we are returning things as we finish with them, but this is a work in progress!

PERSONALLY...

I was delighted to hear Tina talk about 'intrinsic motivation' during our training and to learn that, under the Froebelian approach, 'intrinsic motivation, resulting in child-initiated, self-directed activity, is valued'. I first encountered the notion of intrinsic motivation in 1987, while reading

Tina's book, *Early Childhood Education*, which states, 'Children and adults learn from each other and enrich each other's lives.' I plagiarised these words and for 20 years included them in our parents' leaflet.

We have never promoted extrinsic motivation, with its reward charts and stickers, and I was naively feeling quite smug when we talked about this concept during our training. However, I was rudely awakened from my smugness when my team informed me that some of these practices had crept into some of our nurseries! While the concept of 'intrinsic motivation' has been hard to grasp for many of our team members, it has been particularly challenging for recent recruits.

I remain committed to developing self-discipline and believe that we are doing our children a tremendous disservice by promoting extrinsic motivation. Slow-cooked casseroles are so much healthier, delicious and sustaining than a microwave ready-meal, but they do take more time. Just as children need to understand boundaries, so too do team members, and 'stickers and charts' are unacceptable in my world.

A unified approach is essential, and all the team in all the rooms need to be modelling and building upon positive, intrinsic behaviour management. We all need to be 'sensitive' adults helping children make sense of 'their' world, articulating for them to help them internalise the external, 'making the outer inner', as Froebel would say.

After a recent visit to one of our nurseries, a parent emailed the manager to say, 'The setting was very calm and I believe that is a place where I feel Edan would flourish and be comfort-

able within. I was really impressed with the way that children are allowed to "think" for themselves and decide what they want to do whilst still being guided towards their individual learning goals.'

I have to say a wave of joy came over me as I read this. Our Froebel adventure has lasted almost two years and it is difficult sometimes to see how far we have come, or sometimes where we are going in our practice. But this potential parent has seen us in a new light, and can see where we are now.

I know we are a long way from where we came from, I know we have a long way to go, but it is a journey, and journeys are best enjoyed each step of the way, looking forward to tomorrow but appreciating and valuing in where one is today. ■

The concept of 'intrinsic motivation' has been particularly challenging for recent recruits



Children are allowed to think for themselves at Yellow Dot