The previous chapter explored the ways in which a Froebelian Network (the Edinburgh Froebel Network) emerged through organic growth and happenstance. Professor Kevin Brehony, on his appointment at the Froebel Professor at the Froebel College, University of Roehampton, established the Early Childhood Research Centre (ECRC). At the same time Tina Bruce was made an honorary Professor, and he asked her to organise seminars with a Froebelian focus of interest to practitioners as well as researchers. Speakers such as Jan Dubiel, an expert on assessment working to develop the legally framed national English Foundation Stage Profile contributed as well as Professors Milda Bredikyte and Pentti Hakarainen from the University of Vilnius, Professor Adam Ockelford speaking of his work developing ‘Sounds of Intent’ as well as these seminars giving an opportunity for PhD students to give a presentation and engage in critical dialogue regarding their focus, which led to an increasingly explicit articulation and robust examination of Froebelian principles and influences. Conferences were also arranged with an agreement from the Froebel Trust to underwrite the cost. On each occasion these have attracted over a hundred delegates.

The re-establishment of the Froebel Certificate course was a mission dear to the heart of Tina Bruce, and in discussion with Helen Tovey and Jane Read, and support from Kevin Brehony and Maurice Craft (Chair of the Froebel Trust Education Committee) this was taken forward. The pattern of the course’s re-instigation was necessarily different from that followed in Edinburgh. This is an important issue to raise. Local and cultural differences will dictate different ways of developing Froebelian education appropriately. But there is inter connectivity between the Froebel courses in Edinburgh and Roehampton in that both emerged from a need felt by practitioners in the field, with important exchanges and sharing of lecturing. Another similarity has been the cost to the participants. In Scotland the Edinburgh City Council has entered into supporting attendance. Because of the wide catchment of London, it has been necessary to help attendance through a subsidy approach. This has been felt to have more social justice than an individual scholarship or bursary approach. Universal benefits are more effective in broadening access. A further similarity is the way in which the conferences and the courses are interconnected in a very positive way. Conference attendance seems to give confidence to delegates such
that they feel encouraged to sign up for the course. This is especially important as many early childhood practitioners enter the field of work through access routes, or may have studied for their initial training some time ago and feel anxious about returning to more academic writing and study.

The first conference, 8th July 2006: after ‘Rose’: which way forward?

Professors Kevin Brehony and Tina Bruce joint chaired the day in the Kairos Conference Centre, Roehampton. Jim Rose CBE spoke about his Review undertaken at the request of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). He outlined the five aspects of the Rose Review, giving the expectations for best practice in early reading and synthetic phonics, relationship with the new Early Years Foundation Stage, the best provision to help children with significant literacy difficulties catch up, the impact of leadership and management and practitioner knowledge and skills, and the cost effectiveness of different approaches. He concluded that high quality phonics work is the best route for beginner readers by the age of 5 years as it ‘paves the way’ to literacy. He recommended that this should be an inherent part of practitioner and teacher training and implemented in settings and schools. This view is in contrast to the Froebelian approach to literacy because it highlights the smallest parts of the process as requiring emphasis in the earliest stages of literacy rather than the whole to parts approach. It was felt to be important to hear the view of the former HMI, Chief Inspector of Primary Education and later Director for Ofsted. His colleague Debbie Hepplewhite of the Reading Reform Foundation and a leading proponent of the synthetic phonics approach gave her keynote: The way forward following the Rose Review: Self-reflection?

Discussion groups asked delegates to see in what ways they agreed, disagreed, could find reconciliation, or not, to the keynotes of the morning. These were facilitated by Sue Robson, Anne Washtell, Elise Alexander, Cathy Svensson, Shirley Maxwell, Hiroko Fumoto, Sue Greenfield, Sally Cave and Fran Pafford. Kevin Brehony asked the facilitators to give emerging themes gathered from the morning discussion groups. This exercise formed a transition to the afternoon when the Froebelian approach was given attention.

Dr. Dominic Wyse, University of Cambridge spoke to the title Rose Tinted Spectacles in which he critiqued the Review, interrogating the data on which it rests, concluding that the evidence is wrong, that the teaching of reading has become inappropriately politicised, and that practitioners should say no to the proposed changes to the national curriculum. Then followed Lesley Staggs, until mid-February 2006 the first National Director for the Foundation Stage. She located early literacy within the context of the Every Child Matters framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage, and its principles were highlighted. These included placing value on diversity, partnership with parents, starting with what children can do and a focus on the whole child.

The second conference, 16th June 2007

Implementing the place of movement in developing communication, language and literacy in the early years

This was chaired jointly by Professors Kevin Brehony and Tina Bruce at the Kairos Conference Centre in Roehampton. It took up the requirements of the National Legally framed documents in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This demonstrates the way that Froebelians have always embraced the challenges and political and theoretical climate of the era through robust
discussion. It was a 1-day conference to discuss how Movement and PE specialists and general-ist early childhood practitioners, working together, can develop communication, language and literacy. Two speakers were from the University of Roehampton, Ian Pickup, *The language of movement in physical education: exploring the possibilities for the early years*, and Helen Tovey, *The contribution of outdoor experience to movement development and developing communication, language and literacy*. During the afternoon Penny Greenland, MBE, from Jabadoo, The Centre for Movement Studies, gave a keynote titled: *The contribution of developmental movement play to the development of literacy in young children*. The previous conference highlighted the whole to part approach of the Froebelian philosophy. This conference drilled down to examine how the physical body as a whole is part of learning to read and write, and that movement aspects of development need consideration and attention in educating young children. The Froebelian Susan Isaacs famously wrote:

> To sit still is the most difficult thing for the little child, and to sit still for long would be the worst thing he could do.  

*(Isaacs, 1931: 222)*

**The third conference, 28th June 2008**

*Musical development and learning: creativity in the early years foundation stage*

The conference was chaired by Tina Bruce and Kevin Brehony and the over 100 delegates were welcomed to the Kairos Conference Centre in Roehampton. The legally framed *Early Years Foundation Stage* was considered in the light of the place of music in the lives of children from birth to 7 years. The keynote speakers were Professor Adam Ockelford, who spoke about his work *Sounds Intent* which traces the development of music before and after birth in young children, and Professor David Hargreaves both at the University of Roehampton and Dr. Susan Young from Exeter University.

**The fourth conference, 29th November 2008**

*Playing outdoors: forests and gardens, adventures and challenge*

Helen Tovey, Jane Read and Tina Bruce welcomed to the Froebel College at the University of Roehampton, delegates numbering one hundred plus and introduced the speakers. The conference focussed on the value of play in young children’s lives and learning. It looked at the rapid expansion of Forest Schools and considered the impact these can have on the traditional notion of the nursery garden. This helped delegates to consider Froebel’s thinking on the importance of nature in the education of children. The first keynote speaker was Jenny Doyle, the Forest School coordinator for Worcestershire, based at the Bishops Wood Environmental Education Centre since 2000. By 2008 there were 280 settings in the county with a Forest School site and about 300 trained leaders. Jenny has 40 years of experience working in the outdoor with childcare settings in the private, maintained and voluntary sectors. Her talk was followed by Dr Ingunn Fjortoft from the Telemark University College, Norway, where she is Associate Professor in biology, ecology and physical education. Once again the whole experience was highlighted in the Froebelian tradition. There were discussion groups led by facilitators so that delegates could exchange thoughts and feelings and debate in a robust way the practicalities.
The final keynote speaker was Helen Tovey, Principal Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Roehampton. She is Froebel trained and a former head teacher of an outstanding Nursery School, involved in setting up a challenging outdoor area in a new inner city school. She lectures on the Edinburgh Froebel Course and the Roehampton University Froebel Certificate Course. She is author of *Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenge* (Open University Press) and *Bringing the Froebel Approach to your Early Years Practice* 2nd edn (Routledge).

The Roehampton Froebel certificate course and its many adaptive forms of life

Just as the Certificate in Froebel education at the University of Edinburgh emerged from the Conferences initiated by the Edinburgh Froebel Network, so the pattern was similar in Roehampton. The Froebel Certificate at the University of Roehampton developed into a renewed form from this conference. This was its third reincarnation. It had been very successful in the 1980s, led by Chris Athey, Hilda Garrard and Greg Condry, with 15 or so teachers seconded to it from a variety of local authorities near enough for travel. Then the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) requested 20 places a term on a full time course, seconding teachers and a nursery school head teacher tutor, first Joyce French and then Gina Houston, to work with Tina Bruce so that nursery and infant expertise could be built and expanded in the local authority. A double course was run with 35 teachers per term attending. With cutbacks to funding the course shrank, and became part time across one year. This was a challenge and it disappeared. It was then revived because of the efforts of Helen Tovey and Jane Read working closely with Tina Bruce, and two cohorts of practitioners successfully completed the course which was one week residential full time. Significantly Jane Whinnett and Lynn McNair (now key figures in the Edinburgh Froebel Network) took the course. From the beginning, Edinburgh and Roehampton have been closely linked with tutors working together to promote Froebelian early childhood education. Two Senior Romanian teachers attended the course.

Jane Read and Helen Tovey showed great vision in developing a series of study days and conferences focussing on issues relevant to Froebelian education. Norwegian teachers successfully attended the course, and it is enthusiastically embraced by practitioners in Special Educational contexts as well as mainstream. The study days linked to this conference were 13th February 2009, *Understanding play, cultivating creativity;* 20th March *Creating rich environments: listening to children using the Mosaic approach;* 12th May *Developing and extending children’s thinking;* 12th June *Working together: roles and relationships in the early years.* It is important to note that practitioners can take this course at two levels so that they build their professional expertise. The study days include presentations from specialist tutors from the early Childhood Research Centre at the University of Roehampton as well as group discussion and workshops. There are also arranged visits to innovative early childhood centres and schools and access to the Froebel Archive for Childhood Studies (see Chapters 3 and 6). Course members can use the credits at level 4 and at level 6 to go towards a Higher Education degree. The course is 50% subsidised by the Froebel Trust.

The fifth conference, 12th June 2010

*Building blocks, building minds: block play in the early years*

The conference at the Froebel College, University of Roehampton, was chaired by Jane Read, Helen Tovey. Dr Karyn Welhousen Tunks gave the keynote *Blockplay: building a foundation for*
young learners. Pat Gura, a key figure in the Froebel Blockplay Collaborative Research Project (see Chapter 13) spoke to the title Blockplay: contrasts and connections. This was followed by a keynote from Jane Read Froebel’s Gifts: blocks for Life, Beauty and Knowledge. In the afternoon there were practical workshops led by Sally Cave and Fran Pafford: Blocks as objects to think with; Solveig Morris: The power of blocks: principles and practice; Daniel Spry and Annabel Hollis: Blocks: time to play! Stella Louis: Blockplay and problem solving and Ann Bridges: Blocks across the curriculum. All the workshop leaders had undertaken some form of Froebel training. Helen Tovey brought the conference to a close, summarising the key Froebelian messages and challenges to work upon.

The sixth conference, 16th June 2012

Young children’s creative thinking: 10 years of the Froebel Research Fellowship project (2002–2010)

The day was chaired by Tina Bruce. The discussant for the closing plenary session was Professor Kevin Brehony, Director of ECRC. More than a hundred delegates attended in the Froebel College, University of Roehampton. The decade of work from the Froebel Research Fellowship was reported at different points of the day. David Hargreaves gave the first talk: What is creative thinking, and do young children do it? This was followed by Hiroko Fumoto, who spoke on Young children’s creative thinking: Social relationships and cultural diversity. Later Sue Robson and Sue Greenfield also gave talks on the work of the Froebel Research fellowship (see Chapter 21). Sue Robson’s title was: How do young children express their creative thinking? Sue Greenfield’s was: Parents’ experiences of supporting young children’s creative thinking at home. Practical workshops were led by Jessica Pitt (music), Suzanne Quinn (pedagogic documentation), Lucy Parker (clay) and Katherine Milchem and Jo Witt (nature), all of whom have undertaken different kinds of Froebelian training.

Professor Trisha Maynard gave her keynote: Letting go: Creative thinking and the outdoor environment and drew on her research project undertaken in South Wales, inspired by Reggio projects. She spoke about Froebelian perspectives on outdoor play and creativity, noting the synergies between these. She argued that when outdoors adults may be more able to support children’s creative thinking as there is a dynamic interaction between the physical and emotional/social contexts, experiences and pedagogical strategies utilised characterised by a shift of control from the adult to the child. It is this shift, which resonates with Froebelian principles and practice that enable adults to support and observe the possibilities of the creative thinking of young children.

The second keynote of the day addressed the concept developed across a decade by Professor Anna Craft, (Exeter University) with her colleagues which she titles Possibility Thinking. She explored with delegates the central issues of ‘what if’ and ‘as if’. She pointed out that although not a Froebelian study in itself, the theory of possibility thinking has much in common with Froebel’s ideas about the importance of children’s active engagement in play, exploration and choice-making. She spoke about its nature, the role of curiosity and questioning which drives it, and the role of the adult. She argued that in the twenty-first century, the recognition of children’s creativity means acknowledging, as Froebel did, their latent capability. In seeking to develop that possibility thinking is more widely and appropriately positioned as wise and humanising than as harnessed to the global marketplace.

Kevin Brehony, as the discussant, led delegates to the end of the day, with a celebratory toast, funded by the publisher Sage, of the book Young Children’s Creative Thinking by Hiroko Fumoto, Sue Robson, Sue Greenfield and David Hargreaves.
The study days linked to attendance at the conference were again offered, with a new cohort of course members undertaking the course successfully.

The seventh conference, 5th October 2012: the first Froebel Pioneers conference

schemas, parent partnership and a Froebelian approach to the early years curriculum: a celebration of the work of Chris Athey

Jane Read and Helen Tovey welcomed more than one hundred delegates to the Froebel College, University of Roehampton. A video interview with Professor Cathy Nutbrown, who has implemented the work of Chris Athey in Sheffield across the years, was shown at the start of the conference, paying tribute to the groundbreaking contribution that was made through the partnership with parents which Chris Athey felt to be crucial together with the pioneering work developing the concept of schemas in early childhood. This was followed by a keynote from Tina Bruce, formerly head of the Froebel Nursery Research Project School working with Chris Athey who was the Research Fellow funded by Leverhulme, Galbenkian and the Froebel College Governing Body (see Chapter 33). Her title was Learning about schemas – the journey continues. Sara Holroyd then spoke to the title Engaging with parents: A journey from teaching practice at the Froebel Research Project, with Chris Athey, to Headship at Werneth Primary School in Oldham. Stella Louis gave a talk Parents identifying and observing their children's schemas. As part of her work in the London Borough of Southwark she had contributed to a DVD disseminating this work. Lynn McNair, Head of Cowgate Under 5s Centre in Edinburgh described the work on schemas in her setting, and Jane Whinnett, Head of Balgreen Nursery School in Edinburgh gave illuminating case histories demonstrating the lasting legacy of the work of Chris Athey, The seed cast abroad: Froebel’s principles today.

The eighth conference, 5th October 2013: the second Froebel Pioneers conference

elinor Goldschmied: a radical pioneer for people under three

A celebration of the life, principles and practice of Elinor Goldschmied

This work, funded by the Froebel Trust, was officially launched at the conference held at the Froebel College, University of Roehampton. Over 120 delegates attended including parents and Trustees of the Froebel Trust. Excerpts of the DVD were shown in the keynote talks and The conference was chaired by Tina Bruce. The first keynote was given by Dr. Jacqui Cousins, who had direct contact with Elinor Goldschmied, a deeply influential figure for her. Her title was Elinor: A key person. She spoke of her skilled observations, rigour of analysis, professional attitude, respectful and loving approach working with babies, toddlers and their parents or significant people (see Chapters 12). After each keynote there was a question and answer session. Professor Emerita Sonia Jackson OBE (Institute of Education, University of London) then gave a keynote Elinor Goldschmied: an inspirational teacher. She worked closely with Elinor, co-authoring in 1994 the first edition of People Under Three: young children in daycare. Anita Hughes, a chartered educational psychologist since 1981 who worked closely with and trained with Elinor, gave a very practical keynote demonstrating the Treasure Basket developed by Elinor. (For more detail, see Chapter 25.) In the afternoon Barbara Ongari, Dorothy Selleck and Peter Elfer each gave a
presentation addressing the subject *Who is the key person for the key person? The emotional complexity of responding to young children’s emotional communications.* Barbara Ongari is Professor of Clinical Development Psychology at the University of Trento since 1999. She is interested in particular in attachment. Dorothy Selleck worked with Elinor at the National Children’s Bureau and in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Elinor’s philosophy underpins Dorothy’s work, that growth takes place through relationships.

Dr Peter Elfer Principal lecturer at the University of Roehampton and Chair of the Froebel Trust Research Committee, has a long standing commitment to the well-being of babies and young children and how the staff who care for them manage this complex work and its daily demands and challenges. He contributed to the development of the English *Birth to Three Matters* national and legal framework in 2002.

**The ninth conference, 4th June 2016**

*Children’s well-being as a central concern: implications for practice and policy in the early years*

This conference presented current research highlighting Froebelian principles of well-being relating to: baseline assessment, infant emotions and interactions (see Chapters 22 and 25), parent and caregiver perspectives, pedagogic documentation, musical play (see Chapter 23), recontextualising professional development and technology and young children. It was supported by the early Childhood Research Centre in the University of Roehampton and the Froebel Trust. The presentations were given by Mathias Urban, Sigrid Brogaard-Clausen, Michelle Cottle, Sofia Guimaraes, Sally Howe, Peter Elfer, Sue Greenfield, Fengling Tang, Sue Robson, Valeria Scacchi, Antonia Zachariou, Suzanne Quinn and Michelle Palser. Many of these topics can be read about in this Handbook.