

Take a risk with Froebel

Dr Amanda Norman discusses how early years practitioners can support children's emotions rather than manage their behaviour, using a Froebelian approach that is based on listening and empathy.



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MANAGING BEHAVIOUR is an area that seems to be constantly evolving, and open to interpretation, depending on whether you are a parent, an educational psychologist, a practitioner or a health visitor. It has become quite a slippery term to define and articulate, particularly in settings, without running into a number of different side issues along the way.

The word 'managing', in itself, can be problematic, with thoughts of directing, or trying to use a 'one size fits all' approach. However, exploring a Froebel perspective on emotions and behaviour can provide an alternative way to approach behaviour management.

Behaviour management policy

The biggest challenge for practitioners, I have found, is when they have tried to come to an agreed consensus of what a behaviour management policy should have in it, and then agree how it should be interpreted into practice. Having a successful meeting with a shared vision is what we aim for, but what happens when you feel that a child seems to be sabotaging the behaviour intervention you have agreed to employ?

I can remember a child picking off stickers from a wall chart and then re-arranging them according to where her friends were; I can also remember a child being devastated when she was not selected to have a sticker at the end of a session. I also remember going to the dentist, the vets, the supermarket and, basically, everywhere we visited the expectation was that they not only wanted a sticker but that they had the right to a sticker!

This got me thinking about external reward systems and our reliance on receiving something externally to make ourselves feel good inside – and if we are really good we would get either one more, or a bigger...

I remember trying to explain to a group of senior staff working in early years settings that, yes, rewards are good, and yes, they do change behaviour and, yes, they are helpful as an intervention that everyone can follow... however, it is important to be mindful because, very quickly, you will notice that it can be equally effective when revoking a reward, threatening not to allow a reward, or just not giving them to certain children. What happens then? Are they being

used as we want them to be used, solely as a positive intervention or are we happy with external sanctions too?

It is a difficult dilemma and one that is certainly reliant on the expertise of the adult giving them, and the behaviour of the child receiving them. It is also dependent on attitudes, understanding and in recognising the developmental maturity of the child.

Froebel had a different outlook on behaviour, he wanted adults to think about the intrinsic value of rewards and for them to help children to recognise their own emotions and to act accordingly without being rewarded for it. His work has been developed further and concepts, such as emotional intelligence, recognise that perhaps we need to consider our feelings inwardly and to act accordingly.

I think, therefore, that we could re-address this imbalance of using reward systems to manage behaviour by reflecting on Froebel in order to better support emotions.

Who is Froebel and what does he say about emotions?

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) had a passion for education. He introduced the kindergarten – children's garden – reflecting his thinking regarding how important it is for children to be able to play and how, through play, learning will occur.

At the time, his theory of education was unusual because he promoted mutual respect in children, and allowed children to 'be children', with self-expression and freedom. He moved away from the use of rote learning that was popular of the time. He advocated that children learn through autonomy and that the adult should begin with what the child is learning.

Managing behaviour using a Froebelian approach:

Using a Froebelian approach requires practitioners to enhance the intrinsic nature of the child, to reward the children with praise and support.

Principles

- Recognition of the uniqueness of each child's capacity and potential.
- An holistic view of each child's development.

Pedagogy

- An holistic approach to learning, which recognises



Practitioners need to offer spaces where both they and the children are able to communicate their feelings in an open and honest way

children as active, feeling and thinking human beings, seeing patterns and making connections.

- Encouragement, rather than punishment.
- An approach to learning that develops children's autonomy and self-confidence.

Environment

- An environment which promotes interdependence as well as independence, community as well as individuality, and responsibility as well as freedom.

International principles

- Each child is a unique and creative being, and needs to be respected, valued and recognised as an individual.
- Each child's concept of self-esteem and confidence should be fostered to enable him or her to become an autonomous, creative and original thinker.

A LEEWF approach

Re-visiting how we connect emotionally to the child using a LEEWF approach

The acronym 'LEEWF' was used because it changes colour and texture with the seasons and is delicate, rather like the emotions of the child, and one I reflected on as being appropriate in defining Froebel's philosophy on how to support the holistic and intrinsic nature of the child.

Strategies that could be incorporated into a LEEWF approach with children, include:

- The use of a persona puppet to encourage emotional conversations.
- The use of a home teddy/rabbit as a transitional object.
- The use of a semi-structured game around emotions, played daily, observing the results.
- The use of a regular tidy-up song.
- The use of pictorial books based on emotions.
- Conversations with the children about their feelings and the words they use
- Behaviour expectations discussed and shared with the children.
- The use of plenary time using open-ended materials to encourage talk about feelings.
- Organising regular walks beyond the setting to encourage an appreciation of the nature and weather outside.
- Practitioners sharing their own thoughts about feelings and behaviour with the children through stories and puppetry.

It is recognised that almost all the strategies above are included in most settings already and are not exclusive to a LEEWF approach. The LEEWF approach is not intended to be a unique or novel approach, rather it is a way to reconnect with the inner child and their capacity for goodness from a holistic perspective. The

The LEEWF focus

The adult focus includes: Providing a space where both the practitioners and the children are able to communicate their feelings in an open and honest way beyond the recognition of a reward.

For practitioner's to establish warm, responsive, interesting, and trusting relationships through a key person approach (Elfer, 2011) so that they and the children they care for feel part of an emotionally safe community.

Children's focus: To learn the value of different friendships with the freedom to explore and articulate emotions in a secure environment without external strategies influencing behaviour (Liebschner, 1992).

way we communicate emotions with children through everyday activities then reduces the necessity and over-reliance on rewards.

Taking the time to plan areas for children to engage with their emotions, such as an emotional roomscape area or sanctuary space, could provide observations that will help you develop an understanding and appreciation of how children process their emotions through their behaviour.

Another Froebelian approach could be to plan regular nature walks, interacting with nature that exists whether in an urban or rural community. Again, visits away and Forest schools have become regular features in the world of early years' settings.

However, the concept of just spending a few minutes out in nature 'wallowing' in its naturalness, rather than planning activities, is something perhaps not so prominent.

If possible, taking a break outside or simply going on walks, with spontaneous opportunities arising as and when they come along, are great ways to promote talk and shared understanding of what is allowed and any necessary behavioural boundaries.

Developing ways to support children's emotions, rather than simply managing behaviour, will also leave staff feeling supported and confident in their own abilities. Changing the language used and

reflecting on experiences are both essential if staff members are to develop thinking about the inner child, rather than behaviour surrounding children. Stories about emotions and puppet play facilitate the type of talk that can lead to shared understanding.

Points to consider

- 'Children need encouragement as growing plants need warmth and light, and they must have parents' love and understanding.' [Lilley, 1967]
- Adults must grasp children's earliest activities and understand their impulse to make things, and to be freely and personally active.
- How do you plan for the autonomy and independence of the child?
- Children need warm, responsive, interesting trusting relationships.
- They also need a place where they feel significant (Tovey, 2012).

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Useful resources

- *Early childhood Practice: Froebel Today* by Tina Bruce. Published by SAGE Publications (ISBN: 9781446211250).
- *Child Care & Education* by Tina Bruce and Carolyn Meggitt. Published by Hodder (ISBN: 9781444117981).
- *The Social Toddler* by Clive Dorman and Helen Dorman. Published by Children's Project (ISBN: 9781903275382).
- *People under three. Young children in day care* by Elinor Golschmied and Sonia Jackson. Published by Routledge (ISBN: 9780415305679).
- *Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain* by Sue Gerhardt. Published by Routledge (ISBN: 9780415870535).
- *How Babies think: The science of childhood* by Alison Gopnik, Andrew Melzoff, Patricia Kuhl. Published by Weidenfeld/Nicholson (ISBN: 9780753814178).
- *Doing Early Childhood Research (2nd ed)* by Glenda Mac Naughton, Sharne Rolfe, Iram Siraj-Blatchford. Published by Open University Press (ISBN: 9780335242627).
- *'Observing and Assessing Young Children'* by Cathy Nutbrown, C. and Mary Drummond; in *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years* by Gillian Pugh. SAGE Publications (ISBN: 9781446266410).
- *Bringing the Froebel Approach to your early years practice* by Helen Tovey. Published by Routledge (ISBN: 9780415567312).

References

- Elfer P, Golschmied E, Sellek D (2011) *The key person approach in nurseries (2nd Ed)*. Routledge: London.
- Liebschner J (1992) *A Child's Work: Freedom and Play in Froebel's Educational Theory and Practice*. The Lutterworth Press: Cambridge
- Lilley I (1967) *Friedrich Froebel, a selection from his writings*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge

Key points

- Managing behaviour is an area that seems to be constantly evolving, and open to interpretation, depending on whether you are a parent, an educational psychologist, a practitioner or a health visitor
- It has become quite a slippery term to define and articulate, particularly in settings, without running into a number of different side issues along the way
- The LEEWF approach is based on the principles of Froebel and seeks to connect with a child's emotions, using listening and empathy (as examples), rather than trying to 'manage' outward signs of their behaviour