

## FROEBEL'S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE AT EARLY EDUCATIONAL PERIOD

**Mirza Muneeb Manan**

**Univeristy of Kashmir**

### ABSTRACT

*One of the emerging trends of education nowadays is Lifelong Learning where there is no end of education, and one should venture to expand it throughout the life. To initiate with the above supposition, it is needful to have a burly base at very elementary level. Therefore, childhood period plays a very significant role in this regard. It has been always a matter of concern that how this early and fertile period should be utilized well. Many different theories have been propounded by different philosophers and psychologists, all are having importance at their level, but Froebel has introduced a very significant concept of the emancipation of child education. The present paper attempts to have a holistic view of Froebel's innovation to child learning.*

**Keywords:** *Lifelong Learning, Elementary level, Emancipation.*

### Introduction

Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel was a German pedagogue, a student of Pestalozzi who laid the foundation for modern education that stands on the recognition; children have unique desires and potentialities. He shaped the concept of "kindergarten" and also coined the word today used in German and English. He developed the educational toys known as Froebel Gifts. After Froebel's birth, his mother's health began to deteriorate. She died when his age was just nine months. Froebel went to live in the small town of Stadt-Ilm with his uncle who was a gentle and an affectionate person. At the age of 15 Froebel, who loved nature, became the tyro under a forester. Then he decided to put down his apprenticeship and started studying mathematics and botany in Jena. He worked as a land surveyor for a specific period. Froebel married Wilhelmine Henriette Hoffmeister in Berlin, but the couple remained childless, and Wilhelmine died in 1839 after that Froebel married again in 1851. His second wife was Louise Levin. He started as an educator in 1805 at a secondary school in Frankfurt, where he got scholarly about Pestalozzi's ideas. He, later on, worked with Pestalozzi at Switzerland and developed his ideas further. He became a teacher at Berlin in a boarding school for boys, and at a pedagogical and nationalistic center. In 1820, Froebel in print the first of his five Keilhau pamphlets, an Unser Deutsches Volk (To Our German People). The other four pamphlets were published up to 1823. In 1826 he published his major literary work, Die Menschenerziehung (The Education of Man) and founded the weekly publication Dieerziehenden Familien (The Educating Families). From 1831 to 1836, Froebel again lived in Switzerland. As mentioned above he designed the educational play materials known as Froebel Gifts, which consists of geometric building blocks and pattern activity blocks. Friedrich Froebel's great insight was to be familiar with the significance of the activity of the learning child. He introduced the concept of "free work" into pedagogy and established the "game" as the typical form that life took in childhood, and also the game's educational worth. Froebel died in 1852 at Marienthal and his grave can still be found in the burial ground at Schweina.

### **Educational thought of Froebel**

In case of children's educational society the philosophers worldwide have struggled with understanding of criticality and heap of posed questions and problems. Educators at childhood level supported the idea that children should be trained as soon as possible to become creative members of the superior society. The cultural heritage of the society could be handed over from generation to generation; this cultural imposition theory has been common throughout the educational world (Staff, 1998). Educational reformers totally opposed the cultural imposition theory with influence of their belief that adults should not enforce their views and ways upon young children of society. Educational appropriateness is defined as what is needed to each child's level of development and willingness, not what is estimated by society (Staff, 1998). The German educator, Friedrich Froebel, was one of these pioneers of early childhood educational reform. He believed that every child possessed complete educational potential by birth and an appropriate educational environment is required to support the child to grow and develop in an optimal way (Staff, 1998). Froebel's vision was to excite a pleasure and love for children and to provide a novel but small world--a world that became known as the Kindergarten. Kindergarten is the place where children could play with same age group and experience their first gentle flavor of independence.

Froebel's philosophy of education consists of following components:

- (a) Free self-activity,
- (b) Creativity,
- (c) Social participation, and
- (d) Motor expression.

### **Free Self-Activity**

Froebel believed that exciting voluntary self-activity among young child was the essential form of pre-school education (Watson, 1997a). Self-activity is defined as the development of qualities and skills that make it possible to take an invisible idea and make it a reality. Self-activity involves devising a purpose, planning out that purpose, and then performing on that plan until the purpose is understood (Corbett, 1998a). One of Froebel's momentous contributions to early childhood education was the theory of introducing play as a means of involving children in self-activity for the purpose of externalizing their inner nature. Froebel's understanding of play is characterized by free play which solicits all of the child's imaginative powers, thoughts, and physical movements by symbolizing in a satisfying form his own descriptions and educational interests. It was continued by indicating that play designates a child's mental attitude and should not be identified with anything performed externally. A child should be given complete liberation from the prerequisite of following any given or prearranged system of activities while he is engaged in playful self-activity. Froebel's beliefs regarding play is concluded as through stimulating play that produces self-activity, the ultimate goal of the child is the completeness of growth which brings about the understanding of his potential powers and frequently carries him from one plane of educational growth to another.

**Gifts**

To assist children in their development of moving from one plane of educational growth to another, Froebel provided the children with many exciting activities to enhance their creative powers and abilities. Froebel designed a chain of instructional materials that he called "gifts and occupations", which confirmed certain relationships and led children in comparison, testing, and creative exploration activities (Watson, 1997b). A gift was an object provided for a child to play with--such as a sphere, cube, or cylinder--which helped the child to understand and internalize the concepts of shape, dimension, size, and their relationships (Staff, 1998). The occupations were items such as paints and clay which the children could use to make what they wished. Through the occupations, children externalized the concepts existing within their creative minds (Staff, 1998). Through the child's own self-activity and creative imaginative play, the child would begin to understand both the inner and outer properties of things as he budges through the developmental stages of the educational process.

**Significance of family**

A third component of Froebel's educational plan involved working closely with the family unit. Froebel believed that parents provided the chief as well as the most reliable educational influence in a child's life. Since a child's first educational experiences occur within the family unit, he is already familiar with the home atmosphere as well as with the activities carried on within this setting. Naturally, through creative self-activity, a child will duplicate those things that are in a direct and real relationship to him, especially things that he learns through observations of daily family life (Dewey, 1990). Froebel believed that providing a family setting within the school environment would offer children with opportunities for interacting socially within familiar field in a non-threatening manner. Focusing on the home environment occupations as the foundation for beginning subject-matter content permitted the child to develop social contact skills that would prepare him for higher level subject-matter content in later educational developmental stages (Dewey, 1990).

**Motor Expression**

Motor expression, which refers to learning by doing as conflicting to following rote instructions, is a very important feature of Froebel's educational principles. Froebel did not believe that the child should be placed into society's style, but should be allowed to shape his own style and grow at his own pace through the developmental stages of the educational process. Corbett (1998b) upholds Froebel's doctrines that a child should never be hurried in his development but he needs to be involved in all of the experiences. Each stage requires seeing the relationships of things and ideas to each other and to the child so that he can make sense out of both his subjective and objective world. It was further agreed that development is continuous, with one stage structuring upon another, so that nothing should be skipped through haste or for any other reason as the child moves through the educational process. Responsible educators should endeavor to recognize each child's individual level of development so that essential materials and activities to kindle appropriate educational growth can be offered. Froebel believed that imitation and suggestion would unavoidably occur, but should only be utilized by the teacher as instruments for assisting students in formulating their own instructional concepts (Dewey, 1990).

**Conclusion**

It was Froebel who created meaning to what originated from children, not just what adults provide them to do or learn. Froebel saw the educational value of play and the utilization of non-book materials in the school. He provided a notional basis for early childhood education that recognized stages of cognitive growth. These concepts developed by Froebel continue to vibrate in early childhood education even today. After having a clear outlook of all the complexities at the very important stage of development, a child should be provided the entire requisite to flourish in an optimal way. We should try to avoid the compulsion of any particular kind influenced by the expectation of parents. A child is a free entity and must be given a right to develop according to his own pace and interests. It is very important to provide a free and student friendly atmosphere in all educational step-ups.

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