

Froebelian Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care: A review of Froebel's writing, archival sources and academic literature

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Executive Summary

The project 'Froebelian Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care' seeks a deeper understanding of leadership specific to early childhood, which is inspired by a lively engagement with Froebelian principles and practice. This report presents findings from the first project strand, which was a review of three bodies of writing in order to gain insights into Froebelian leadership: 1) Froebel's own writing; 2) archival material offering accounts of leadership enacted by inspiring women who have drawn on Froebelian principles and 3) relevant academic literature published in the last 30 years.

Froebel's own writing suggests important facets of what we might mean by Froebelian leadership including reflection, community, the entanglement of feeling and intellect and curiosity. At the same time, we need to give space to the discomfort of engaging directly with how Froebel addresses women educators and works to invisibilise, rather than draw out, their leadership. Froebel's own life also adds to this picture of Froebelian leadership by spotlighting the importance of committing to a vision of progress for children and families, even when this is disruptive to the status quo.

Archival sources help to show us how generations of women leaders have taken forward Froebelian ideas and developed them in early childhood education and care (ECEC) contexts across time and place. We were particularly excited about this strand of the review, since it gave a chance to hear about and from women leaders who – while drawing on Froebel's ideas – were themselves profound and inspiring thinkers and activists. We hope that this part of the review works to make visible women's leadership in ECEC, pushing back against the sometimes invisibilising effects of Froebel's own writing. This review homed in on the papers of Emilie Michaelis and Henriette Schrader Breymann (both archived at the University of Roehampton) as well as the published memoirs of Caroline Garrison Bishop (1936), Lilleen Hardy (1912) and Felicity Thomas (2020). Consulting these sources suggests that leaders inspired by the Froebelian tradition share a capacity to: 1) prioritise connection with others, 2) integrate children's learning with women's education and public life, 3) foster communities of learning and 4) balance pragmatism and idealism, navigating and solving real-life problems as they occur.

An examination of the academic literature on Froebel identified 50 relevant sources. Three principles of Froebelian leadership emerged through engagement with these sources. First, the Froebelian leader was shown to be someone unafraid to challenge the status quo and disrupt mainstream practices. At the same time, leaders inspired by Froebel were portrayed across history as pragmatic navigators of the wider political context who sought mainstream influence for Froebelian ideas and avoided dogmatic, niche applications of the approach. Finally, these leaders were shown as seeking continual and collaborative learning in communities that they proactively created and sustained.

Weaving together these emergent themes, we suggest four principles of Froebelian leadership:

- Continual and collaborative learning
- Connection and warmth
- Disruptive political influence

- Supporting working women at the same time as serving children and families

The findings have implications for those in practice hoping to embody and develop Froebelian leadership. They are also an important resource for professional learning and reflection, which can in turn feed into future research that continues to develop our sense of what it means to be a leader in ECEC.

Introduction

The project 'Froebelian Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care' aims to develop a better understanding of leadership specific to the sector, which is deeply informed by the enduring legacy of Froebel and a lively engagement with the Froebelian principles.

When it comes to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), we know that leadership matters. International research demonstrates a strong relationship between leadership and children's learning in the context of EY education (Douglass, 2019; Melhuish & Gardiner, 2019). Programmes of leadership development in different ECEC contexts around the world show promise in their potential to positively influence day-to-day interactions in EY settings and children's learning (e.g. Arbour et al., 2016; Douglass, 2019; Carroll-Meehan et al., 2019).

Despite a growing understanding around the importance of leadership for children's learning and wellbeing in ECEC, models of leadership in ECEC continue to be dominated by understandings of school-based leadership or even visions of leadership that emerge from other sectors, including private business (Nicholson et al., 2020). Developing ECEC-specific visions of leadership is an essential step in ensuring that investment in leadership development speaks authentically to the sector (O'Sullivan & Sakr, 2022). Given recent initiatives in England, such as the new National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NQPEYL), it is more urgent than ever that we understand what it means to lead in ECEC.

An understanding of ECEC-specific leadership would benefit greatly from engaging with the enduring legacy of Froebel. Reflecting on Froebelian principles prompts not only questions about our interactions with young children but also broader questions about the way we organise early education, including contributions and enactments of leadership. Recent work inspired by Froebel, such as the research on slow pedagogies (Carlsen and Clark, 2022) or the use of Froebelian storytelling as a means to understand children's experiences and perspectives (Pascal and Bertram, 2021) challenge us to imagine how leadership might look when we see it through a Froebelian lens. How might it prioritise connection and unity? How might it privilege autonomy? And how might it place relationships at the centre of what it means to lead, so that a sense of belonging and community are core values for anyone in an ECEC leadership role?

Taking inspiration from previous research that has used dialogues around Froebelian principles as a way to encourage deeper reflections and explorations of practice, the research attempts to open up collaborative reflective dialogues in the tradition of

Froebelian practice that support deeper engagement and understanding across professionals around the topic of EY leadership.

This report presents outcomes from the first strand of research in this project: a review of three bodies of literature to gather insights about ECEC leadership as seen through a Froebelian lens (figure 1). The report explores what we can learn about Froebelian leadership from 1) Froebel’s own writing; 2) archival material offering accounts of Froebelian leadership in action and 3) relevant academic literature published in the last 30 years. With the supportive critique and involvement of an advisory panel specifically involved with the literature review, the report offers insights into the nature of Froebelian leadership.

Figure 1. A review of three bodies of literature



Froebel's Writing and Froebel's life

Pedagogics of the Kindergarten

Translations of Froebel's original writing introduce some important dimensions of education that in turn shape how we might imagine leadership in ECEC. In our review, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Froebel, 1861/1896) came to the fore as particularly important as a text for thinking about leadership and what it might involve. *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* suggests that reflection, community, the entanglement of feeling and intellect, and curiosity are all important aspects of leadership. As well as engaging deeply with this text, we also realised the need to reflect on what we learn from Froebel's autobiography and the commitment to a radical vision for children that his life so clearly demonstrates.

In *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, Froebel describes educators (including himself) as reflective: 'He enquires as to the effects of what has been done, and the consequences of what has been neglected' (p. 1). Educators are constantly asking questions of the practice that they see around them and use this reflection as the basis for making decisions about the future. Froebel advocates for in-depth reflection. For example, he suggests that it is:

'...essential that parents and nurses for the benefit of their children and for the blissful results of their efforts to educate the children, should recall as much as possible the first phenomena, the course and the limitations of the development of their own total life... and so to seek to raise themselves by degrees to the recognition and perception as well of the general as of the especial laws of development of life; so that thus the guidance of the child, the fostering of his development, may receive in these laws their surer determinations as well as a higher and firmer foundation, the true foundation.' (p. 66-67)

Thus, those with the privilege of educating children are exhorted to look carefully at their own childhood experiences in order to understand better their own development and how this connects with the realisation of potential among children in their care. Froebel encourages educators to engage with the 'limitations of the development of their own total life'. A leader inspired by Froebel's writing would need to demonstrate this reflection themselves but also be prepared to inspire reflection and reflexivity in others.

Froebel emphasises other dispositions that would infuse leadership including:

- A strong sense of community: 'he does not and is not to stand alone; he is, as a human being, a member not only of his family, his community, his country, the whole race of mankind now existing, but of all humanity' (p. 7)
- On the entanglement of feeling and intellect: 'the all-embracing heart, the penetrating intellect' (p. 4)
- On curiosity and self-development: 'for the child desires to go into the open air, he knows already the door which leads thither – he wishes to make a journey of

discovery into the world, into the free Nature which offers to him so much that is new' (p. 112); 'self-discovery, self-observation and self-development to help unite man in and with himself and with nature and life' (p. 6). It is important to note the repetition of terms such as 'self-instruction', 'self-education', 'self-cultivation' and 'self-activity' which strongly point towards the need to respect children's ownership of their development, but also suggest the need to extend this respect to yourself and other educators. The implication is that we are all on a journey of finding out about the world which is propelled by our internal desires and perceptions; educators and leaders need to recognise this and use it as the basis for how they engage with themselves and others.

At the same time as recognising these various elements as potential tenets of Froebelian leadership, we experienced discomfort and cognitive dissonance reading *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*. This discomfort arose from the jarring way in which Froebel addresses 'the mother and the thoughtful nurse' across his writing, which does not appear to invite or recognise the leadership, initiative or autonomy of women educators. The imagined women reading the text are instructed in how to do things correctly and the mother is positioned as a vehicle for their child's growth, rather than as a leader of themselves or others.

'True, the natural and unspoiled feeling of the mother often hits upon the right thing to do; but this right thing is done by her too unconsciously and too unconnectedly, it is not repeated continuously enough; still less is it constantly and progressively developed, and so it is not logically enough built up' (p. 39)

Froebel positions women as naturally disposed to nurture each other. Thus, women's education of young children is seen as building on instinctive care rather than as an act of leadership. Gender differences are posited as manifesting in the very earliest stages of life as a result of instinctive drives:

'Hence there makes itself visible later, by and through this, the spiritual difference, the difference of vocation and life between the boy and girl. The boy will be longer delighted with the play with the sphere and cube as separate and opposite things, while the little girl is, on the contrary, early delighted with the doll, which inwardly unites in itself the opposites of the sphere and cube. The inner significance of this fact is, that the boy early presages and feels his destiny – to command and to penetrate outer Nature; and the girl anticipates and feels her destiny – to foster Nature and life.' (p. 93)

Such comments deeply constrain how we think about the impact of women on early education. In this view, women are credited with making a difference to the particular children in their care but there is little validation for how their influence might extend beyond these few particular children. This highlights the importance of the next generations of Froebelian educators – the women who championed and built upon Froebel's principles around the world, working on a much larger, more significant scale. While we need to turn to these experiences and actions to understand what it means to be a Froebelian leader, we also need to hold the tension of working with the term 'Froebelian', which ascribes so much importance to the figure of Froebel over and above the women leaders who changed the world of ECEC and continue to do so.

Autobiography

As a coda to this section, we recognise that new avenues for thinking about Froebelian leadership do arise when we take into account Froebel's autobiographical writing and what we know of his life from other sources. Dialogues with Professor Lynn McNair and Simon Bateson have been essential for considering how Froebel's life – what he did, rather than what he said – might inform our vision of Froebelian leadership. Froebel's life appears to point towards the importance of passion and curiosity as qualities of leadership, as well as the willingness and capacity of leaders to challenge the status quo and push back against not only social convention but political pressure. In our conversations, McNair highlighted how throughout his life, Froebel never lost sight of his vision of what was right for children and families and his commitment to making this a reality. No matter the political pressures, the social discord and the financial difficulties, he continued to strive towards an implementation of this vision. Perhaps one of the most fundamental tenets of Froebelian leadership is this tenacity and the willingness to disrupt what has come before and/or the dominant paradigms and practices of society.

Accounts of Froebelian Leaders

Archival Sources

To understand more about how generations of women leaders have taken forward Froebelian ideas and developed them in early childhood education practice, the following archival sources have been consulted:

- Papers of Emilie Michaelis, University of Roehampton Archives
- Papers of Henriette Schrader Breyman, University of Roehampton Archives
- Memoirs of Caroline Garrison Bishop, published 1936
- Diary of a Free Kindergarten by Lilleen Hardy, published 1912 (digitised)
- 'Growing a Nursery School from Seed: The First 75 Years' by Stephanie Harding and Felicity Thomas, published online by The Froebel Trust in 2020

Working with these sources, four themes emerged regarding Froebelian leadership. Froebelian leaders appear to:

1. Prioritise connection with others
2. Integrate children's learning with women's education and public life
3. Foster communities of learning
4. Balance idealism with pragmatism, solving real life problems as they occur

Prioritise connection with others

The archival sources present warmth and human connection as integral elements in leadership. The women leaders we focused on all had a warm presence and were intent on connecting spiritually with others – whether children, student teachers or colleagues. This suggests that a fundamental aspect of Froebelian leadership is knowing, appreciating and seeking to understand others. From this perspective, leadership is fundamentally about people rather than the dry management of institutions. The memoir of Caroline Garrison Bishop show how generating warmth was seen as a vital part of leadership in Froebelian-inspired ECEC institutions in the first part of the 20th century.

Caroline Garrison Bishop, principal of Edgbaston College, was remembered by those around her as a warm presence deeply connected to others. She is remembered as a ‘presence round about, a person seen every morning, and a personality felt every minute.’ (p. xi, foreword of the memoir from Mr Maurice Jacks, Headmaster of Mill Hill School). In the same memoir, another early Froebelian leader Annette Hamminck-Schepel is similarly described as having ‘warmth and directness’. Both figures are associated with the concept of *Wohnstube*, which is roughly translated as ‘the power of the home’ (p. xiii), which in turn prompts us to consider the contribution of discourses of spiritual motherhood to Froebelian leadership. Emily Last, who collates the memoir for Garrison Bishop describes how:

Miss Bishop’s touch was felt in every department; besides being in direct contact with the children, students and household workers she ordered the meals and studied the separate needs of the members of her large household. (p. 66)

A student training under Garrison Bishop describes how the institution under Garrison Bishop’s leadership felt like a home and a family:

In our year we were wont, laughingly, to call ourselves ‘the family’, to talk of ‘coming home’ to College, and surely we were not far wrong - for many of the elements of home life were there. We were bound together by a common tie, each had her sphere, her work to be done for the common good, and, above all, we were united in affection, in veneration for the ‘mother-spirit’ of the place. How many of us have been to her [Garrison Bishop] with pleasures that grew brighter for her sympathy, with difficulties which her insight went far to solve, with joys that came back to our hearts more precious for her reverend handling, with troubles which she helped us to find strength to bear. She took us all, younger and older, a jumble lot, many of us much cumbered with cares of self, and showed us the deeper things of life (p. 71-72)

Impressions of Dorothea Spinney, a student at Edgbaston evoke similar feelings of warmth:

When “Harborne Road” is mentioned in my mind’s eye there is a sun with big rays, it is just appearing above the horizon – such a sun as a child draws with chalks –

then comes warmth, light, growing things, a gentle buzz and stir in my ears and within a contentment' (p. 75)

Lilleen Hardy's *Diary of a Free Kindergarten* places a similar emphasis on feelings of home. She argues that the 'virtue of the real kindergarten as Froebel conceived it lies not so much in a system of occupations, as in an atmosphere' (p. 83). The essence of this atmosphere is entangled with discourses of spiritual motherhood and home-making: 'Every woman, by the very fact that she is a woman, is responsible for neglected children...' and to care for them is 'like sitting in the sunshine'. In these texts from the 19th and early 20th centuries, the imagery around leadership is of physical warmth and light. Leaders are conceptualised as women capable of generating the warmth and light that will give physical and spiritual sustenance to others.

Felicity Thomas, in her much later account of developing a nursery school with Froebelian principles, shows how an appreciation of people continues to be at the heart of leading. Thomas notes how she has always been interested in observing and understanding others, and how being a 'people person' is essential to her leadership. She also explores how playfulness can be a special part of generating a connection with others.

Being playful and entering into the child's game as a partner rather than a leader was a huge revelation. One member of staff said she would feel "silly" doing this but she could clearly see how much the children were enjoying it and how their play was positively sustained. Another member of staff said she thought she would lose "control" and "respect" from the children and she would not be able to modify their behaviour. These comments resonate with me now. When I visited the school which Froebel started at Keilhau, Germany, in 1817, the historian who was our guide gave a description of Froebel squatting down on all fours and being animals with the children. The people in Keilhau thought him a silly old fool with no authority – they could not understand that in this way Froebel was able to inspire children to want to learn. (p. 19)

Thus, Thomas presents a constant connection between playfulness and learning as a thread that connects present day leadership in ECEC with Froebel's own life and approach. Play and playfulness is portrayed as much more than a child's domain or activity, but as a means of leading and learning among all, whatever their age. The message seems to be that leadership is about connecting with others through extending warmth and invoking play.

Integrate children's learning with women's education and public life

The archival sources draw attention to the intertwined trajectories of early childhood education and women's liberation, including their own education and contributions to public life. The leaders we focused on led not only in the education of young children and families, but in supporting the education and development of those women who typically take responsibility for the care and education of young children. That is, Froebelian

leadership is about seeing the destinies of children and families as entangled with the experiences and opportunities of the workforce. Aspiring to more on behalf of children and families means simultaneously aspiring to more on behalf of the workforce. We found this idea to be particularly resonant given the current context in the UK (and many other parts of the world) in which the beleaguered workforce are so poorly treated and remunerated for their contribution.

In her diary, Henriette Schrader Breymann, argues that 'women must take the initiative...they must become more self-dependent'. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, the discourse of spiritual motherhood enabled Schrader Breymann to call for women's leadership in public life in a way that did not too radically contravene social expectations regarding gender:

My object is to train women for spiritual motherhood so that she may be a principle of motherliness in social life, as well as a true mother in her household. Her position in the community will differ according to age, gifts, social status and circumstances. But she must gradually take up a totally different position and variety of functions in the community. Partly voluntary, partly as a paid official. In our health society too, there are valuable possibilities for the emancipation of women in a true sense.

What Schrader Breymann suggests is that women, building on an innate capacity to care for others, can extend their roles and responsibilities beyond the confines of the domestic sphere. They can take up voluntary roles on local and national committees, and even potentially be paid for this work. While these sentiments of course have to be situated in the time when they were written, what is notable is the clear focus on women's future. Women's position in society is a fundamental part of a social vision.

This is echoed in Caroline Garrison Bishop's memoirs, where the women leader is imagined as being at the centre of a many-layered sphere of education and development. Surrounding this leader are concentric layers of children, students and colleagues: 'the children formed the central rings around Miss Bishop and the students the outside ones' (p. 71). Children's education and the development of the (female) workforce are portrayed as parts of a whole. Both adult women and children need to be nurtured by the leader and given opportunities for progress and self-development.

While the articulation of these views is very much grounded in the past, we see this strand of leadership as continuing to be important and relevant. The largely female ECEC workforce is hugely undervalued and the pay and conditions they face unacceptable in many parts of the world. For too long, ECEC has relied on the 'goodness' of women – their willingness to take up the work of care without adequate recompense or recognition. This is entangled in various ways with the work of the women leaders we are focusing on. On the one hand, the discourses of spiritual motherhood have much to answer for, as they have created the conditions for women's exploitation. On the other hand, the work to advance women and the conceptualisation of ECEC as a place where children, families *and* working women find recognition and fulfilment, is a powerful call that we can continue to respond to. Evoking and building a vision of Froebelian leadership may be a powerful means to show how children's development and women's education and professionalism are strategically intertwined.

Foster communities of learning

The archival sources show how women leaders inspired by Froebel have been unafraid to explore the cutting-edge of educational practice. Froebelian leaders come together in constant and dynamic dialogue to reflect continuously on their practice and to innovate for the future. The papers of Madame Michaelis show her forensic analysis of Froebel's texts and how learning and teaching with others was a fundamental part of her life and work. Reading Michaelis' notebooks is a strange experience because, as the contemporary researcher we are desperately seeking *her* in the pages, but she almost entirely absents herself from what she writes. Her notebooks are full of lectures on Froebel that unpick all that Froebel had to say about education. She is thinking through the pedagogy with and for others (hence her impressive reputation for giving public lectures) but she never makes her own presence felt. There is no 'I think...' or 'We could...' in the pages of Michaelis' notebooks, and that is important to recognise and give space to. It shows how women leaders in ECEC throughout history have hidden, whether consciously or unconsciously, behind the looming figures of male thinkers such as Froebel. It is an important complexity to attend to in a project such as this, which hopes to make visible the contributions of women's leadership to ECEC but may in fact reinforce the sublimation of women's thoughts and actions into acceptable categories such as 'Froebelian'.

Certainly what Michaelis' impressive notebooks show is that women leaders inspired by Froebel did not limit themselves to simply managing institutions; they were pedagogical leaders always interested in and aware of developments in pedagogy and management decisions were made with pedagogy in mind. We see this also in the memoirs of Caroline Garrison Bishop. Emily Last describes how 'the work for which she is remembered in Birmingham was dynamic, not static: it grew' (p. 1). Garrison Bishop was constantly interested in what others were doing, how others were teaching; she did not stay so close to Froebel's own texts that she could not appreciate and engage with the work of a diverse range of other thinkers.

Building on this legacy, Felicity Thomas explains how the Froebelian leader is at the centre of an organisational culture resonant with the love of learning. In order for educators, children and families to embrace learning, leaders must authentically love learning themselves, not just because continual learning supports improvements in practice but because it is an instinctive joy: 'this is how Froebel saw learning as a continual reflection on what we know and what we still need to know... we wanted everyone to feel the emotional response to learning...' (p. 16). In order to foster a love of learning across an entire organisation, Thomas argues that Froebelian leaders must learn when to stand back: 'If as adults we are too prescriptive, or jump in too quickly with our own ideas and questions, we know that the children move away or shut down. It is the same with adults' (p. 96). This echoes earlier impressions taken from Froebel's own writing where the emphasis is on 'self-discovery' and 'self-development'. Leaders need to conceptualise professional learning with this in mind. For example, Thomas used action research as a way to involve all educators in exploring and implementing pedagogical change, starting from a place of curiosity.

Balance idealism with pragmatism, solving real life problems as they occur

The archival sources suggest that the Froebelian leader is pragmatic and hands-on. While they are endlessly curious and pedagogically engaged, this does not mean that they are removed from day to day problem-solving. The opposite seems to be true when we look at accounts of leaders from the past. Lilleen Hardy's description, for example, of transforming the church hall into a kindergarten every Monday morning highlights how practical her leadership was:

'It is a Mission Hall, and if you saw it set out for church on Friday evenings, you would think it would never do for a kindergarten. But Monday morning there is a great transformation. I have made a big Liberty curtain to draw right across the room in front of the altar, and all the forms, chairs, kneeling-mats etc. go out of sight. Then little tables and chairs come out, dolls and cradles, washing-up bowls, cans etc., canaries, doves, plants, brushes, dust-pans, dusters etc., and it looks quite homely' (p. 17).

Practical decision-making and problem-solving also features heavily in Felicity Thomas' account of running a nursery school. She describes for example the importance of recognising that in asking support staff to attend staff meetings, their extra contribution of time would need to be recognised either through additional pay or time off in lieu. The solution she reaches is to introduce a more flexible start time to the nursery school day (which had the added benefit of making the morning less stressful for parents/carers who were also managing school drop-off for their older children) and rotating time off for members of the staff team. This example demonstrates how leaders pay attention to the small practical details that make significant pedagogical shifts possible.

Academic Literature

Sources

A search for academic literature conducted using the keyword 'Froebel' via our institutional library turned up a total of 45 peer-reviewed articles in journals. Some additional resources were considered when they had been mentioned by members of the advisory group and/or others connected with the research. These additional resources were a video resource of Lynn McNair talking about Cowgate Under 5s centre, an MA assignment specifically on Froebelian leadership as well as three books about Froebel – Tina Bruce's 'Introduction to Friedrich Froebel', Jane Read's edited collection 'Froebelian Women' and 'Finding Froebel' by Helge Wasmuth, Ulf Sauerbrey and Michael Winkler. There were therefore a total of 50 sources taken into account for this part of the review. For all the sources, the abstract or introduction was consulted in order to determine whether the source would be relevant to understanding Froebelian leadership; if it was unclear, the article was read in full. Notes were made about the article in general and then

specifically in relation to the question 'What is Froebelian leadership?'. These notes were then thematically organised and from this emerged the three principles that are shown below:

- The Froebelian leader isn't afraid to challenge the status quo
- At the same time, the Froebelian leader is a pragmatic navigator of the wider political context
- Froebelian leaders seek continual and collaborative learning and growth

The Froebelian leader isn't afraid to challenge the status quo

The academic literature highlights that there is a historical precedence for Froebelian leaders to challenge what has come before and what they perceive to be harmful for children. This echoes the earlier mention in this report of how Froebel's own life demonstrates risk-taking in order to progress towards a counter-cultural vision. It highlights ECEC as a politically contested space over time and place. Other Froebelian leaders have taken this forward, challenging convention and status quo, for example in relation to women's education and role in society (Albisetti, 2012). The academic literature shows how early Froebelian leaders continued their work in hostile political environments. For example, Nishida (2015) writes in this way about the work of Annie L. Howe advancing Froebelian education in Japan during the late 19th century. Also, Read (2013) discusses the leadership of Elizabeth Shaw and Frances Roe and highlights how their adoption and adaptation of Froebelian principles and practices challenged pedagogical conventions of the time.

The academic literature also highlights how challenging the status quo continues to be an important facet of Froebelian leadership in contemporary contexts. McNair and Powell (2020) explain how 'educators have derived strength from Froebelian philosophy or traditions to hold 'the whole child' and family in mind while socio-political agendas for education and care have meandered across diverse ideological landscapes' (p. 5). They call this 'principled conviction as *modus operandi*' (p. 5). Similarly, Hoskins and Smedley (2019) explore Froebelian education as a counter-discourse to the emphasis on school-readiness, which positions the child as 'becoming-adult' rather than valuing and celebrating childhood on its own terms.

One strand of this thinking relates to the integration of maternalism and professionalism. In ECEC discourses, maternalism has been blamed for the low pay and status of the ECEC workforce (e.g. Ailwood, 2007), but the literature raises the question of what would happen were we to use Froebelian education as a means to integrate maternalism and professionalism (Aslanian, 2015). Vaughan and Estola (2007) consider this in terms of the gift paradigm versus exchange paradigm as applied to ECEC. They suggest that there is a rich history of the gift paradigm underpinning ECEC, including via Froebelian education. Contemporary visions of leadership might take inspiration from this historical basis to stay with the gift paradigm in conceptualising leadership. Historical writing shows how the integration of maternalism and professionalism has often framed Froebelian

leadership among notable women, such as Elise van Calcar in the Netherlands (Bakkar, 2013). Additionally, life histories of women who have trained at Froebel College in the twentieth century emphasise love and care as the foundation for professionalism (Smedley and Hoskins, 2017). This remains a contentious issue. For some, over-emphasising love and care has laid the foundation for the de-professionalisation of the workforce. On the other hand, an argument can be made that understandings of professionalism need to be more radically overhauled to make room for this emphasis on love and care – that women should not need to choose between acting from a place of love and care and being paid appropriately for the contribution they make to society.

At the same time, the Froebelian leader is a pragmatic navigator of the wider political context

While the literature suggests that Froebelian leaders often provide counter-discourses to dominant educational thinking, the literature also explores how Froebelian leaders have navigated diverse political contexts in order to ensure that Froebelian ECEC is not relegated to act as a niche or narrow ECEC practice. Froebelian leaders have fought to ensure that liberating ECEC experiences and an expansive view of the child and childhood are part of mainstream educational experiences.

For example, Read (2013) considers how Elizabeth Shaw and Frances Roe championed Froebelian practice as a way to advance infant teaching from the 1890s to 1930s, making the point that these leaders sought pragmatic influence in government and were not content for Froebelian pedagogy to remain something enjoyed by just a privileged few. Similarly, Read (2006) looked at the ways in which Froebelian pedagogy was pragmatically integrated into London's infant schools at the turn of the 20th century. This ties into the historical work of Jackson (1999) and the distinction he draws between Froebel's experiments at Keilhau, which he positions as a smaller and more idealistic experiment in education and the later institute of Blankenburg which presented a more coherent and decisive vision for community-based education. Jackson argues that Blankenburg offers a more pragmatic vision of Froebelian education, which in turn would put the emphasis on a kind of leadership that can offer progress at scale. Building on this, McNair and Powell (2020) discuss the idea that Froebelian leaders are bilingual. That is, Froebelian leaders can articulate themselves both in a political sphere of ECEC and through a Froebelian lens. They hold these two ways of seeing simultaneously and work with them adeptly in order to maximise their positive influence on children and families.

Froebelian leaders seek continual and collaborative learning and growth

As the archival sources suggested, the academic literature paints a picture of Froebelian leadership that emphasises continual learning, self-development and growth of the learning community. In Read's (2013) analysis of how Elizabeth Shaw and Frances Roe

imagined and re-imagined Froebelian pedagogy, she emphasises their openness to a wide range of other influences including Dewey and Montessori. Taking from these portraits, the impression of the Froebelian leader is of a constantly curious individual who does not become weighed down by dogma. Indeed, Nawrotzki (2006) argues that revisionism is fundamental to the history of Froebelian influence on pedagogy. Nawrotzki suggests that it is through revisionism that Froebelian ECEC has remained relevant across time. From this perspective, open minds and a willingness to embrace and engage with new ideas characterise the Froebelian leader.

Day to day, children and adults in a Froebelian setting work with 'living questions' (McNair, 2022). Froebelian leaders model endless and authentic curiosity, as well as the desire to practically pursue inquiries. This connects with academic literature that has focused on Froebelian leaders' own self-development, including their spirituality. For example, Best (2016) explores spirituality in the context of Froebelian pedagogy, which in turn raises questions about the contribution of spiritual experiences and spirituality to conceptualisations and enactments of Froebelian leadership. Watts (2021), reflecting on Froebel's own curiosity as a scientist, prompts us to think about how Froebelian leaders might express their curiosity and desire to learn. Watts suggests that this curiosity starts and ends with close observation of the environment around you. It enables us to imagine Froebelian leaders as careful observers, not just of children but of adults and organisations also.

The literature suggests that sharing practice is a vital component of Froebelian leadership. In Read's (2013) writing on Elizabeth Shaw, the Froebelian leader is imagined as community-centred; an individual willing and able to see a proactive partnership with local families and the surrounding neighbourhood. This is similarly a thread in Jackson's (1999) historical analysis of the Blankenburg institute, which he presents as an interconnected network of education, childcare, the education of teachers and family services. Read's (2018) explorations of how Froebelian leaders in the past and present have taken ideas of Froebel abroad to different parts of the globe, suggests that in a contemporary context, Froebelian leaders want to learn alongside communities to understand the potential relevance and usefulness of Froebelian ideas. Leaders avoid imposing principles and practices on others, and instead seek to re-imagine Froebelian ECEC alongside others and through constant collaborative learning and dialogue.

Weaving together the strands of the systematic review

Taken together, the learning from Froebel's writing and life, the archival sources and the academic literature suggest the following facets of Froebelian leadership (Table 1).

Table 1. Facets of Froebelian leadership

Froebel's writing and life	Archival sources	Academic literature
Reflection	Connection and warmth	Challenging the status quo
The entanglement of intellect and feeling	Integrating the development of children with the advancement of women	Navigating political contexts in order to have influence
Community	Collaborative learning communities	Continual and collaborative learning
Curiosity and self-development		
Challenging the status quo	Solving real-life problems	

In order to arrive at useful and usable conclusions, we have brought these elements together and combined them where it seemed appropriate to do so. Through this process, the following four principles of Froebelian leadership emerge:

- Continual and collaborative learning
- Connection and warmth
- Disruptive political influence
- Supporting working women at the same time as serving children and families

Continual and collaborative learning

The principle of continual and collaborative learning weaves together Froebel's emphasis on reflection, curiosity, self-development and community with the collaborative learning communities that were described in both the archival sources and the academic literature. Froebelian leadership is characterised by a deep commitment to asking 'living questions' together with a learning community, that comprises children, families and colleagues. Leaders set an expectation that professionals working with children are constantly growing and developing, just as the children instinctively are. They foster the conditions for self-development by avoiding dogma and supporting professionals to engage deeply with a diverse range of theoretical and practical frameworks. They create reflective learning communities that offer a space for professionals to come together and discuss practice.

Connection and warmth

The principle of connection and warmth weaves together Froebel's emphasis on the integration of intellect and feeling with the emphasis in archival accounts on the capacity to emotionally 'hold' and support others, including children, families and professional colleagues. The memoirs of Elizabeth Garrison Bishop are particularly influential in generating a vision of the Froebelian leader as someone at the centre of a series of

concentric communities (children, families, student-teachers, colleagues) who take sustenance from their warm and nurturing presence. Such leaders are ready to listen sensitively to others and offer inspiration on a daily basis. They support the whole community to 'take heart' in the journey of early childhood learning.

Disruptive political influence

The principle of disruptive political influence brings together learning from Froebel's own life and his persistent willingness to challenge the status quo and fight for an alternative vision of children's early lives, as well as the emphasis in academic literature on both disrupting the status quo and navigating political contexts effectively in order to generate and maintain influence. These sources suggest that Froebelian leaders are not content to practice Froebelian education in niche bubbles that are set aside from society and mainstream education. Academic accounts of historical developments in the Froebelian movement stress how Froebelian leaders focus on bringing Froebelian principles and practices into connection with mainstream education systems. This suggests that contemporary Froebelian leaders are those who work tirelessly to align existing ECEC systems with Froebelian principles.

Supporting working women at the same time as serving children and families

The principle of supporting working women at the same time as serving children and families emerges from archival accounts of Froebelian leadership as well as the academic literature. Both sets of sources show how leaders in ECEC remain committed to not only supporting development among children and families, but demanding better for the largely female workforce who raise and educate young children. While this is a historical focus, there is a contemporary need around much of the world to ensure that the ECEC workforce, who are predominantly women, are appropriately valued, remunerated and supported to flourish.

Conclusion

This report has developed a vision of Froebelian leadership in ECEC informed through a review of Froebel's own writing, archival sources that showcase Froebelian leadership in various times and places and a body of relevant academic leadership. Through examination of these sources, the report presents four principles that seem to be at the heart of Froebelian leadership. These are:

- Continual and collaborative learning
- Connection and warmth

- Disruptive political influence
- Supporting working women at the same time as serving children and families

The findings have implications for those in practice who self-identify as Froebelian educators, who seek to understand how to embody leadership that is concordant with Froebelian principles and practices. These principles however, are not just relevant to those who already take inspiration from Froebel; they can also be used to deepen our understanding of a sector-specific ECEC leadership. Froebelian practice is an important thread in the history of ECEC and so – in developing a vision of leadership specific to those who work with young children – we can take inspiration and nourishment from accounts of leadership across time and place that relate in some way to Froebel. The findings can act as a starting point for professional learning, which can in turn feed back into our understanding of Froebelian leadership through continual and collaborative learning and reflection.

At the same time, we recognise the tensions that arise in talking about ‘Froebelian’ leadership when so much of what we have shared flows from women whose contribution has been made invisible at least partly through the imposition of terms such as ‘Froebelian’. Why do we talk about Froebelian leadership rather than Bishopian leadership, given the amount of inspiration we have taken from reading about Caroline Garrison Bishop? This is a question we need to keep on returning to with openness and a sense of possibility about how we might differently configure the field of ECEC leadership if we change the language we use to talk about it. In our interviews and workshops with leaders around the world, we have begun to probe some of these complexities but this is an ongoing dialogue that will not be solved quickly or easily. We therefore hope that this review acts as an invitation to discuss and problematise the construct, ‘Froebelian leadership’, which we have used throughout.

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