**IFS 2023 Pre-formed panel proposal**

**Title:**

Froebelian Futures: affordances, challenges and revolutions in Scottish early learning and childcare

**Format:**

pre-formed panel

**Presenters:**

Simon Bateson (University of Edinburgh; corresponding author), Dr Lynn McNair (University of Edinburgh), Lian Higgins (Cowgate Under 5s, Edinburgh)

**Keywords:**

practitioner inquiry, inclusion, leadership

**Description:**

Froebel’s place in Scottish early learning and childcare reached a new milestone in 2020 with the publication of *Realising the Ambition*, Scotland’s national practice framework (Scottish Government, 2021). The guidance – written by Froebelians – is shaped throughout by a Froebelian view of the child (Bruce, 2012). This creates new opportunities and challenges. How can Scotland ensure that practice follows policy, and at the same time give practitioners a strong voice to advocate for further progress? How do we avoid the potential tokenisation of Froebelian principles, as a new *lingua franca* or cultural currency (Bordieu, 1977)? Furthermore, what issues do we face around equity and divergence in children’s experience of high quality, Froebelian care and education?

This panel introduces and explore these themes through the in-progress research, practice and teaching programmes of three Scottish Froebelians.

Dr Lynn McNair OBE (The University of Edinburgh) et. al write about the development of Practitioner Inquiry training (Cochran-Smith et al, 2015) in Froebelian terms – as a methodology and manifesto for child and community-led policy and practice. This international programme, funded by the Froebel Trust until 2024, aims to give early childhood and other Froebelian practitioners critical skills, confidence and networks to further consider and embed Froebel’s principles into their everyday routines through their own research inquiries. Drawing on practitioner questionnaires, Local Authority evaluations and practitioner research projects themselves, McNair considers the impact to date of both individual practitioners’ work and the programme as a whole.

Simon Bateson (The University of Edinburgh) writes about affordances within Froebelian practice for transforming educational approaches to both anti-racism and inclusion more broadly. His current work with Dr Shaddai Tembo (Bath Spa University; also funded by The Froebel Trust) looks specifically at how coloniality (Quijano, 1999) shapes and may be subverted within children’s play as antecedent to race-thinking and other forms of alienation. Their current research, informed by Bateson’s wider work on Froebelian understandings of inclusion, considers these issues in partnership with two nurseries in Scotland and England, drawing on the ethical underpinnings of practitioner inquiry for its own methodology of ethnography-by-proxy. As Scotland drives forward its expansion of early learning and childcare based on “early intervention” for lower income and marginalised families (Scottish Government, 2017), Bateson’s work aims to illustrate the unique contribution that Froebelian pedagogies might offer for inclusive, anti-racist practice – as well as their current limitations.

Lian Higgins (Cowgate Under 5s, Edinburgh) is an associate researcher on a new inquiry by the University of Edinburgh into the general state of Froebelian practice in Scotland today. With its one year Froebel in Childhood Practice programme, an MSc pathway in Froebel and Social Justice, Froebelian Leadership and Practitioner Inquiry certificates (see froebel.ed.ac.uk/training), the University offers satellite training to thousands of early childhood practitioners across Scotland. Each year, many come to visit Cowgate Under 5s as a widely-recognised centre for excellence. With more than twenty years’ experience at Cowgate, Higgins is uniquely placed to offer insight into the challenges which settings and practitioners must navigate to make Froebel “live and breathe”, as well as the opportunities, omissions and constraints which shape the everyday implementation of Froebelian principles.

**References:**

Bourdieu, P. (1977)*Outline of a theory of practice / Pierre Bourdieu*. Cambridge University Press.

Bruce, T. (2012)*Early childhood practice: Froebel today*. [Online]. London: Sage Publications.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2015). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Quijano, A. (1999), ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’. In Therborn, G. ed. *Globalizations and Modernities*. Stockholm: FRN.

Scottish Government/Education Scotland (2020), *Realising the ambition: Being Me.* Available at: https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/realising-the-ambition/ (Accessed: 30 Jan 2023).

Scottish Government (2017), *A Blueprint for 2020: the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-2017-18-action/> (Accessed: 30 Jan 2023).