A story of Froebel’s global reach

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For over 20 years, the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, has expanded the existing influence of Froebel in New Zealand’s early education through its four principles. The revised version of Te Whāriki, published in 2017, retains these four principles. They are to empower the child to learn and grow; integrate the wider world of family and community into the curriculum; foster respectful reciprocal relationships for children with people, places and things; and implement a curriculum that reflects the holistic way that children learn. These principles are also found in traditional Māori knowledge. Explanations of the curriculum principles recognise the importance of play.

At Daisies, a small family-centred education and care centre in the capital city, we regard these principles of Te Whāriki as the pedagogical guidelines for implementing our unique curriculum. Our philosophy statement includes the following:

Daisies is a loving, engaging and pleasing place of learning for . . . children, parents and teachers. We provide teaching and learning at Daisies where:

- children flourish;
- investigation by children and adults is a hallmark of the curriculum, and they demonstrate a passion to explore and learn; . . . and
- we are connected to the community.

We value . . . the natural environment, and . . . support [sustainability] as an influence on learning.

Adventurous play in the community

For the past five years, one feature of Daisies’ curriculum has been the weekly half-day excursions for eight children (on a roster) to a very large park comprising hills, bush (forest), streams, pools and some mown grass.

Children are accompanied by two qualified teachers and a parent or grandparent. Everyone is invited to play and explore. Observation based assessment after excursions informs our planning.
for next week’s membership and pathway through the park (literally and educationally) that will
develop children’s capacities.

Getting to the bush is a learning experience too, as the group walks half a mile to the station,
rides a train for two stops, and walks another half mile to the park. Through this, children learn
spatial connections in our community. At the park they learn, _inter alia_, about the spatial dimen-
sions of a vast space and challenging hills.

Freedom of movement is a given, within the parameters of two rules in the bush:

- children must stay in visual sight of an adult, and
- all interactions, be it with people or nature, must be respectful.

The children’s sense of empowerment is manifested when they lead the way. Holistic learning
combining, for example, confidence, leadership, physical skills and stamina, responsibility for
others and courage are evident as children learn to assess risk, push boundaries and conquer
challenges. It’s hard going at times — they may surprise parents as they clamber over logs and
rocks, wade through pools, and scramble up steep banks. The physical body and the emotional
mind connect for success. Images of children change.
Figure 18.2  Construction play which gives another kind of first-hand experience

Figure 18.3  Practitioners, with their families, nurture and guide children whilst giving freedom of movement and encouraging thought and ideas to develop
Figure 18.4  Connecting and engaging with nature

Figure 18.5  Children clambering up a steep bank, engaging with nature, developing understanding with care of it
The children become excited about hands-on botanical discoveries. They are often seen with friends looking closely at the details of leaves or bark on trees. Heads are down while exploring the stream lifting up rocks and logs to discover creatures hidden underneath. They stop, place a hand to their ear and tell other children to listen to a bird call. Through these collective experiences children strengthen relationships with others in the Daisies’ community – teachers and family members.

Children and adults enhance their understanding of the Māori value of kaitiakitanga (care of the natural environment). We discuss ways we can respect and nurture the bush and streams. The children and their parents develop a stronger sense of connection with the world of Tane Mahuta (the Māori god of the forest) as they explore the environment and its inhabitants.

During explorations of nature in the wild, the role of teacher is to ensure safety, model curiosity and wonder, and instigate hypothesising and problem solving. We may not have answers; in any event, we seldom supply ready-made answers. Conversations often start with comments like ‘I wonder . . .’ Co-construction of new knowledge happens through dialogue and afterwards.

Back at Daisies, we re-visit the experience via a slide show of the photos taken. We share photos and comments with families via a Nature Explore diary in the foyer and electronically. ‘Working theories’ posited in the bush are investigated further. For example, the movement of air and/or water involved months of research for adults and children. But that is another story.

**Froebelian principles and their connection with Te Whāriki**

The photographs and writing in this case study of Daisies illuminate Froebelian principles which chime with Te Whāriki:

- The central importance of first-hand experience which holds meaning for the child
- The way that nurturing family, parents, grandparents and practitioners guide children as they are introduced to new experiences whilst giving freedom of movement, encouraging thought and ideas to develop
- The connections and engagement with nature and care of it
- The need for adults to observe children and to act on their observations so that education begins where the learner is, rather than where they ought to be. This means that those working with children need to be highly trained.