

# Engaging with nature in Froebelian education

Nature-based education in the early years is important because it provides young children with opportunities to explore, observe, and interact with the natural world. This type of education helps to foster a sense of wonder and curiosity about the environment and promotes physical activity and healthy habits.



This directly aligns with the philosophy of Friedrich Froebel, who believed that children learn best through play and exploration. Froebelian education emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning experiences that engage all of the senses and values the natural world as a source of inspiration and learning.



*‘The child should experience nature in all aspects  
– form, energy, substance, sound and colour’.*

(Froebel in Liley 1967:148)

The Froebelian principle, **connectedness**, emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of connection between the child, nature, and the world around them in early childhood education. According to Froebel, children are naturally curious and should be encouraged to explore and discover the world through play and hands-on experiences. This involves creating an environment that is rich in opportunities for children to engage with the natural world, such as by incorporating plants, animals, and outdoor spaces into the learning.



### Improved physical health

Spending time in nature encourages physical activity and can help children to develop gross motor skills such as running, jumping, and climbing. Outdoor play also helps to build strong immune systems and reduces the risk of obesity and other health problems.

### Emotional well-being

Actively playing outdoors has proved to reduce stress and anxiety in children, promotes feelings of calmness and relaxation, and increases overall happiness and well-being. Spending time in nature can also help children to develop a sense of empathy and appreciation for other living things, which can foster positive social interactions.

## The benefits of engaging with nature

### Cognitive development

Nature-based education provides opportunities for children to observe and explore the natural world, which can help to develop their cognitive skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. Exposure to natural environments can also improve children's attention spans, memory, and overall academic performance.

### Environmental awareness

By spending time in nature and learning about the environment, children develop an understanding and appreciation for the natural world. This can help to foster a sense of responsibility and a desire to protect the environment for future generations.



Froebel believed that from the earliest years children should be immersed in nature, engaging with it first-hand in the kindergarten garden and in the wider landscapes of hills, valleys, woods, and streams.

<https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/An-introduction-to-Froebel-children-and-nature.pdf>

## Principles of Froebelian education

*A Froebelian approach is not a method. There is no formula or recipe to follow or set of equipment to purchase or prescribed curriculum to adhere to. Nor is it a series of ideas and activities which practitioners can dip in and out of. Rather it is a whole way of thinking about children and childhood, based on a set of values and principles.*

*Helen Tovey 'Bringing the Froebel Approach to your early years practice'*

### Respect

Children are powerful learners, motivated from birth to explore, investigate and be curious about the world. The Froebelian educators respect them for who they are and value them for their effort, building on what they can do rather than focusing on what they cannot do.

### Connectedness

Children's learning should be related to their lives and experiences so that they connect new ideas to what they already know. A view of the whole child is paramount, for everything is linked.

### Creativity

Creativity and imagination are of central importance to children's learning as it connects their feelings with outer world. Play, imagination and symbolic representation are important features of creativity.

### Freedom with guidance

Free movement, free choice and self-activity are important, but they should be within framework of guidance in which the role of the adult is crucial.

### Play, talk and first-hand experiences

Children learn best through play and it integrates all learning. It is an essential part of their development. Play allows them to operate at their highest level.

### Play outdoors

Everyday experience of the natural world is essential so that children begin to understand interrelationship between all living things.



### Well-informed and qualified educators

Children are entitled to knowledgeable professionals who facilitate and guide rather than instruct. They support and extend their learning and interests based on careful observation.

### Positive relationship

Relationships with children should be close, trusting, responsive, interactive and intellectually engaging.

### Community

Children are closely connected to the wider community of people and places, where adults and children learn from each other. Froebelian settings that inclusion, diversity, belonging, close partnership with parents, families and community are key features of a harmonious learning community.

For more reading <https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles>

# How do we incorporate nature into children's learning at Linden Tree?



We incorporate outdoor learning opportunities into our curriculum. This includes taking children on nature walks around the nursery or local parks, playing outdoor games which encourage children to learn about the natural world such as measuring how big the tree trunk is holding hands around it, etc.



Children observe and collect natural items such as leaves, flowers, and rocks. Then we use these items to start discussions about different aspects of nature.

We encourage nature art by using natural materials like leaves, sticks, and stones to create art. They use their imagination to create sculptures, collages, or other works of art inspired by the natural world. Through these activities, children develop their creativity and problem-solving skills.

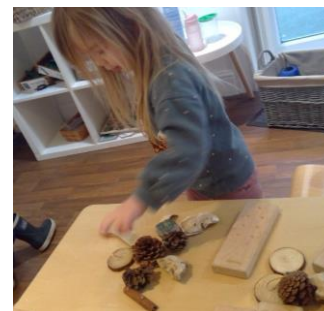
*observing*

*exploring*

*developing problem solving skill*

*imagination*

*inquiring*



We provide opportunities for gardening; we encourage children to plant and care for a garden. This provides an opportunity to observe the process of growing and decay, name the parts of a plant and stages of growing, measure and compare, learn new words and use them in their conversations, learn from first-hand experiences, take responsibility for the plants.

We create a nature corner or area in the classroom. We display natural items collected during nature walks or items such as shells, pine cones, or feathers. We provide tools such as magnifying glasses or binoculars. We use this space for children to explore and discuss different aspects of nature.



Dear Andrew,

Today you went to our growing corner, took a pot with lentils, brought it to me and said "look, they are big now." I said to you that indeed our plants had grown bigger and I asked you what you observed. You touched one lentil which roots had started to grow and said "it's sticky", while you observed that the lentil's root was attached to the cotton wool. Then you asked if you can water them. You used the watering can and watered the pots one by one. You even remembered which pot belonged to who. Then you said "they are growing and they are moving" as you noticed that while you touched the twig it was moving back and forth.



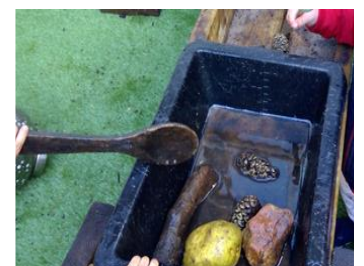
responsibility

first-hand experience

We encourage unstructured play in nature such as building towers, playing in soil, or climbing trees (in the park). This type of play allows children to explore and discover the natural world on their own terms.

Dear Bella,

I saw you cooking in the garden with soil and grass. You were singing and dancing while you were pouring soil into a pot, you said: "the dinner is ready come!" I asked you: "what did you cook for dinner? And you said: "smashed potatoes with chicken" I asked you: "Can I have some?" and you said 'yes' and you served me "food" in a pot. Then you invited your friends to cook with you and you told them: "you have to mix and be careful it's hot". One of your friends didn't have a plate so you went to the mud kitchen found a pot and you gave it to her saying: "here you go, now you can cook".



**'Children learn in nature rather just than about nature.'**

Helen Tovey 'Bringing the Froebel Approach to your early years practice'

## Our visits to Kew Gardens



Each year we aim for our preschool groups from Linden Tree Nursery Schools go on a trip to Kew Gardens. They have an opportunity to engage in natural world and see rare plants and places such as Palm House, Waterlily House, Prince of Wales Conservatory, etc. They actively participate in educational sessions such as 'Tremendous Trees' during which the children learn about trees in a sensory way. They also have picnic lunch under a tree and then they have an opportunity to run in open space, climb trees, collect sticks, etc.



## Taking risk



**"To  
climb a tree is  
for a child  
to discover a  
new world."**

Froebel (Education of  
Man, 1826)



At Linden Tree, we understand how important it is to explore in order to learn and it often involves taking risks. We provide many opportunities for positive risk taking and adventurous play outdoors. *Such adventurous play allows them to become confident and capable, to test their limits and to find out how their bodies work in space (...) by testing their nerve, strength and skill' (H.Tovey)*

By allowing children to take risks, they learn to assess and manage potential dangers, which help them become confident decision makers. We engage the children in playful activities that challenge them and push them out of their comfort zone.



### Benefits of taking risks:

- Builds confidence and resilience
- Builds problem solving skills
- Encourages independence
- Encourages assessment and making decisions
- Gives satisfaction and sense of achievement



# A life cycle of a bean in Twigs and Trees

Planting beans



Observing them grow in the garden

Looking after the beans and other plants in our garden everyday



Harvesting the beans, taking them out of their pods and preparing them to be cooked



The children planted some beans in Twigs room. They watered them every day and while observing we discussed all the stages: germination, seedling, leaf growth, and flowering.



When all the beans were harvested the children decided to cook them and make bean salad. This project helped them understand how we grow our own food.

*‘The child, or a boy, who has guarded and cared for another living thing, although it be for a lower order, will be led more easily to guard and foster his own life.*

F. Froebel (Education of Man)



*'Where this sense of Nature is still unspoilt, nothing unites teacher and pupil so closely as a common effort to study its phenomena. Teachers should regularly take their classes out of doors (...)*

Froebel, in Lilley, 1967:146



At Linden Tree we make sure all our children have an access to our garden twice a day despite the weather. The garden offers space for physical movement and exploration such as soil, water, sand, tools, etc. We often take the children to Wandsworth Common or Clapham Common.