

Forest School Pedagogy; new concept or has it all been done before?

Aims

- Develop a historical review of play-based and child-centred learning in English early childhood education.
- Use historical review to explore pedagogical approaches underpinning English Forest School practice.

Time line of the progression in English perspectives of Play-based and Child-centred learning

Fröebel (1783-1852)

- A pioneer of child-centred, play-based learning.
- Gifts and Occupations (Joyce, 2012)

1854 First English Kindergarten

- 1875 Production of kindergarten manuals (Brehony, 2000).
- Gifts and Occupations used to develop manual skills of working class (Read, 2006).

1898 End of payment by result (Plowden, 1967).

- 1900 Froebelian Orthodoxy challenged by the rise of Developmental Psychology (Nawrotzki, 2006).
- 1910 Revisionist Froebelians replaced Orthodox Froebelians (Nawrotzki, 2006)

Revisionist Froebelians

- 1860-1931 McMillian (Joyce, 2012)
- 1885-1948 Isaacs (Drummond, 2000)

1967 Plowden Report

- Promoted use of play in nursery and infant education
- Flexibility in curriculum and testing within schools (Plowden, 1967)

1988 National Curriculum introduced

2007 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) published

2011 Tickell Review

- School Readiness
- Planned, purposeful play (Tickell, 2011)
- 2012 revised EYFS published

Current tension between play-based and child-centred learning within EYFS

Critical perspectives towards embracing complexity of play (Wood, 2010)

Developmental Psychology and decontextualization of the child (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2006).

Background

The term Forest Schooling was introduced in England in the early 90s and was used to describe an outdoor educational approach modelled on a Danish forest kindergarten (Williams-Sieghfredsen, 2011). The concept of play-based learning and child-centred learning, influenced by the Danish model, are what defines the Forest School approach from other outdoor learning programs (Leather, 2018). Yet the concept of play-based and child-centred learning are not unfamiliar to early childhood education in England. However, these defining concepts in Forest School practice are said to be becoming diluted due to the Forest School movement's efforts to alline with mainstream education (Leather,2018). To understand the English perspective of this Danish inspired outdoor educational approach, this study will explore the historical context of play-based and child-centred learning in English early education.



Use of Fröebel's gifts in galleried classroom in 1900
Source: Corporation of London, London Metropolitan Archives cited in Read (2006)



Susan Isaacs with her pupils in the garden
Source: Van der Eyken and Turner, Adventures in Education cited in Drummond (2000)

Findings

Conflicting perspectives in the meaning of child-centred and play-based learning.

- Historical context: Orthodox Froebelians conflict with Revisionist Froebelians.
- Modern context: School readiness agenda and purposeful play conflict with Post-developmentalism.

Current debate and progression of play-based and child-centred learning in practice reflects historical progression and debate. (Pattern indicated in colour coding)

- New concept of play and child-centred learning
- With increase of popularity of a new concept, rises need to define and standardise the new pedagogy
- This sparks debate surrounding principles of pedagogy and conflict between the values of original concept and standardisation.

Forest Schooling as new concept within exciting debate surrounding play and child-centred learning.

- Is the development of the Forest School approach following patterns of progression in play-based and child-centred learning concepts of the past?

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