

Froebelian Pedagogy as Everyday Activism in Support of a Sustainability Agenda

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Abstract

A contemporary concern about children's loss of contact with the natural world accompanies an ongoing urbanization and their reduced independent mobility. Children are becoming increasingly reliant on adults in accessing outdoor play and this is giving rise to more such experiences being shared. This research has explored the contemporary contribution of Froebelian holistic pedagogy through which child, adult and natural environment relations are understood as mutually beneficial. An exploration has been undertaken through preschool organized family trips to nature sites in a suburban English context. Sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009) has framed use of child-worn Go-Pros™ **on trips by ten children** between two and four-years old. This footage has then formed the basis for sensory elicitation interviews **with parents in which we revisit shared experience from their child's point-of-view**. These parallel perspectives have been analyzed through use of a vocabulary of holistic relations drawn from the theory of the evolution of human consciousness (Gebser, 1949) The potential is highlighted for children to draw adults into sensory experiences, big questions and storied relations with surroundings which can balance the potential for adults to draw children into abstract relations with a global context. Each is equally significant in forming rich, continuous connections between individuals and whole and can highlight the **potential offered by Froebel's pedagogy in support of a sustainability agenda. This is through its** orientation to a vision of the whole and significance of our own holistic capacities as everyday activism within this.

Keywords

play, sensory ethnography, holistic relations, adult, child

Introduction

A contemporary child and nature problem is understood in terms of their reduced direct contact with the living systems of our world, and barriers to this in a complex combination of opportunity and orientation-related factors (Soga et al, 2018). Opportunities **can be understood as “a focus on space and time that allows children to explore nature”** (Soga et al, 2018, p115), and factors influential to this are identified in urbanization and its associated

risks to children. Risks are determined in motorized traffic, various forms of pollution and concerns about unknown people or “stranger-danger” (Moss, 2012). Orientation factors are considered in terms of time-use and attention and impacts on nature contact recognized in increasingly timetabled family lives and a growing draw from indoor activity. These conditions are summarized as changes to the **“cultures, opportunities and controls that children and young people live and play in”** (Thompson, 2011, p19) and factors influential to

outdoor play are described in the following terms:

“Some of these obstacles are cultural or institutional – growing litigation, educational trends that marginalise direct experience in nature; some are structural – the way cities are shaped. Other barriers are more personal or familial – time pressures and fear.”

(Louv, 2005, p115, cited by Moss, 2012, p12)

These factors work in and through evolving cultures in which there has been a **changing attitude towards risk in children’s** activity, obstructive authority attitudes towards **children’s** outdoor play and a mass media amplifying these concerns (Moss, 2012, Thompson, 2011). A “culture of fear” has evolved and created a scenario in which children no longer stray far from home, and if they do so it is in the company of adults. Monitoring in England over the past eight years indicates a **steady “decline in the proportion of children spending time outside, particularly for children spending time outside independent of adults” (Defra, 2019, p18). If children’s contact with natural environments is to be addressed within current conditions, adults will be alongside them as their gatekeepers to outdoor play.**

Literature Review

Child and nature relations are significant to address, due to associated physical and psychological health benefits with developmental implications across the whole lifespan (Pretty et al, 2009, Chawla, 2015). There is potential for impacts beyond this

through links between childhood experiences in nature and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood (Wells and Lekies, 2006, Passmore et al, 2020). This problem has been elevated in public consciousness through terms such as “nature-deficit disorder” which describe **an “increasing divide between the young and natural world, and the environmental, social, psychological, and spiritual implications of that change” (Louv, 2005, p2). It is a situation** relevant to the whole human-environmental context and its effect is described as an “extinction of experience” (Pyle, 1978). This highlights an increasingly “socio-technical” experience and loss of direct contact with living systems giving rise to a cycle of loss and disaffection:

“As the richness of the neighbourhood diminishes, the power of the neighbourhood to fascinate, arouse, excite, and stimulate also passes into dullness, ennui, and apathy. Those who know and recognize less, care less, and therefore act less, leading to still more losses.”

(Pyle, 2003, p9)

Addressing the child and nature problem is therefore associated with the potential for a changed future and benefits understood in terms of healthy human-environment relations. Davis and Elliot (2014) for example assert that sustainable development **is now dependent on a “co-evolution of social and biological systems played out in responsive and responsible relations” (Davis and Elliot, 2014, p10).** Child and nature contact is understood as foundations for this reconstructed relationship, and attention is now turning

towards its facilitation. The interdependence of child with adult is gaining recognition and there is a need identified for **taking “a wider view of the barriers to visiting nature spaces amongst the whole family”** (Defra, 2019, p 12). Adult “nature connection” is understood as influential **on children’s opportunities** (Passmore et al, 2020) and therefore that nature-contact **initiatives should consider the “needs, motivations and benefits for the family, and extended family, as a whole”** (Defra, 2019, p18). Within these conditions, pertinent contemporary research questions are identified **in whether children’s experiences** are affected by **their caretakers’ presence, or whether children’s** playful and exploratory manner can affect what their caretakers notice and feel (Chawla, 2015). It is the second question that has received limited attention to date and this research has sought to explore. This has been through a foregrounding of Froebelian pedagogical relations in which:

“Play truly recognised and rightly fostered, unites the germinating life of the child attentively with the ripe life of experiences of the adult and thus fosters the one through the other.”

(Froebel, cited by Liebschner, 1992, p24).

From this perspective, it is not only adult influence on the child that is significant, but **equally a child’s influence on the adult. It is the** pertinence of this to contemporary conditions that has prompted the research reported in this article.

The Contemporary Contribution of Froebelian Pedagogy

Froebel’s early years pedagogy is underpinned by a holistic philosophy outlined according to laws of “Unity” and “Opposites.” **Unity can be understood as life’s wholeness,** opposites its diversity of expression and learning **is through “discovery of the connecting thought or link”** (Froebel, 1887, p42). **Individuals are interconnected with life’s wholeness through** multidimensional and continuous relations. It is this holistic perspective that shapes an understanding of pedagogical relations in which a child at play is considered in a state of unity with surroundings but requires balance for their **development through adult “rational conscious guidance”** (Brehony, 2017, p20). However, that adults continue in this development, and this **can be aided by “the all-quickenning, creative power of child-life” which can “be translated from their life to ours”** (Froebel, 1887, p89). Education is in support of a state of ‘living development’ and play can be understood as an expression of “the source of all that is good” and gives “joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer peace, rest with the world” (Froebel, 1887, p55). The natural world can be considered an “external” expression of source, and this offers a model for the **“removal of obstacles to growth and the elimination of force in pedagogy”** (Roseman, 1965, p331). This holistic conception of education is expressed in the following:

“Let us impart life to ourselves, to our children; let us through them give meaning to our speech and life to the things about us! Let us live with them, and let them live with us; thus shall we obtain from them what we all need.”

(Froebel, 1887, p88)

Education is continuous and conscious and **“nothing so unites teacher and pupil as conjoint study of nature” through which there is a potential to “strive to feel into their hearts the spirit and life of nature” (Froebel, 1912, p101). Froebel’s kindergarten pedagogy has been** historically influential on the development of early childhood education at global scale (Brehony, 2009). A contemporary reconnection of its enduring practices with originating holistic logic may now offer a means to align education with contemporary sustainability need. This can be considered in relation to a need identified for a paradigm shift towards connectedness, interdependence and the potential to “act together” for a sustainable world (Elliott et al, 2017). There have been two Froebelian principles in focus in this research and these include the relationship of every child to family, community, nature, culture and society, and the integrity of childhood in its own right (The Froebel Trust, 2021). These can be considered in terms of our potential to “act together” and **children’s contribution to connectedness and interdependence within this.**

The Research Method of Sensory Ethnography

The methodology adopted in this research is described as “doing sensory ethnography” (Pink, 2009) and explores possibilities afforded to the senses and scope for this offered by new digital media. Sensory **knowledge has been described as “the most profound type of knowledge which is not spoken of at all” (Bloch, 1998, p46). Sensory ethnography has offered the means for stepping outside of an adult language-oriented culture and engaging with a child’s embodied ways of knowing the world. The aim of this method is described as seeking an account “as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations**

and intersubjectivities through which the **knowledge was produced” (Pink, 2015, p5). New materialist perspectives inform an underpinning conceptual framework that orients to place, perception, knowing, memory and imagination. This is an understanding of place as constituted by the ongoing movement of all life that becomes interwoven as an “enmeshment” (Ingold, 2008). Human perception, knowing, memory and imagination forms part of this context and research needs to engage with “everyday life in its ongoingness” and “be both inside and seek to step out of everyday life in order to understand it and abstract it.” (Pink, 2015, p241). I have chosen this method to explore a holistic conception of a life context in which “energy and matter are inseparably united” (Froebel, 1912, p103). A parallel might be considered in new materialist terms such as “intra-action” which describe a “dynamism of forces’ (Barad, 2007, p141) in which all designated ‘things’ are constantly “exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably” (Stark, 2016, p1). Both engage with the life context in its wholeness and consider our own relational capacities as part and within this.**

The Go-Pro™ as means to have ‘Feeling to Feel with the Child’

The research took place in a suburban English context and explored the role of early years practice through pre-school organized family trips to local natural environments. The **child’s perspective has been placed in focus** through their wearing of a Go-Pro™ video camera during trips. Go-Pros™ are designed for use in action and can move with the child and capture their verbal, non-verbal and embodied interactions with people and place. Previous use of this research tool with young children has been suggested to offer an experience of **“something that cannot be explained” (Green, 2016, p281) and to make “apparent features of**

the environment of interest to a child that might go unnoticed or be taken for granted by an **adult** (Green, 2016, p282). Its use on a chest harness can offer an “intimate appreciation of how the children might be feeling” (Burbank et al, 2018, p321) through capturing moments of self-talk and “sharp intakes of breath...or brief moments of stillness or indecision” (Burbank et al, 2018, p 321). The Go-Pros™ were used by ten families with children between two and four-years-old recruited on a face-to-face basis. This meant that children’s assent could be sought in the process through attendance to their non-verbal cues (Robson, 2011). This footage formed the basis of sensory-elicitation interviews with parents in which we revisited shared experiences from their child’s point-of-view. This research process has been described according to “first person feeling, second person empathy” (Pink, 2015, p246) and has been used in this research to explore scope for an adult to have “feeling to feel with the child” (Froebel, 1887, p73). Video represents a mimetic medium that can engage viewers in a multi-sensory response. This could enhance this research through a “resonance of bodies” in which there is a “synchrony between viewer and viewed that recovers the prelinguistic, somatic relation to others of infancy, a capacity that still remains accessible to us in adulthood.” (MacDougall, 1998, p53). After an initial annotation of the Go-Pro™ footage, I selected short clips of shared or parallel child and adult engagement as a basis for interviews. I aimed for discussions to be led by video content but also used guide questions in seeking to cover similar ground with each family. Following interviews, families were then offered use of the Go-Pro™ for their local independent outings and this gave broader insight into their whole relational context.

A Vocabulary of Holistic Relations as an Analytical Lens

The aim of sensory ethnography is described as seeking “to understand other people’s sensoria” (Pink, 2015, p148) and this means some contexts will call upon a need for new sensory categories. The focus on child-led experience in a natural environment has prompted use of a “vocabulary” found relevant to previous research findings in this field (Chawla, 2002). This is the theory of the evolution of human consciousness (Gebser, 1949) described as offering a means to capture “otherwise difficult-to-acknowledge aspects of children’s experience of the natural world” (Chawla, 2002, p206). This holistic theory parallels Froebel’s vision of life according to a source in “Unity” with a conception of this as “Origin.” Human consciousness is described as a “wakeful presence” (Gebser, 1949, p52) and this can “evolve” through a deepening experience of human individualism through which a choice can be made to re-join with the whole. This process can occur in the life of an individual life or whole culture and is outlined in terms of five consciousness structures that shape human experience. These are archaic, magic, mythic, mental and integral consciousness and offer a “vocabulary” of relational qualities. Each are a significant aspect of holistic experience and offer the means to give equal value to those expressed by adult and child. The findings will ensue with a brief description of each consciousness structure, what this drew attention to in findings and include an illustrative example from data. Reference will be made to a synthesis of the work of scholars who have engaged with this holistic perspective including Gebser (1949), Johnson (2019),

Yiangou (2017) and Chawla (2002). All data has been anonymized by the changing of participants names.

Research Findings

Archaic Consciousness

Archaic consciousness is described as **“identical with origin” (Gebser, 1949, p43) and is** a pre-verbal state in which there is not yet differentiation between self and surroundings. It is the dominant consciousness of animals and infants which we may re-enter in later life when **“in repose or reverie, when we are simply absorbed in our body and our place” (Chawla, 2002, p208)**. This state is suggested to represent human identity with the world and should be considered a source of wisdom. As a **consciousness form it is “elemental in an immediate physical sense” (Chawla, 2002, p 209)** and has been drawn upon in describing **children at play as “baptized in the world by immersion” when “up against the full sensory qualities of things” (Chawla, 2002, p209)**. Drawing upon this descriptor drew attention to **children’s embodiment and emplacement and its** influence on accompanying adults. This was highlighted in **Go-Pro™ footage demonstrating young children’s impulse to run into open spaces** and the emotional states that accompanied this. Children expressed joy in free movement and there was the potential for emotional contagion in accompanying parents and care givers. This potential for physical and emotional movement was linked to their having safe space for its expression, and through this, impacts that were instantaneous. Such physical movement and accompanying sensations were **“in the moment” and the intimate capturing of the child’s point of view** conveyed a sense of **“being here, now and me.”**

An example is drawn from four-year-old Noah who on reaching the top of a hill during a country park walk starts to run very fast **shouting “I can’t stop!”**. **Eventually he runs into** a low fence which stops him, and his Mum calls his attention to a pile of leaves. However, Noah turns **and runs again into open space shouting “I can’t stop, I can’t stop!”** Mum seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to reflect on this and demonstrated her capacity to have “feeling to feel” with her child in the following comment:

“I think he liked the experience of the freefall running. It was excitement that he might not be able to stop... ‘What possibly could happen if I can’t stop?’ – which he loved; you know.”

This led Mum to make a comparison with her own experience of being in that space:

“I can’t think of the last time that I ran and ran and ran...like...you know...you don’t do that as an adult. People would be looking at you and thinking “What on earth is she doing? You know, children have the right to do that, whereas, as an adult, that right is taken away from you. Assign you to a loony bin, you know. The natural environment has definitely allowed us to have that... err... interaction.”

Such commentary highlights a culturally dominant understanding of development in which a sense of “being” in childhood can be left behind upon reaching the adulthood that this will “become” (James & Prout, 1990). A holistic perspective offers the potential to reframe this according to a “living development” in which all ways of being retain their value.

Children's joy in running highlighted their other movement by contrast, and this included walking, dancing, climbing and slowing down to play. Walking similarly demonstrated scope for a synchrony between children and adults, and this was particularly evident in care expressed through holding hands, walking and enjoying experiences together. In examples where the pace of movement slowed down or stopped, children demonstrated influence through their multi-sensory engagements with **surroundings. This could draw adults' attention** to qualities they may have become accustomed to over time, and examples included echoes, shadows, soft feathers, sticky mud and the **qualities of water. One parent's comment on a muddy walk with her two children** highlighted the value she identified in this activity. The footage captured the challenge her three-year-old daughter expressed in balancing on slippery mud, but also their shared enjoyment in dealing with this. These observations align with the value identified in nature-based family activity which **can promote a strong "we' feeling" in the family** through engagement with the spontaneity of the world (Izenstark and Ebata, 2016). Mum shared her mobile phone photos taken whilst **walking back through puddles and stated "It's just there. It's just there for you. The more you get out and experience, the more they want to get out and do it again."** Such an observation might be considered significant in a contemporary context characterized by an **"extinction of experience" (Pyle, 1978). It is a holistic perspective that draws attention to the value in embodied and emplaced experience and a pathway to this through children and "the gentle admonitions of their lives" (Froebel, 1887, p89).**

Magic Consciousness

Magic consciousness is also concerned with pre-linguistic embodied and emplaced

experience and describes the emergence through this of a sense of self in separation to surrounding life. It is these conditions that offer grounds for relations and an expression of our own agency through their formation. However, in the stage of emergence associated with magic consciousness there is a stronger sense of reciprocity as described according to the metaphor of hearing and a "labyrinthine ear" (Gebser, 1949). This highlights an equal attendance to input from surroundings as described by Johnson (2019, p.65):

"Whenever we begin to reconnect with the non-verbal world of embodied presence and listening (in every sense of the word), when we begin to hear and so gehören – belong – to what we hear, we attune...ourselves to the magical structure."

The "magical structure" can be considered as the life of which we are part, and magic consciousness as our experience of its equal expression in self and surroundings. **Accordingly, children's engagement in nature play motifs (Sobel, 2002) can be considered an expression of this through play patterns engaged in "regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, or ecosystem...when they have safe free time in nature" (Sobel, 2008, p19). Magic consciousness thereby drew attention to play patterns that children expressed, and these included "animal allies," "adventures," "maps and paths" and "fantasy and imagination."** The "animal allies" motif represents strong feelings children can exhibit towards animals in early and middle childhood, and this can be expressive of both an empathy and fear. This was demonstrated in family encounters with the birds, squirrels, rabbits and insects living within

this suburban locality. Children demonstrated a strong fascination with the lives of animals and posed “big questions” about whether they could be considered a friend or foe (Meehan, 2017). Adult responses demonstrated a sense of responsibility to convey respect for other life, but this could also be accompanied by a more “bio-phobic” emotional response. The following is a short extract taken from three-year-old Tom and his dad’s interaction whilst climbing a tree.

Dad: Oh look, what’s that? Look, show the camera (the Go-Pro™ then gets closer to a woodlouse on the tree trunk). What is that?

Tom: A spider (He sounds a bit scared)

Dad: That’s not a spider, that’s a woodlouse. There’s another one. There’s two woodlice.

Tom: I like dem.

Dad: Yeah? Do you know who doesn’t like woodlice? Grandad.

Tom: I do

Dad: Grandad’s scared of woodlice.

Tom reaches out his hand to touch it.

Dad: Are you being cruel to him? Be gentle. (Gasps) Ooh. It’s scared of you (the woodlice start to move away from Tom’s hand).

This is a brief interchange in a moment of fleeting experience, but reflection highlights it as encompassing fundamental questions about our relations with wider life. Biophilia has been described as a genetically based human “urge to affiliate with other forms of life” (Wilson, 1984, p416) and it is asserted that a failure to allow this to flourish in childhood can lead to the opposite state in an adult “biphobia.” However, a holistic perspective suggests this remains an ever-present potential and that a source for its

revival can be offered by “the all-quickening, creative power of child-life” (Froebel, 1887, p89).

Go-Pro™ footage also highlighted **children’s engagement in the nature play motifs** of “adventures,” “maps and paths” and “fantasy and imagination.” These were demonstrated in a strong drive to leave constructed pathways, enter undergrowth and playfully forge their own routes through them. Adults joined children in this activity through a concern not to let them out of sight in a public place and through this **shared in children’s discoveries both real and imagined along the way.** “Maps and paths” have been described as **“finding shortcuts, figuring what’s around the next bend” (Sobel, 2008, p 34)** and “adventures” as when **“you don’t know what’s going to happen when you start out” (Sobel, 2002, p 21).** Children’s engagement in this activity can offer an everyday example of our creative capacity within given conditions. These “big questions” (Meehan, 2017) and “everyday adventures” (Gill, 2014) can be considered purely relevant to children, and adults as their facilitators. However, a holistic perspective suggests these can offer adults a reminder of our fundamental conditions, relational capacities and connective potential in their reciprocity.

Mythic Consciousness

The mythic structure is described as a more familiar form of consciousness due to its connection with language and symbol in story, song and rhyme. This can be understood as the **expression of “associative, metaphorical thinking...known through the voice” (Chawla, 2002, p 217)** common to oral cultures and **represents a circling pattern of “a world half created, half received” (Chawla, 2002, p 218).** Mythic consciousness represents cyclic time as expressed through the in and out breath, heartbeat, seasons and generations. This

promotes an orientation to a world of **“complementary and not yet contradictory opposites”** (Johnson, 2019, p 70) such as child and adult, earth and sky and spring and autumn. This is therefore a use of language and symbol supportive to relationality and links with the foundational experience promoted in magic consciousness. Drawing upon this description has highlighted the ways in which all families referred to familiar stories from home in forming relationships with wider life. This included stories from all media forms, but a difference was demonstrated between child and adult-led engagement as illuminated through referencing psychoanalytic perspectives on fairy tales (Bettelheim, 1976). Children could demonstrate a drive to face fears through imaginative engagement with characters such as wolves, “baddies” or bears. One example included three-year old Liam who repeatedly searched for a Big Bad Wolf in woods and undergrowth. The following is a moment of his self-talk captured by the Go-Pro™ as he crossed a field on a pre-school trip.

“I’m gonna find a big bad wolf. I’m gonna turn him into a rabbit....Look, that’s the big bad wolf’s house (he points to an old shed at the edge of the field). Look, Peter Rabbit holes.”

Liam and his family then walk into the next field filled with stinging nettles where his parents try to direct his attention to looking for spiders. However, after a while Liam announces, **“I don’t wanna see the spiders...I wanna find the Big Bad Wolf”**. Insight into this was enhanced through reflection on this with his Mum:

Mum: He watches The Three Little Pigs and it’s got a Big Bad Wolf in it...
Me: So then, when he’s out in the world does he think that what he watches in cartoons might be...?

Mum: Yeah, he might.

Me: Do you think he felt a bit scared?

Mum: Yeah, slightly. A little bit nervous **maybe...**

Me: He looked for you for reassurance **too in the footage...he is looking for the Big Bad Wolf, is he?**

Mum: Yeah, you can see him looking about.

Me: So, is it partly a game and partly he wants to see the Big Bad Wolf?

Mum: It’s a “and what if I did?”. You can tell by the tone of his voice. Hmm...is anything going to jump out? Now he seems braver...

Mum shows that she is in tune with **Liam’s emotions and accommodates his fusion** of physical and imagined surroundings. She demonstrates that although this is illusory from an adult perspective, she knows that it **represents “a real world of feelings”** (Chawla, 2002, p 218) for Liam. Their joint engagement **with this familiar story illustrates how it “gives** voice to the powers of empathy, sympathy and associative thinking” (Gebser, 1949, p65) and for Liam this involves the potential to feel fear. However, a psycho-analytic perspective highlights that there is the potential for adults to demonstrate a different impulse, and this is to present the wider world as a safe place to their children. This could be seen in footage in which adults referred to Peter Rabbit or Bob the Builder in drawing parallels between life seen in surroundings and their familiar world of home. This is well-intended, but a psycho-analytic perspective asserts this represents a loss for the child and their potential to build a sense of self through a capacity to face fears in simple storied ways, and this may be forgotten in adulthood. A holistic perspective highlights that our human capacities involve a narration of relations with

wider life, and children can remind us of the significance in its connective depths.

Mental Consciousness

Mental consciousness is accessible through language and symbol, and is

“structured by an observing I/eye that assesses the environment objectively, evaluates it in the abstract, and measures it rationally and often quantitatively.”

(Chawla, 2002, p 211).

Its ruling “term” is defined as “ego” or “I” and its ruling sense is sight (Gebser, 1985), **and this shapes a perspective in which “space is perceived in three dimensions, oriented to the one-point perspective of the observer’s lines of sight, and time becomes an “arrow” – an irreversible quantified line” (Chawla, 2002, p211).** Mental consciousness can afford **“perspective, paradox, abstraction, rational reflection, and self-assertion” (Chawla, 2002, p211)** and there is scope for this to be effectively expressed in powers of focus, self-efficacy and self-esteem. However, in its defective expression, this can lead to mechanistic thinking **that “spatializes and then employs what it has spatialized” (Gebser, 1949, p83), and combined with a defensive egoism can reduce the ‘other’ to mechanisms to be manipulated and consumed.** Drawing upon this description highlighted environmental interactions oriented to the visual sense and language in naming and knowing, and a subtle difference between adult and child-led engagements. Adult-led interactions could be oriented to sights at a distance, future destinations or abstract activities such as counting and naming. The Go-Pro™ footage demonstrated that children may or may not engage with this because they cannot see what

an adult can see as their vision is instead oriented to their immediate surroundings. This might go unnoticed if not highlighted through the Go-Pro™ **which also illuminated the potential for child-led interactions to influence adults through drawing their attention back to immediate surroundings and the taken-for-granted as a basis for naming and knowing.** The following example illustrates a shift between adult-led naming and child-led interest whilst feeding ducks on a pre-school trip. Lucy is not a particularly verbal child, but her interest is **influential on Mum’s attention.**

Mum: What colours are their beaks, Lucy? (Mum points and Lucy looks)

Lucy: Black and white

Mum: ...and what colour noses? (Mum points to her nose)

Lucy: Red.

Mum: Red. Well done! Do you like them?

Lucy: Yeah. One more (she points to the bag of bird food and wants to throw them more).

They stand and watch the birds.

Mum: Wow! Do you want to come and have a look? (They walk back down the bank so that they are closer to the pond **again). Aren’t they nice?**

Lucy: Yeah (Lucy is watching and smiling)

Mum: Which ones are your favourites?

Lucy: The white ones.

Mum: (laughs) You like the gulls? I like **the black ones because they’re really pretty.** (Lucy stands watching and laughing at the birds)

Mum: Can you see how they’re paddling under the water? (They watch for a while). Can you see how the gulls are coming and swooping down and

grabbing some food and they fly away again? (Mum starts to narrate the birds' activity as they watch).

Through Lucy's interest Mum's attention is drawn back to the less 'appealing' gulls and she starts to attend to their movement. Mum's reflections highlight the way she became conscious of this:

"Maybe you might normally say 'oh, there's the ducks' and go do something else – but actually noticing the different ducks' behaviour, and can you see them underwater and how they feed...?"

This difference aligns with the identification that in the early stages of cognitive development perception conducts thought, but that through development into adult capacities that perception then obeys thought. (Wilson, 1995). This can also be considered in relation to **Froebel's description of the role of language in life's 'destiny', as a process that "outwardly opposes" humanity and surroundings but "unites them inwardly" in meaning (Froebel, 1887, p88).** The family is a significant site of learning for this as adults can add an **"explanatory word" and "join the visible with the audible" and thereby bring experience "nearer the child's insight and knowledge, nearer his inner perception" (Froebel, 1887, p81).** Such processes can offer means for unity between "inner" experience and "exterior" world. However, there is also scope for development of **its defective expression when adults do "not feel the meaning of what we say, for our speech is made up of memorized ideas, based neither on perception nor on productive effort" (Froebel, 1887, p88).** The opportunity for this to be **"re-enlivened" is identified in "the few rare cases,** when our discourse rests on intercourse with life

and nature" and that children offer a means for this through giving "meaning to our speech and life to the things about us!" (Froebel, 1887, p88). A holistic perspective highlights the significant role played by language but that this is to be integrated within our deeper connective potential.

Integral Consciousness

Integral consciousness highlights the value in assimilating all relational capacities **leading to an experience that is "cosmocentric" in which "identity is with nature, the manifest world and oneness" (Yiangou, 2017, p 431).** A crisis for the human ego is involved in a transition in which there is an experiential opening to life beyond the self. Gebser asserted that integral consciousness is currently culturally emergent and discernible in an **experience of time's "irruption" to "concretion."** **Time's "irruption" is the process through which humanity realizes its limits of control over surrounding life and experiences time as a "runaway force in the uncontrollable march of technological upheaval and social revolution" (Johnson, 2019, p80).** Through this there is the **potential for an experience of time's "concretion"** as a re-integration of consciousness structures **"very much alive, though latent in the present" (ibid, p12).** This description has been considered in relation to barriers **identified to children's** nature contact in current environment and time conditions. The research has explored a potential within this for adults to re-experience consciousness structures in shared outdoor experience with children. A juxtaposition between child and adult perspectives could be seen in parent reflections on their decision-making in going outside. A "tension" was highlighted between **a child's bid for "freedom" and "happiness" and adult responsibilities.** **These children's "negotiations" were relatively**

successful, and this might be considered to reflect self-selecting participants who had chosen to attend outdoor trips and were confident in discussing family life.

Parent 1:

“It’s very hard to keep on top of the house...I get no chance to do work when the kids are awake, and then when they’re asleep there’s all the housework to be done. It’s a real juggle to fit everything in...but being out of the house with them, out of all these things, seems the less stressful...they just seem to be happier and free-er outside.”

Parent 2:

“They’re just sort of happy and free...they’ve got the room to run around, haven’t they? Never wants to go home. I think for me as well - I get a bit cabin fever if I’m indoors all day. You just get a bit lazy, and it’s good for the mind, isn’t it? To be out...a bit of fresh air. It wears them out too. She always sleeps well.”

Such comments indicate that parents recognized benefits experienced by them all in mood and family function despite challenges in getting outside. It is perhaps interesting to consider these descriptive terms and a holistic understanding of play, both as relational language between adult and child and its **potential to promote “joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer peace and rest with the world” (Froebel, 1887, p55)**. The following parent comment suggests that there is **a value in children’s voice if we can attend to it.**

Parent 3:

“It’s just ‘cos you got the responsibility. Take out the responsibility and kids ain’t nothing. Know what I mean? They’re

easy to get through the day with. I just feel that they’ve got to deal with me as much as I’ve got to deal with them.”

This highlights the potential for qualities such as “ease” to come to the fore if we can give it space and perhaps alludes both to a value in attuned relations and a potential to be influenced by a “state of flow” (Csikszentmihalyi et al, 2014) associated with play. This comment might be considered a contemporary response to **a call to “live with our children” and “obtain from them what we all need” (Froebel, 1887, p88)**. Outdoor play is understood to offer multiple benefits to children including potential **“to process their emotions, live out their anxieties and build friendships and resilience” (Children’s Commissioner, 2018, p5)**. However, there is also growing insight into its wider **potential benefits to adult society “through improved family wellbeing, reduced anti-social behavior and vandalism, and even increased volunteering and social action” (Children’s Commissioner, 2018, p4)**. A holistic lens can support consideration of broad possibility through daily experience and an appreciation that it is our own holistic capacities that offer means to experience mutuality within our relations.

Implications

This research has engaged with a holistic lens in exploring what the more recent theory of the evolution of human consciousness (Gebser, 1949) can illuminate in Froebelian philosophy. **Insight has been offered into Froebel’s** description of pedagogical relations between adult and child, and the potential for local experience to be connective to conditions at global scale. A reciprocity is highlighted

between children’s potential to draw adults into sensory, creative relations with surroundings whilst adults can draw children towards abstract relations with a global context. Each is equally significant in forming rich, thick connections between individual and whole and can align with sustainability thinking in the need to act local but think global (Hoff & Gausset, 2015). A **Froebelian conception of ‘spherical relations’** (Liebschner, 1992) highlights an interconnection **of individual subjectivity with life’s wholeness.** This supports understanding of the role played by our holistic capacities, the revitalizing effect of child on adult and the relational depths offered by a moment of experience. The qualities promoted through child-led relations can align with those significant to nature connection identified as tuning into our senses, responding with emotions, appreciating beauty, celebrating meaning and activating our compassion for nature (Lumber et al, 2017). Adult nature connection is currently understood as influential on children, but perhaps within current conditions there can be an appreciation of the **equal significance in children’s influence. It is asserted from Gebser’s holistic perspective that “perhaps it is only when the world is darkest that we might seek new pathways – new ‘lines of flight’ - to at least try out for ourselves”** (Johnson, 2019, p83). This research has **highlighted the potential to discern such “lines of flight” from within the fabric of given conditions and research tools to illuminate these through playback of “ephemeral moments” (Spinney, 2008, p98). Froebel’s holistic vision is well preserved within established early years practices and perhaps a sustaining breath can be offered through their reconnection with an originating holistic logic. This may support the potential for our “ordinary” experiences to become extraordinary once more, and to understand that it is our own holistic capacities that offer a means for an everyday activism in**

the world. The significance of this is highlighted by current planetary conditions that we are **equally “responsible for, and mortally vulnerable to”** (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015, p 510) and the present moment as time to act in the recent Climate Change Report (IPCC, 2021).

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