Introduction

The development of powerful communities of practice more often than not remain undocumented. Yet the fascinating ways in which such networks of early childhood educational practice have developed and influenced policy are useful to ponder and give important lessons for the future of policy-making and relevant research. Key features are summarised in Part V and are touched on in other parts of the book. In this chapter the beginnings of the Edinburgh Froebel Network are unearthed and subjected to analysis and scrutiny, although its story continues to develop. Interestingly it is the less tangible aspects which play the greatest part. Perhaps this is why such histories are rarely captured and are left untold. Perhaps also this is why all too often the lessons of history are not learnt and acted upon. For example happenstance, the meeting of like minds, the importance of relationships and the joint workings and communications that follow are not tangible to identify. However, they play a central and critical role in the development of sustained communities of practice such as the Edinburgh Froebel Network. When like minds meet, people collaborate rather than compete. They help each other’s work to develop, and there is a healthy cross fertilisation of ideas and dialogue across different centres. It is not only their success that is celebrated but they value the work of other likeminded networks, and they urge each other on, and give courage and encouragement.

People working in this way want to better understand how colleagues work and make progress. They put energy into spending time in robust dialogue and interrogation. They participate in each other’s ventures. Training becomes of central importance, so courses are established which take pride in their inner cohesion and high quality. This aids clarification of thinking, professional development and so learning results. This benefits children and their families. It really is a question of one thing leads to another and a case of things happening in the right place, at the right time in the right way. A gardening image suggested by Jane Whinnett (personal communication Bruce, 2017) is of the strawberry plant with its runners. Chance meetings of likeminded people are key. These can lead to lasting and critically important relationships which
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over time develop as part of the powerful work with training greatly valued and the increasing influence of a network such as the Edinburgh Froebel Network.

The power of happenstance

From 1985–1989 Joan Tamburrini, Principal lecturer at the Froebel Educational Institute, was External Examiner for the Canterbury PGCE course in Primary Education. She was a towering psychologist embracing the Froebelian approach, and an outstanding academic and scholar. One of the students whose practice she observed was Jane Whinnett, who became interested in the principles of Froebel and the practice that resulted. In 1975 Tina Bruce, was recommended by Chris Athey to take the newly established MA at the FEI where Joan Tamburrini was to be the course director. Here is the first example of happenstance.

In their separate worlds, both Jane and Tina found Joan was the sort of tutor who sharpened their thinking and caused reflective implementation of it in practice. She was quite a daunting tutor as well as being inspirational. Joan had previously tutored Sheena Johnston, one of the most influential educational leaders in Edinburgh in early childhood education. Sheena had also studied with Joan Tamburrini through the one year full-time prestigious Froebel Diploma, which was the predecessor of the MA with a rigorous selection process. Sheena was a respected and much loved tutor leading the Froebel Diploma Course at Moray House College which no longer exists. At this time Scottish teachers seeking senior posts in primary schools, or wishing to teach in nursery schools or classes, were required to take this course, or a similar one local to them. In spite of being qualified teachers they were examined in practice and could fail. English trained teachers could not teach in Scotland unless they were Froebel trained. Sheena invited Joan to be the External Examiner and when she finished her term of office in 1989, Joan recommended Tina Bruce to become the External Examiner.

By happenstance, the very first student that Tina observed on her teaching practice with a group of nursery children in a primary school was Jane Whinnett. Something of a pattern is beginning to emerge. There are chance meetings, which involve the meeting of minds and hearts. This is not a sentimental statement, because it is between likeminded people that there is most likely to be the possibility of people leaving their comfort zones and developing further. Where there is trust and a feeling of well-being as people dialogue together they are empowered to do their best. When this occurs people connect. Lasting professional relationships emerge and are sustained over time. But this only occurs if both sides continually work at the connection. Without commitment and energy to dialogue and share and critique practice and thoughts, the relationship will fade and the possibilities for professional development with it. Another factor is the emergence of a tradition from one generation to the next of handing on the baton. In this chapter a typical tutor or mentor/student choreography of this kind is apparent.

It is important to note that Sheena was in her quiet way a key mover and shaker of early childhood education, not just in Edinburgh but also beyond. Consequently, when examining for Moray House with Sheena, she introduced many colleagues to both Joan Tamburrini and Tina Bruce and this led to evening talks with attendance from HMIE, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Children in Scotland and senior staff from different Scottish local authorities. A close colleague of Sheena in Edinburgh was one of her former students, Maureen Baker, who trained at Moray House, taking the Froebel course there. Maureen was Head of the Children’s House Nursery School, a free standing nursery school often described as an oasis where children, staff and parents learnt together indoors and outdoors in an ethos of mutual respect. Maureen comments, ‘Froebelian principles underpinned the way we learnt and staff were committed to the approach.’ Maureen applied for funding and initiated a project with the Castlebrae Cluster in
Communities of Froebelian practice

Craigmillar, asking Tina to help. This was an inner city housing estate in an area of multiple deprivations in Edinburgh. The cluster was made up of free standing nursery schools, nursery classes attached to primary schools, a family centre attached to a secondary school run by the social services department, the Books for Babies project and a family centre. Wendy Dignan, the nursery advisor for Edinburgh, wholeheartedly supported the work.

The cluster looked at how children become symbol users and makers, gathering videos, photographs, summaries and artefacts. Through this project Tina was introduced to the Head of Cameron House Nursery School, Chris McCormick. The news section of Nursery World (May 31 2001) reported:

Staff working with under-fives in Edinburgh have been counting the gains they have made from a project led by early years expert Professor Tina Bruce. Nursery schools, nursery classes, children’s centre, the Family Centre and Books for Babies and Healthy eating project in the Craigmillar area received funding from the community school budget to hold joint in-service training days with Professor Bruce on the theme of learning through play. Each centre tackled the theme through a variety of topics, culminating in an exhibition and celebration day last week. The exhibition was such a success that there are now plans to extend it.

Marianne Lagrange at Paul Chapman Publishing gave positive support to the work that had been achieved and commissioned a book to be scribed for the cluster by Tina Bruce which developed from the work of the Craigmillar project. It was titled, Developing Learning in Early Childhood and published in 2004. The book was launched at the beautiful Edinburgh City Chambers with a keynote from Susan Deacon, local Member of the Scottish Parliament. Her young child attended with her and enjoyed playing with the children attending with their parents from the Craigmillar community. She introduced the celebration by speaking about the importance of ‘Local communities being involved in making decisions about meeting local needs’. A juvenile piper performed, arranged by Maureen Baker, who said:

It has been a fascinating experience – from the initial involvement in a staff development day to seeing out notes and records reproduced in print. The work in Craigmillar has been wide ranging and the book shows how adults can support children and actively help them develop in their learning in early childhood.

(Learning and Teaching Scotland: Scottish Executive Spring/Summer, 2004: 1)

This is a very good example of how both top-down and bottom-up are important, but only if they meet in the middle. Often they don’t. They pass each other by. George Ellis is a physicist who has worked across the years with Stephen Hawking. He is interested in education, and his book How Can Physics Underlie the Mind? is pertinent here. He writes:

It is the combination of bottom-up and top-down causation that allows genuinely complex behaviour to emerge out of simple components combined together to form modular hierarchical structures. As well as bottom-up causation, top-down causation takes place in these structures through the crucial role of context, in determining the outcomes of lower level causation. This occurs in the natural world of inanimate objects; in the biological world of plants, animals and intelligent beings and in the manufactured world of artefacts. It takes place in evolutionary, developmental and functional contexts.

(Ellis, 2016: 5)
The crucial role of context is evident with a clear relationship between whole to parts in the emerging Edinburgh Froebel Network. Things cannot function well if separate and bitty. The top-down elements in this scenario are that there was community funding without which the emerging Froebelian network would not have met. Because the work produced was of quality this was picked up at policy-making level because of a launch in a prestigious context, the City Chambers. It was then written up and disseminated at national levels in several ways. *Nursery World* news, Learning and Teaching Scotland journal front page in *Early Years Matters* (2004: 1) both nationally and internationally with translation into Chinese of the book *Developing Learning in Early Childhood*. There was bottom-up work of great quality but this would not have developed without vision in leadership, commitment and ability for functional teamwork from Maureen Baker, Head teacher of Children’s House Nursery School, who led the Castlebrae Project.

Maureen also brought about an important Froebelian reconnection in Tina Bruce and Jane Whinnett, by this time Head of Balgreen Nursery School and a new connection with Chris McCormick, Head teacher of Cameron House Nursery School. Through Jane Whinnett, Tina met Stella Brown, Head teacher of Tynecastle Nursery School. As a result Tina was invited to work with the Edinburgh Nursery School head teachers regularly at the request of Wendy Dignan the Inspector for Early Childhood Education in Edinburgh, who joined sessions when she was able to. This was at the time when the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence 3–18* was being developed and piloted. Lynn McNair, Head of Cowgate Centre for Families and Children under 5 attended some of these meetings and it was at this time that Tina Bruce was involved in the reactivation of the former Froebel Course at the Froebel College, University of Roehampton which she was leading with Jane Read. Jane Whinnett encouraged Lynn to apply so that they could attend together, and they both successfully completed this residential Froebel course in Roehampton.

It is obvious that what is happening here is not a linear process, nor is it a hub and spoke process. Jane Whinnett describes it as being like a strawberry runner plant, hence the title of this chapter. The strawberry runners have already rooted down connected plants, through happenstance relationships, top-down and bottom-up professional workings, both informal and formal, in ‘evolutionary, developmental and functional contexts’ (Ellis, 2016: 5).

But so far in this chapter, the Edinburgh Froebel Network has not yet come into existence. It came into being by a process of happenstance and sustained relationships forming. The Castlebrae Project, the nursery school headteacher professional training days, the book written together, are gradually making things more tangible. A further very tangible development was the invitation to Tina Bruce from Maureen Baker, Stella Brown, Lynn McNair Chris McCormick and Jane Whinnett, to work together when Jane Whinnett applied for funding to the on *Assessment for Learning Project*. In all the projects outlined in this chapter Froebelian principles were at the core of the work. The work was well received by the funding body and this resulted in a request for presentations to be given at a dissemination day from the Project funding organisers.

All of this demonstrates the happenstance nature of the developments leading to the birth of the Edinburgh Froebel Network. But in reality of course happenstance doesn’t just happen! Happenstance can only happen if people connect and form working relationships which are sustained and involve energy and commitment. It was in this way that the Edinburgh Froebel Network was born.

**The Edinburgh Froebel Network emerges**

The Edinburgh Froebel Network was established in 2008 by a group who had by this time worked closely together for some years. The volunteer founders were Maureen Baker MBE,
Stella Brown, Lynn McNair OBE, Chris McCormick and Jane Whinnett. They had been sharing continuing professional training days and development projects regularly with Tina Bruce since 1989 and were encouraged to have a conference in 2009 about the Froebelian work they had been engaged in. Eighty seven delegates attended. This was a great success, leading to requests for more Froebelian articulation, and is analysed later in this chapter. This one conference led to a decade of annual Edinburgh Froebel Network conferences and the probability that this will continue into future decades. The Froebel Trust has given small grants towards the conferences.

There was also an enthusiasm to document and tell the story of their work as another means of dissemination. Marianne Lagrange at Sage was very positive in agreeing to publish the book *Early Childhood Practice: Froebel Today* (2012) which was edited by Tina Bruce with the founders of the Network writing a chapter each and chapters from the Roehampton Froebelians Jane Read and Helen Tovey and Marjorie Ouvry, all of whom had spoken at Edinburgh Froebel Network conferences. This was given a prestigious Award for ‘service to in service training resources’ by *Nursery World* in 2013. The Edinburgh Froebel Network has gone on to develop an increasingly flourishing website with a new Froebel Network leader joining the team, Catriona Gill, Head of Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre. This encourages the use of twitter and other social media such as *storyfy*. It also links with the Froebel Network newsletter disseminated from Annan School which is a continuation of the National Froebel Foundation newsletter.

A further development has been the bridging activity of the leaders of the Edinburgh Froebel Network in recapturing the traditional Froebelian way of integrating theory and practice so that they feed off and into each other. Tutors of different Froebel courses give keynotes and presentations in seminars and workshops at international conferences and those not so directly or overtly Froebel focussed. For example Jane Whinnett has spoken at the *Nursery World* Annual Masterclass (Whinnett 2016) and presented at the International Froebel Society Conference hosted by the Lutheran College in Kassel (23–25 June 2016) supported by the Froebel Trust. Her topic was *Froebel in Edinburgh: Gifts for Our Future*. In April 2017 a group of 11 from the Edinburgh Froebel Network attended the first *Froebel Gathering* in Richmond on Thames, where the various Networks of Froebelians reported on their work.

Lynn McNair, Jane Whinnett and Tina Bruce gave master classes on Froebelian approaches to play for *Children in Scotland* in Edinburgh on several occasions, (2014 and 2015) titled *Learning to Play: Playing to Learn* and a keynote at the International Family Day Care Organisation (ifdco) Conference in Edinburgh (July 22–5, 2015) titled *The Importance of Play*. Froebelian education is made explicit in such contexts.

Dr Lynn McNair and Professor John Davis (University of Edinburgh) spoke to Parliament at Holyrood. Lynn said, in their PowerPoint presentation, *Froebel in Early Childhood Education*:

The Edinburgh Froebel Network is an excellent idea of what can be achieved when like minded people come together in a common purpose and with shared principles. The founding members united under the Froebel umbrella to share their enthusiasm and expertise. The Froebel Movement had no shortage of courageous women campaigning for better outcomes for children, recognising the role of families and communities and promoting high quality experiences with high quality staff. The Edinburgh Froebel Network has been instrumental in supporting professional development and a Froebel course at the University of Edinburgh.

Lynn McNair, Teresa Bolger and Luke Addison spoke in Bulgaria 12th and 13th September 2017 on *The Froebelian Approach: Defining the Core Values, Giving Presentations and Discussing
with Stakeholders Representing the Bulgarian Government. The conference was titled Parenting Creatively: Creation of Bulgaria’s First Early Childhood Centre (Serving Families and Educators and Childcare Professionals). Lynn McNair also spoke at the two day conference in New Zealand Back to the Future with Froebel at the ASB Arena, Tauranga. Across the day her topics were Froebel’s History, His Principles and the Importance of Play.

Chris McCormick spoke at the BAECE: Early Education Conference (2015) in Edinburgh about the work in Partnership with Parents at Cameron House Nursery School. This included parents joining with her to speak.

In the traditional Froebelian way the Edinburgh Froebel Network began by organising annual Froebel conferences but the founders were also instrumental in the successful reinstatement of the part time Froebel Certificate in Childhood Practice at the University of Edinburgh, with the sustained and committed support of Professor John Davis, and the Edinburgh Froebel Network founders became involved in the tutoring of the course led by Lynn McNair who was appointed a Teaching Fellow by the University of Edinburgh. The course has gone from strength to strength with attendees including practitioners, teachers, from private independent, local authority settings, playgroups, charity and voluntary sector, local authority senior managers, care inspectors, parents and childminders. There is an increasing diversity in the student group of gender and ethnicity reflecting the population of different areas of Scotland. Graduates have gone on to become head teachers, senior early years officers as well as further training including teacher training.

The course has gained informal encouragement, recognised nationally as an example of excellence in professional learning in the key messages of the document Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014: 28). In her report as Chair of the independent review of the Scottish Early Learning and Childcare Workforce and Out-of-School Care Workforce, Professor Iram Siraj praised high quality training such as the Froebel courses. The University of Edinburgh is now offering Froebel courses in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Midlothian and Falkirk. In 2017, 60 course members attended the Edinburgh course and 60 attended the Glasgow course (integrated with six local authorities). It is important to note that the courses are becoming accessible locally so that practitioners do not have to travel so far. Local authorities, such as the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow Council support the courses by releasing practitioners and contributing to the funding of attendance. In addition, Lynn McNair and Jane Whinnett teach the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) basic course for the City of Edinburgh Council using the principles of the Froebelian approach. Froebelian practice is spreading and being recognised by local authorities in Scotland. Inspection reports have identified the nurseries led by Lynn McNair and Stella Brown as the best of Scotland. Lynn McNair said in her presentation with Professor John Davis to Parliament at Holyrood:

Inspection reports reveal that early learning and childcare settings with trained Froebel practitioners perform consistently well in inspections with a high proportion of excellent grades.

(McNair & Davis, 2017)

Graduates of the University of Edinburgh Froebel Certificate Course become members of the Edinburgh Froebel Network Masterclass meeting regularly, at times joined and led by Tina Bruce. Projects they began to develop while studying on the course at the University, and deepened or begun anew through the master classes are disseminated at Froebel Conferences. Practitioners are growing steadily in confidence and are much more able to articulate their Froebelian
practice. One example is the International Froebel Society in 2014 hosted by Canterbury Christ Church University with part funding from the Froebel Trust. The topics were:

Lynda Bardai, *What kind of gardener am I?*
Julie Owenson, *Creative expressive dance.*
Alison Hawkins, *Mapping my Froebelian journey as Principal of a kindergarten.*
Graeme Hawkins, *Learning through play in the upper stage of primary school.*
Jan Paterson, *A headteacher of a primary school’s consideration of the contributions of Froebelian principles and approaches to educational philosophy in 3 settings: blockplay, outdoor learning and extended narrative observations.*
Deirdre Armstrong and Jackie Matthew, *A look at how block play can best be managed to enhance play experiences and ultimately improve learning outcomes for children.*
Catriona Gill, *Throwing out the plastic: constructing an environment which supports the development of high quality creative play.*
Diane Janczyk, *Froebel’s Mother Songs.*
Sharon Imray, *A journey of new discoveries, looking at heuristic play as a natural progression for ‘toddling’ children from the treasure basket.*
Lian Higgins, *Managing lunch times in Froebelian ways.*
Sandra Brown, *An environment for living and learning, reflecting froebelian principles in the ‘Seedling room’.*

Some of the Graduates of the University of Edinburgh Certificate course go on to take the BA in Early Childhood Studies. The University of Edinburgh Froebel course graduates attend the Master classes and a group have (2016–2017) been involved in a practitioner research project, *Players and Storytellers,* initiated by Jane Whinnett with a small grant from the Froebel Trust. This explored the development of narrative and character through storytelling and play. This development project was disseminated at the 9th Edinburgh Froebel Network conference in October 2017. The order reflects the groupings in which they were presented. The Froebelian emphasis on sustained observation, the development of the symbolic life of the child, the importance of play and the role of the adult in supporting and encouraging the right atmosphere and educational environment indoors and out of doors is evident. The projects also point to the sophistication in the Froebelian approach, which demands well trained practitioners and partnership with families exploring the worthwhile learning of children together. There were 10 projects:

Alison Hawkins and Moira Whitelaw, *Wester Coates Nursery School, Stories Here, Stories There, Stories Actually Everywhere.*
This project looked at the effective use of storytelling in a free flow Froebelian setting. It examined the part of storytelling in language development of the emergent actors and writers.
Rhian Ferguson, Juniper Green (formerly Balgreen Playgroup), *Children’s Narratives: a look at the importance of listening to, facilitating and nurturing pretend play and storytelling in an early years setting to support children’s literacy development.*
This project highlighted children’s narratives, play, use of props and symbolism and the role of the adult.
Deirdre Armstrong, Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre, *Superheroes and Imaginative Play: Are we losing opportunities for our children?*
The emphasis was on the importance of extended observation to generate new ways of look-
ing at children’s imaginative play. It led to the reassessing of practice and learning to value
superheroes play as a way to gain confidence and control. Another aspect was finding out
about pretend and real aggression. This project drew on Vivian Gussin Paley’s ideas for
children to act out their own stories.

Elaine Fullerton, Hope Cottage Nursery School, Fix, fix Fix – Olav is Stuck – supporting chil-
dren to tell the story they really want to tell.
The focus of this project was on the way that children engage in characters from stories
and popular culture to tell their own stories. It also explored stories that capture the
child’s imagination and deeper psychological tensions were highly motivating. Children
use storytelling to make their inner world of feelings and ideas outer as well as the play
strengthening and refining the inner world of feelings and the child’s sense of self. The
adult can play a sensitive role in helping children to flourish. Social multimodal storytell-
ing will produce rich characterisation and complex plots as well as social and emotional
development.

Linda Bardai, A Bag Full of Stories: An Adventure with Props.
The longevity of Linda’s story bag was explored (40 years) which contained artefacts ena-
bling children to tell their own stories. The project looked at how democracy and experi-
mentation are supported through storytelling.

Rosemary Welensky and Lucy Macfarlane, Mary Erskine Stewart’s Melville Junior School
Nursery, Woodland Stories and Adventures.
The study was based on children self selecting stories at forest kindergarten. It examined the
sharing of stories and the use of natural resources and supporting children to create their
own stories inside and outside.

Chris McCormick and Shauna McIntosh, Cameron House Nursery School, The Story of our
Stories or How Cameron House Climbed the Magic Beanstalk.
The emphasis was on the way that stories or narratives are embedded in our lives from birth
and connect us with others. Traditional stories play a key role in supporting children’s
use and development of narratives. Play and reincorporation in children’s narratives are
interwoven to feed creativity.

Sharon Imray, Poppies Pre-school, Stonehaven, Goldilocks Eated the Three Bears ... yuk! Feeling
the Fairytale Every Day.
How repetitive storytelling influenced pretend play and supported children emotionally.
Freedom with guidance, the importance of trusting your intuition and sometimes getting
it wrong! Good observation supports children emotionally.

Catriona Gill, formerly of Craigentinny Primary School, recently appointed Head of
Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre Players and Storytellers: Supporting Writing
in Primary One.
This project looked at how a Froebelian play based approach can support the development
of children’s narrative writing. It examined the role of the adult in supporting children to
translate their narrative abilities in oral storytelling, into their written storytelling, through
the use of story grammars.

Teresa Bolger, Cowgate Under 5s Centre for Children and Families. Rescue Knight Com-
ing! ... and follow me, follow me and now we are out of the cage! Embodied adventures exploring
the literacy of movement within a wild natural place.
The focus was on exploring tales created through playing with ‘nature’s affordances’
(Lester and Maudsley, 2006: 3). It looked at ‘wayfaring, ongoingness’ (Ingold, 2007) and
‘throwntogetherness’ Massey, 2005:5) and ‘Entanglements’ (Hackett, 2015: 1) and the literacy of movement, and playing with legends, fairy tales and folklore in the woods.

The Edinburgh Froebel Network have become aware, with the expansion of the University of Edinburgh Froebel course across Scotland, that it is important to be able to offer an accessible community of Froebelian practice for those not local in Edinburgh. Recently they have started to offer practical workshops/seminars on some Saturdays. These include four sessions working *Clay: a Froebelian Occupation* (Thelma Miller, who is a Froebel Travelling Tutor), *Woodwork: a Froebelian Occupation* (Pete Moorhouse who works in nursery education and care in Bristol and is a practising artist) and *Observation of schemas to support children’s early mark making and literacy* (Stella Louis, who is working with BAECE: Early Education to roll out the Froebel Trust’s Froebel Travelling Tutor short courses).

Recently, as part of the *Wee Builders Project*, Jane Whinnett for the Edinburgh Froebel Network has supported the National Galleries of Scotland, which aims to welcome more children and families to the Galleries. The Network is lending sets of mini unit blocks for children to use in building their own creations in the Scottish National Gallery inspired by the art that is all around them.

### The Edinburgh Froebel Network conferences

These, in a sustained way, have promoted the practical implementation of Froebelian approaches to early childhood education supported by Froebelian principles, and current research and theory. Looking at them as a whole they demonstrate the journey of current Froebelians in leadership roles, and the desire to review and connect with the primary sources and roots of Froebelian thinking, whilst functioning in ways which are appropriate for the historic, geographic and cultural contexts in which children, families and practitioners live. Although, as would be expected, these have highlighted the Scottish context, they very soon attracted delegates from other parts of the UK and at time have been attended by Froebelians from other countries visiting Scotland as the reputation of the work has developed.

**The first conference, 31st October 2009: Gifts for our future**

The Edinburgh Froebel Conferences began with 87 delegates attending, with a small grant from the Incorporated Froebel Educational Corporation endorsed by the National Froebel Foundation. It was titled *Froebel: Gifts for Our Future: A conference celebrating Froebel’s relevance today*.

From the beginning the Edinburgh Froebel Conferences have worked positively with the City of Edinburgh Council, and at the first conference, held in the Godfrey Thomson Hall, Moray House at the University of Edinburgh, it is significant that Councillor Marilyne Maclaren, Convener of Education, Children and Families welcomed the delegates. Another feature of the conferences has been that colleagues from the Universities of Roehampton and Canterbury Christ Church have participated, and at the first conference Dr Jane Read, senior lecturer and the former Archivist of the Froebel Collection at Roehampton gave a keynote titled, *An Introduction to Froebel*. Looking back it is interesting to note that very few of those attending the conference would have known Froebel’s name other than as a pioneer of education and a historic figure rather than having relevance today. In the same spirit, Tina Bruce spoke to the title, *Froebelian Principles: Practice Today*. In the afternoon, Jane Read linked the historic aspects to current issue through the title, *Daring and adventure, exploration and knowledge in Froebelian pedagogy*. She spoke about the importance of learning out of doors.
To climb a tree is for a child to discover a new world.

(Froebel, Education of Man, 1826b)

This first Froebel conference set the scene for those that have followed in Edinburgh. It celebrated the Froebelian heritage and also its relevance today. The title, *Froebel: Gifts for Our Future* has been carried through into each of the subsequent conferences. The logo of the Edinburgh Froebel Network was decided upon. It is the lily, which was a flower that Froebel loved particularly. This was because it grew in dark places where beauty is unlikely to be found. It is a metaphor for the education of children. Even if they are living in difficult circumstances, with the right help they can flourish.

The second conference, 24th April 2010: *Froebel: Gifts for our future*

Once again Councillor Marilyne Maclaren welcomed the delegates, who numbered about 100 this time. A larger venue was needed and found at the Edinburgh Training and Conference Venue. At this conference it was felt possible to go into more detail about Froebelian practice. Tina Bruce shared the findings of the Froebel Blockplay Collaborative Research Project (undertaken with the research assistant Pat Gura and five maintained nursery schools in London) funded by the Froebel College Governing Body in the 1990s. She also demonstrated to delegates the original wooden blocks named the Gifts. Her talk was titled *Froebel’s Gifts Today: Observing children and helping them to develop wooden block play.* However, in the conferences there is never a prescriptive emphasis on the original practices of the Froebelian approach so that Froebelian principles are a means of developing reflective practice that is embedded, consistent and well thought through. This was emphasised in the keynote given by Helen Tovey which was titled *Play Outdoors, Adventure and Challenge: A Froebelian perspective on the nursery garden today.* An important feature was that two of the main elements of the Froebelian curriculum framework had been highlighted, namely the Gifts (mathematically related wooden blocks) and the importance of nature and physical play and development.

The third conference, 21st May 2011: *Gifts for our future*

Once again Councillor Marilyne Maclaren generously agreed to welcome the 106 delegates to the John McIntyre Centre in the University of Edinburgh. Whereas delegates has tended to come from Edinburgh previously, this time two thirds did, but one third came from East, West and Midlothian, Fife, Border and Aberdeenshire. It was also interesting that they worked in a variety of contexts with young children. The Froebelian approach is broader than simply being school orientated, so this wide range of work with young children or amongst those training practitioners was heartening to identify. There were many who had attended the previous conferences. This conference took place at the John McIntyre Centre at the University of Edinburgh. By this time the Froebel Course had been established at the University of Edinburgh, with tutors from the Edinburgh Froebel Network. It has become a tradition for those completing the course successfully to receive their Certificates at the conference, and these were presented to 25 graduates by Councillor MacLaren and Tina Bruce. The conferences also serve an important purpose in promoting interest in the course. At this conference there were 25 notes of interest. The City of Edinburgh has been supportive in sending practitioners to study on the course as they were positive about its impact on the practice of graduates.
This time more of the Froebelian curriculum features Froebelian terminology were introduced. Tina Bruce spoke on *The whole child’s development and learning: The self activity of the child*. This was followed by a keynote from Jenny Spratt, Head of early childhood education and care services in Peterborough City Council whose keynote was titled *The importance of hand and finger rhymes: A Froebelian approach to early literacy*. Marjorie Ouvry, formerly Head of the Rachel McMillan Maintained Nursery school in Deptford, and now an independent early childhood consultant gave her talk on *Froebelian Mother Songs today* and gave delegates the treat of listening to her singing some, using her expertise as a trained singer at the Guildhall school of music.

**The fourth conference, 9th June 2012: Gifts for our future**

*Making Connections across Time and Space*

This conference was held at the Royal College of Surgeons. The conference was used as an occasion to mark the launch of the book *Early Childhood Practice: Froebel Today*, edited by Tina Bruce with authors from the Edinburgh Froebel Network, University of Roehampton and the External Moderator of Froebel Courses at the Universities of Edinburgh and Roehampton. This group of authors all work together as a team committed to the exploration and implementation of Froebelian practice in early childhood education and care today. There was a piper (the talented 15-year-old grandson of Maureen Baker, Jordan Baker) and a toast by Tina Bruce to honour the occasion. Once again certificates were presented to graduates of the University of Edinburgh Froebel Course.

The first speaker was the late Kevin Brehony, the Froebel Professor at the University of Roehampton whose subject was *Every generation of Froebelians creates their own orthodoxy*. This was an important keynote because until then the keynotes had been in the main introductions to delegates informing them about Froebelian principles and practices and how relevant these might be today. Kevin Brehony challenged Froebel tutors and interpreters of Froebelian practice working in the current historic time to consider the extent to which we are always influenced by the time and place in which we locate our work and lives. This was followed by Tina Bruce giving a talk *Recording children’s holistic experiences supports their learning*. This argued for a broad approach to education rather than narrow schooling and emphasised the central place of observing and getting to know children, informed by Froebelian principles and how they connect with current research and theory. Stella Louis, Early Childhood Consultant and Advisory team London Borough of Southwark, then shared with delegates *Froebel’s Gifts and Occupations in a South African Township Kindergarten*. Both these talks demonstrated Kevin Brehony’s thesis that Froebelian practitioners are always influenced by the historic, geographic and cultural aspects of where their work is located. The final talk of the conference was given by Marjorie Ouvry, *Exercising muscles and minds: active learning from a Froebelian approach*.

**The fifth conference, 1st June 2013: Gifts for our future**

*Parents and practitioners collaborating to support children’s learning*

‘Come let us live with our children’ (Friedrich Froebel, 1844)

The conference venue was the John McIntyre Centre at the University of Edinburgh. On this occasion Gillian Tee, the Director of Children and Families, City of Edinburgh Council, welcomed the delegates and presented the certificates to the graduates of the University of...
Edinburgh Froebel Course. Tina Bruce, honorary Professor in early childhood education at the University of Roehampton, then spoke to a chapter she authored in the book which received an award, and was celebrated at the fourth conference, *Early Childhood Practice: Froebel Today*. The title of the keynote was *Family, Community and the Wider World*. This was followed by a talk from Stella Louis, Early Years Consultant and advisory team in the London Borough of Southwark *Parents Identifying and Observing their Children’s Schemas*. Sue Greenfield, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Roehampton was sadly indisposed so unable to give her keynote titled *Parents’ Experiences of Supporting Young Children’s Creative Thinking at Home*. Marjorie Ouvry kindly stepped in at the last minute. In the afternoon graduates of the Froebel course at the University of Edinburgh who had attended Master classes with the Edinburgh Froebel Network presented Development Projects on Mother Songs, Play in the Primary School, Nature and Outdoor Learning, Block Play, Homelore and Birth to Three. Some of these were later presented at the International Froebel Conference in 2014 at Canterbury Christ Church University, as outlined in the previous section of this chapter.

### The sixth conference, 4th October 2014: Gifts for our future

**Key people: key experiences**

*The law of connection is the most important law of the universe, of humanity and of life in general.*

(Froebel, 1899)

Once again Gillian Tee, Director of Children and families, City of Edinburgh Council, welcomed the delegates to the John McIntyre Centre, now numbering approximately 150, and presented Certificates to the Graduates of the University of Edinburgh Froebel Course. Dr Jacqui Cousins, Early Childhood Consultant and freelance family support worker gave a keynote *Discovered Treasure, Elinor Goldschmied, a Key Person*. Previous conferences had touched on the more tangible aspects of Froebelian practice and its supporting principles. Now, with more delegates more familiar with the basics of Froebelian education, it was possible to explore more abstract ideas relating to the philosophy. Observation was the emphasis in the talk by Stella Louis *Again and Again! How children develop deep grooves and why repeated experiences are key for young children’s development and learning*. Relationship with the youngest babies and children was the focus of the keynote by Dr Peter Elfer, Principal Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Roehampton, Chair of the Froebel Trust Research Committee *Keeping Key Relationships in Mind*. Tina Bruce then continued by looking at *Key Experiences for Children from two to six years*.

### The seventh conference, 5th September 2015: Gifts for our future

**Building the ambition: the role of Froebel in the twenty-first century**

Gillian Tee welcomed over two hundred delegates and presented certificates to Graduates of the Froebel Course at the University of Edinburgh in the John McIntyre Centre. In this conference there was a mix of tangible and less tangible aspects of the Froebelian approach. The day began with a keynote from Anne O’Connor, independent early childhood consultant, trainer and writer and co-founder of Primed for Life Training Associates. She holds the Froebel certificate from the Froebel College (now the University of Roehampton). Her talk was titled *Understanding Attachment*. The remainder of the day was made up of a new format of seminars through which delegates rotated so that they experienced them all. These were: *What do we mean by*
Communities of Froebelian practice playing and learning? (Tina Bruce); Treasure baskets: promoting curiosity, inquiry and creativity (Jacqui Cousins); A focus on the emotional work of early years practitioners (Peter Elfer); Using observation and schemas to give toddlers and young children what they need (Stella Louis and Georgie McCall, Head of Ann Barnard maintained nursery school and children’s centre in London); Recent Graduates from the Froebel Course at the University of Edinburgh led seminars on An introduction to Froebel which included workshops on Wooden blocks, Mother Songs and outdoors.

The eighth conference, 8th October 2016: Gifts for our future

Froebelian principles for leaders of learning

Delegates numbering 250 were welcomed to the John McIntyre Centre in the University of Edinburgh by Mark McDonald MSP, Minister for Childcare and Early Years. Lynn McNair and Jane Whinnett presented certificates to the recent Graduates of the Froebel Course from Edinburgh at the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Kathy Goouch, Professor of Early Education Canterbury Christ Church University gave a keynote titled Gazing into the ‘mirror of song’: Singing as a pedagogical device in education and care of babies. Professor Rowena Arshad OBE, Head of Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh spoke on Thinking more critically and creatively for our tomorrow: the importance of higher order thinking as part of the landscape for promoting social justice and rights for children and young people. This was followed by a talk from Kathryn Solly, formerly Head of Chelsea Open Air Nursery school and now a consultant and author Dancing barefoot in the puddles: Risk, challenge and adventure in outdoor play.

The ninth conference, 9th October 2017: Gifts for our future

Marjorie Ouvry welcomed the 320 delegates to the conference in the John McIntyre Centre of the University of Edinburgh, presenting the certificates of the Froebel Course at the University of Edinburgh and Glasgow to the Graduates (now numbering about 50). She introduced Jane Dyke, the Founder of Yellow Dot Group of day nurseries in Hampshire, who had been a host participator in the piloting of the short Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor Courses developed under the leadership of Tina Bruce. She described the journey into implementation of Froebelian practices in the 13 nurseries, and the continuation of that journey. The title of her talk was Leading the process of change: Froebel and Yellow Dot. Lynn McNair, Head of Cowgate Under Fives Centre, Edinburgh, Teaching Fellow at the University of Edinburgh and a member of the leadership team in the Edinburgh Froebel Network then gave her keynote ‘Rules, rules, rules and we’re not allowed to skip’. An exploratory study: Listening to children’s voices about the transition to Primary One. In the afternoon Graduates of the Froebel Course in Edinburgh and Aberdeen presented their development projects from the Master Classes of the Edinburgh Froebel Network, Stories and storytellers. Detail of these are given earlier in this chapter as examples of the implementation of Froebelian practice after attending Froebel conferences and the University of Edinburgh Froebel Certificate course.

The tenth conference, 22nd September: Gifts for our future

Perspectives on Play

The venue is the Edinburgh Assembly Rooms with 500 delegates attending. This conference celebrates a decade of the Edinburgh Froebel Network. The speakers participating: Dr Sue
Reflections on strawberry runners

The story of the Edinburgh Froebel Network is in tangible form a decade old, but it began some years before that without anyone realising it. It happened, and is happening.

Gradually researchers are beginning to want to find out more, and policy makers and implementers in Scotland find the work of the Edinburgh Froebel Network interesting and of use operationally. When policy makers and practitioners work together, powerful things can happen. The Edinburgh Froebel Network is a demonstration of this. The way that strawberry plants grow is not linear or predictable in its pattern of growth but the result when it has room to grow is a delicious fruit.